

Songbird

By

Rachel de Vine

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CHAPTER ONE

Harry

The voice coming from over by the piano was sultry, throaty, and reeked of cigarettes, whisky and dirty sex. I looked up from my glass of single malt and swivelled around on the bar stool to see if the reality matched the image now placed firmly in my brain. I expected to see a train wreck of a woman, whose dissolute appearance matched her voice, but the woman before me was no more than mid-twenties, with long, sleek, dark brown hair, and the face of an angel. I did a double take, unable to believe that the voice and the image I saw before me belonged to each other. Perhaps she was miming? If she was, she was damned good at lip-syncing. She was singing the Billie Holiday song, *Solitude*, with all the angst of the original, accompanied only by the piano; played by an elderly black man.

The woman leaned casually on the piano, with one arm resting on its lid, and the other holding the microphone. She was wearing a simple red shift dress that clung to a lusciously curved body, and which ended mid-thigh to reveal long, elegant legs, and she had her eyes closed as she sang. Her hypnotic singing—and the fact that she had a body that every red-blooded male in the club that night would no doubt love to touch—meant that, by mid-song, all talking in the place had ceased. Even the waiters were pausing in their delivery of drinks, mesmerised by that voice. This was practically unheard of in a club like this, where the entertainers usually had difficulty even making themselves heard above the buzz of conversation.

The song came to an end and the place erupted in cheers and clapping. The reaction of the woman was muted. She opened her eyes, gave a half smile and a nod, before turning to the pianist with a brief word about the next number. It was almost as though the audience were an incidental to her, and you could imagine that she would still sing even if no one else were present. She was in a world of her own. Seconds later, before she had even turned back to face the audience, she had begun to sing again; an Edith Piaf number, *Ne me quitte pas*, sung in the original French with a perfect accent, and with some of Piaf's unique angst. I was fascinated. I

had to meet this woman. I vowed to make a move towards the piano as soon as she had finished her last number of the set.

Unfortunately, I was not the only man present who wanted to meet this remarkable young singer—several other men in the club looked as though they shared my intentions. I, however, had one ace up my sleeve in that the owner of the club, Jake Thackeray, was a good friend of mine, and I was sure that he would help me obtain an introduction to the mysterious new act at his venue. If he did not sign this girl up for a long-term residency, then he was crazy.

She sang six songs, with barely a minute's break between them. As the applause began for the last of these, she gave a brief bow as acknowledgement to her audience, before dashing off the stage and disappearing behind the curtain that led to the dressing room; followed more leisurely by the old man. Despite the whistles and entreaties for more songs the woman did not reappear, much to the disappointment of the crowd. I felt slightly annoyed that she had managed to escape so easily, but would make sure that Jake told me more about the mystery girl in red. I did not even know her name. There were no posters announcing her appearance, and there had been no introduction at the beginning of her set, nor any indication as to whether she would return that night.

I turned back to the bar and caught Tony, the barman, as he was passing.

"Jake in tonight, Tony?"

"I think so. I haven't seen him, though. Ask Rosie at reception. If anyone knows, she will."

Of course she would. This was the woman Jake was banging at the moment, behind the back of his very jealous wife; who was also his business partner. He was playing a dangerous game, in my opinion. Still, that was none of my business. I was only his friend, and not his confessor. I swallowed the last of my drink and left the bar. Rosie was in her usual place, chatting up the men as they arrived, while trying not to antagonize any women accompanying them—a tricky task, but one she seemed to be able to manage without too much difficulty.

"Hey, Harry. I didn't see you slip into the club. You must have ducked under my radar," she said.

"Good evening, Rosie. You are looking as exquisite as usual."

Her face lit up. She was a pretty young thing, but didn't seem overly bright. I was quite sure that she was heading for a fall, for when Jake's wife got to know about Rosie's escapades

with her husband, I knew she would be out on her ass. Jake wasn't a fool. He knew he wouldn't be in the position he was today without the money and business expertise of his wife—and her father—and he wouldn't risk all that for a no-brained floozy.

"Is Jake here tonight? I haven't seen him in the club," I said.

"No, he's not here tonight. He has a family engagement."

She had the grace to look slightly embarrassed. She knew I knew about her banging the boss, and didn't like to remind herself or others that Jake had a family away from the club.

"Shame, I was going to ask him for an introduction to his new act. She's a stunner, and has an amazing voice. Is this her first night here?"

"I don't know a lot about her, actually, Harry. Jake didn't mention her last night, and the first I knew about her was when the manager came to me earlier this evening to say that the regular Wednesday act had cancelled, and that Jake had called and told him he'd managed to get a singer at short notice. I don't even know her name, sorry."

"That's okay, honey. Tell Jake when you see him that she is very good, and to let me know if he plans to book her again. I'm going home now, Rosie. It's been a long day. Goodnight."

