

THE ANTICIPATED SEQUEL TO *SCORPIO RISING*

THE STING OF THE SCORPIO



THERE IS A FINE LINE BETWEEN AMBITION AND GREED

BY MASTER STORYTELLER

MONIQUE DOMOVITCH

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Dedication

*To my girls,
Alicia, Carole-Ann and Rebecca,
who believed in me before I did.*



CHAPTER 1

I am safe, thought Brigitte as the plane descended to New York.

Only two weeks had passed since she had married Alexander in the small ceremony at the Paris *Hotel de Ville*, and already her life had been turned completely upside down. Some of it was for the better, some of it...she wasn't sure.

She was surprised at the swirl of emotions she felt staring at the immense city below. This was a move she would never have made alone, but luckily Alexander was with her—she glanced lovingly at him in the seat next to hers—as were her son, David, and her friend and housekeeper, Réjeanne. All was well, or so she believed.

She was landing in America, far from Paris and

the threat of her stepfather. She still shuddered at the memory of Lucien standing in the doorway, his eyes wandering over her body as they had when she was just a child. She remembered the day he had reappeared as if it had been yesterday.

Réjeanne had taken one look at her face and immediately known that something was terribly wrong. “Get out! Get out,” she shouted at the old man as she tried to push him out the door.

He had shoved her aside easily and walked toward Brigitte “What’s the matter Brigitte? Don’t you recognize your own *papa*?” he asked.

She had stood paralyzed with shock. “You’re not my father. Get out of here,” she said, her voice trembling.

The old man chuckled. “Aw, Brigitte, you’re breaking my heart. Where’s your gratitude for everything I did for you? It looks to me like you’ve got a good life. You’re living in this fancy place and with a maid. I think you should show some gratitude to your father and help him out a bit in his old age.”

From the back bedroom, Brigitte heard David laughing. If her son walked in and Lucien saw him, it would be over. Brigitte remembered how desperately she wanted him to leave before David came out. “How dare you come here?” Her voice

was like ice. “You are nothing but a filthy bastard. Get out of here and don’t ever come back.”

Despite the fact that David had not emerged, Lucien had known. Almost delighted, he said, “You’re calling me a bastard? Me? I think you’ve got that wrong, *ma fille*. It’s your son who is the bastard, not me. And I have a feeling I might have a pretty good claim to that little boy. As a matter of fact, I have a feeling I might have as much right to him as you do.”

At the mere thought of that vile man fighting for custody of her child, she had fainted. Réjeanne screamed. From down the hall, Alex and David came running.

Everything after that was a blur. She recalled Alex snaring Lucien by the collar. “What the hell did you do to her?” he’d shouted.

“Hey! Take your hands off me. I didn’t do a thing. I was just leaving.” Lucien walked out, and from the doorway, called out menacingly “You can tell her that I’ll be back. That’s my boy she’s got there, and unless she and I come to some agreement, she can expect to see me in court.”

Goose pimples swelled on her arms and ran down her spine. Brigitte shook her head, trying to rid herself of the memories. No matter what Lucien had done, or might have done, she could

not forget Réjeanne's and Alex's kindness when she confessed that Lucien was David's father.

Afterwards, Alex had taken her hand in his and said, "You shouldn't feel any shame, Brigitte. The bastard raped you." Rather than drive a wedge between them, her disclosure had brought them closer. Brigitte rested a hand over her heart and closed her eyes.

The voice of the captain cut through her musings. "We hope you enjoyed your flight, and we thank you for using Pan Am."

The plane taxied down the runway, and a few minutes later Alexander held Brigitte's arm as they disembarked. She stepped down the portable stairs and turned to look at her husband, filled with an overwhelming rush of love for him. More than anything, she yearned to create the perfect family, the family she never had. *I will make him happy, she vowed. I will be the best wife I know how.*

New York was alien, though. Everywhere she looked, she was surrounded by ugly gray buildings on city blocks the size of soccer fields. The streets were filthy. People looked angry, harassed, scared. They scowled at each other as they walked by. On the way from the airport, the cab stopped at a red light and a big black man with crazed eyes walked over to the car and stared openly at the occupants inside.

“Don’t worry sweetheart, he’s just another beggar.” Alexander rolled down the window and tossed a few coins to the man. A second later he had already moved on to the car behind. As Brigitte looked around at the unfamiliar city, she wondered if she could ever feel at home again.

Three weeks later, with Brigitte eager to move out of the rooming house where they had found temporary lodging, Alex reluctantly signed a lease on an enormous loft in Greenwich Village. The building, an old warehouse, had been empty for over a year, and the owner was desperately trying to rent it.

“It isn’t a residential building. I can’t imagine how you can expect to live there,” the agent told Brigitte when she expressed her interest