I went out into the wet and dark evening and realised I might have trouble getting a cab because of the rain. Damn, the evening was not turning out well at all.

Next morning, the rain had stopped, and I put on my jogging pants and left the apartment at 6:30 for my usual run around Hyde Park, a short distance from my London home. Pounding the footpaths of the park, I couldn't help thinking about the mystery singer who seemed to have wormed her way into my brain. Without meaning to sound too arrogant, I consider myself quite a catch, and have never had any problems where attracting women is concerned. I'm thirty-six, not bad looking, keep myself fit, and own a successful business that allows me to live the way I wish. I'm not quite in the billionaire category, but my wealth is comfortably in the triple figures with regards to the millions.

It doesn't really matter to me how much money I have, for that has never been the motivating factor in anything I do, but I have to admit that I do enjoy some of the privileges that wealth brings; most notably the freedom to conduct my life without taking too much notice of other people. The only people who matter to me are my ageing parents, who now live a

comfortable retirement in the South of France, in the house I bought for them in a small village near the coast. Because of the distance, and the fact that they are cut off from any London gossip, they really have no idea about my life, other than that I am now wealthy. I fly down every six weeks or so to see them, and telephone them every week. They don't have a computer, and although they have satellite TV that allows them to pick up the British television programmes, they take almost no interest in newspapers or trashy magazines, so they would be very unlikely to learn anything about my life other than what I tell them. My mother makes an occasional attempt to dig a little deeper, with a gentle question.

"When are you going to bring a young lady to meet us, darling?"

This roughly translates as, 'When are you going to marry and have children?' But I manage to laugh and make a joke, and the subject is then dropped again for a while.

The truth is that I have no wish to marry, and even less wish to see miniature versions of me populate the world. I have had no shortage of women in my life, but the minute they become 'needy' or begin to cling like limpets, I feel the need to break away so I can breathe freely again. I have never lived with a woman, and have no desire to do so in the near future.

In fact, many of the women with whom I have shared a bed are married. I like it that way. They come to me to find something that is missing in their relationships, and I try to supply that something they are looking for—before sending them back to their husbands.

And the missing ingredient I can supply? Well, I guess some people would call it a bit of kink. I just prefer to think of it as a more specialised type of lovemaking. I like to be in control, and I like submissive women who allow me to be in control. With some of them it is just a firm hand and a dominating manner that they need, while others need something a little more specialised that their husband or partner either can't or won't supply. I don't push a woman past where she is happy to go. If she just wants someone to be masterful in bed, then that is fine by me. But if she wants to be spanked or restrained, then I am her man, too. I do occasionally have 'vanilla' sex, some of which can be pretty steamy, but a bit of kink is, for me, the icing on top of the cake.

Some of the women I see are semi-permanent fixtures in my life, in the sense that we see each other fairly regularly, but have no other ties—while others are just one night hook-ups. I don't judge the women who come on to me, and I don't expect to be judged by others about my

lifestyle. The truth is I really don't give a fuck what people think of me. The friends I value know me as I am and accept me for what I am—and most share similar interests.

I have never been in love, and I am not sure that I am even capable of being in love. Some female friends say that I just haven't met the right woman yet, but I reply, cynically, that such a woman has not yet been born. Why I am like this, I don't really know. I had a pretty normal childhood, and no bad experiences that I am aware of. I don't tend to analyse myself in any way, but simply accept that this is the way I choose to live. My parents are the only ones I would prefer not to know anything about my lifestyle. Everyone else can just go hang.

I arrived back home at 7:15, and the phone was ringing as I closed the door and dropped the keys onto the kitchen work surface. I was just too late to pick up, and my message machine kicked in. It was Jake Thackeray.

"Hey, Harry. Rosie told me you wanted to speak to me. In fact she is snoring beside me as I speak..."

I picked up the phone.

"Jake, you reprobate. You go out with the family, and still end up in bed with your girlfriend? You're living dangerously."

"Yeah, buddy. Don't know how I manage to get away with it sometimes. Lucky bastard, that's me. Rosie tells me you were at the club last night. Sorry I missed you."

"Not just me—you missed the hottest singer you've ever had at the club. Who is she? And why weren't you there to introduce me to her? You should have seen the reaction she caused. Grown men were standing with their mouths open, drooling down their shirts."

"Yes, I heard she made quite an impression. I'm sorry I missed her. I got a call at about seven to say that our regular singer was ill, and the agency offered this girl as a replacement. I had to take her on the strength of their recommendation, as I had never heard of her. Her name is Pascale Boucher—French mother, Canadian father, apparently. Spent part of her childhood in Canada, but has been living in France for the past seven years. She's been singing in clubs on and off all over Europe, for a while, but told her agency that she wanted to live in London. If she's as good as you say I'll call the agency as soon as they open and book her in a regular slot," Jake said.

"You won't be sorry, Jake. She's such a puzzle, though; an innocent, butter-wouldn't-melt face, married with a voice that suggests dirty sex and a dissolute lifestyle. And to top it all, a peachy arse that I would love to get my hands on."

He laughed. "So you weren't that struck on her, then?"

"You know me. I'm not known to be extravagant with praise, but if you don't sign this woman up you'll regret it."

"Okay, Harry. You've convinced me. Better go. Rosie's starting to stir and I'm hoping for one more fuck before I go back to the missus."

I laughed and put down the phone.

The next few days were very busy and all thoughts of Jake, the club, and the singer vanished from my mind as I flew up to Edinburgh to cope with problems at my latest project. My main business is designing and fitting out nightclubs, casinos and hotel lobbies. That's how I came to meet Jake in the first place—when I designed the interior of his club, Dominoes, a few years ago. The Edinburgh project was turning into a nightmare, with labour problems and an awkward customer who was constantly changing his mind about what he wanted for his club. Two of my project managers had left because of him, and he was now kicking up about the colour scheme after I had committed to buying the materials. I went up to Edinburgh ready to walk out of the job if necessary. I run an established, successful business, and have gone past the point where I have to take all sorts of bullshit just to keep the work. I decided that I needed to lay down the law to this guy and threaten to pull my team out if necessary.

I spent three days in Edinburgh and managed to sort out the problems without losing the client. I had been very plain speaking with him, and he surprised me by falling into line without too much aggravation. I breathed a sigh of relief and flew back to London, exhausted after three intense days and ready to relax—and maybe hook up with one of my regular dates, perhaps for dinner and a session back at my place afterwards. I needed something to relieve the tension from my body after the draining trip.

Before I got around to calling my planned date, the phone rang. It was Jake.

"Hey, Harry, you free tonight? That singer you like is opening in a regular slot. I had her audition for me the day after I spoke to you, and I agreed with your judgement. She's pretty hot

and has a good voice. She could do with a bit more stage presence, but I guess that will come in time."

"As it happens, I'm free tonight. What time is she on?"

"Nine till midnight, with a break halfway through."

"What do you mean by not having enough stage presence?" I asked.

"She doesn't interact with the audience very much. Keeps her head down and mumbles a bit; but with a voice and body like hers I guess it would be greedy to expect the full package."

"What about the pianist?"

"He's part of the deal. She said she wouldn't come if he were not included. I'm not sure of the connection, but he's a good pianist, so that's not a problem," he said.

"I'll see you later, Jake."

I turned up at the club just before nine, and was greeted by Rosie in the lobby.

"Harry, good to see you. Jake is at the bar. He said you would be coming by."

I smiled and carried on through, making my way into the main part of the club. It was a bit busier than normal, and I wondered if word had got around about the new singer. Jake greeted me with a wave from his position at one end of the bar. He liked to sit on a stool there as it gave him a good view of the whole of the club, while still remaining fairly inconspicuous. He wanted to choose whom he spent time talking with—rather than being collared by drunken bores—and the dim light at that end of the bar enabled him to do that. He had an office behind the reception area, but preferred to spend as much time as he could in the club, checking up on staff and keeping an eye on his customers.

As I approached, he grinned and held out his hand. "So our new singer has caught your attention? I must admit that she is quite an eyeful," he said.

He had already ordered my usual whisky, and I took a sip and looked at him quizzically.

"I hope your audition just involved listening to her sing."

He laughed. "You know me too well, Harry. But yes, that's as far as it went. Nice body, but not my type, personality-wise. I like a woman who is a bit livelier. I had a hard job getting a conversation going with Pascale. She looks anywhere except straight at you, and I doubt she uttered more than ten words to me. However, I'm paying her to sing to my customers, not to talk to them, so I'm not too bothered about that."

We chatted for a couple of minutes about inconsequential matters, until the sound of a piano introduction made me turn to the stage. There, stepping towards the microphone, was the same woman who had caught my eye on my last visit to the club. She was wearing the same red dress as before, which flattered her figure and was having the same effect on my groin area as before. The girl was seriously hot. The puzzle was that she seemed unaware of the effect she was having on her audience.

With no introduction she began to sing a Nat King Cole number; *Autumn Leaves*, in the same throaty and sensual voice that I remembered from her last performance. The background noise dropped as people stopped talking and turned to listen to this remarkable talent.

Jake turned to look at me.

"Pretty impressive, huh? I'm glad you were in that night and recommended her. The only downside of having someone that people really want to listen to, rather than someone who provides background noise, is that the audience tends to drink a little less as they become mesmerised by the performance."

"Always thinking of the bottom line, Jake." But I said it with a grin.

"So are you, Harry. But I suspect that it is a different type of bottom line that is in your mind."

He was right. My friend knows me well.

"So, will you introduce me to your new singer?" I said.

"I have a feeling that you will meet her whether I introduce you or not. Just don't drive my new signing away, please."

Jake stayed to chat to me and to listen to Pascale for a while, but then said that he had matters to attend to.

"I'll be back later, and will take you to meet her."

I turned back to the stage and feasted my eyes on the delicious woman with the sexy voice once again. As before she interacted little with the audience, muttering a few words between songs and often turning away from them to converse with the pianist. She intrigued me. Her appearance and personality seemed a complete contradiction to each other. If it weren't for the impassioned singing voice, I would have said that she was a classic submissive. I have met enough in my time on the D/s scene to know one when I saw one. But her singing was far from submissive, as was her appearance in the clinging red dress that had probably made the cocks of

every red-blooded male in the club perk up since her appearance. I settled back on my bar stool and watched her performance, looking forward to meeting her.

Pascale had her long, shiny, dark brown hair loose, and from time to time it fell forward over her face. She would leave it there for a while, as though unaware that her face was partly obscured, before suddenly lifting her head and, with a slow movement of her hand, smooth the hair back from her face and arch her back for a moment, causing her breasts to push against the material of her dress—which I found to be very erotic. I wanted to press my hands against those perfectly shaped breasts, and the thought of doing so caused a familiar stirring in my cock. I fantasised about bending the sexy songbird over the piano and slowly sliding up the red dress. In my warped imagination she was not wearing panties, and her round, shapely bottom was just waiting for my palms to roam over it. I imagined spanking that lovely backside... before fucking her hard. I hadn't felt so sexually attracted to a woman for a long time. There was something about her that triggered a primitive feeling in my gut, and I was desperate to make her acquaintance. Where the fuck was Jake? And how soon would Pascale finish the first half of her set?

The first of those questions was answered quite quickly when, two minutes later, Jake beckoned me from further down the bar. I drained my glass and followed him as he turned and walked through the club to a door marked 'Private', which I figured would lead to the backstage area.

Sure enough, we went along a short corridor and came to the dressing room, a short distance from where I could hear the music.

"She's on her last song before the break. She will come back here to the dressing room for fifteen minutes before the second set. I'll introduce you, but after that you're on your own, buddy. I'm relying on you not to upset my new act on her first night. I'm hoping that she will stay around for a while, so don't you go sticking your dick where it's not wanted."

"Don't worry, Jake. I am fairly civilised, you know," I assured him.

With anyone else I might have been rather pissed at the assumption that I would jump in with both feet and upset his new signing, but Jake and I had a history of being able to banter without taking offence, and he simply grinned and patted me on the shoulder.

The music stopped, and a moment later Pascale appeared in the corridor. She had taken off her shoes and was barefoot, with the shoes in her hand. Her head was down and as she

approached us, it did not seem as though she was aware of us standing there until Jake coughed. She looked up, looking a little startled, unsure about why we were there.

Jake smiled at her. "That was a good start, Pascale. You're going down very well with my club members."

She looked up briefly, apparently unsure of how to respond, but he continued talking while she said nothing.

"I would like to introduce you to a friend of mine. This is Harry Luciano. Harry, meet Pascale Boucher."

Pascale barely lifted her eyes from the floor, and gave me only a fleeting smile. There was a brief, awkward pause before she spoke; in good English, but with a sexy French accent.

"Luciano—you are Italian?"

I was briefly taken aback at her question.

"A long way back. I was born here, as was my father. My grandfather was from Naples."

"Ah," was all she said, before another brief silence.

Jake turned to me and gave me a somewhat sympathetic pat on the shoulder.

"Gotta go, buddy. Come and see me before you go, won't you."

He turned and went back along the corridor, leaving Pascale and me standing facing each other, neither of us quite sure what to do next. I smiled at her.

"I guess you had better have your break. I just wanted to say that you have an amazing voice, and I was wondering if I might buy you a drink when you finish tonight."

She looked up, and I could see a startled expression in her big, brown eyes. She looked like a rabbit caught in a car's headlights. I found myself wanting to stroke her arm and reassure her that I meant her no harm. At least, I meant her no harm that she didn't fully subscribe to. I might play a little rough sometimes, but only with the one hundred per cent agreement of my partner. However, I restrained myself in case my touch was misinterpreted, and instead smiled at her in what I hoped was a reassuring manner.

After a long pause, she paused for several seconds, looking me straight in the eye, before replying in a quiet voice that I had to strain to hear.

"All right. I will see you at the end of my performance," she said.

Then, with a half-smile, she opened the door to the dressing room and went inside, closing it behind her, leaving me with my mouth slightly agape. I had been sure that she would

turn me down and, at the very least, I would have had to do a lot of persuading for her to meet me later. I was not expecting her agreement so quickly. This woman was a paradox; but one whose mysteries I looked forward to unravelling.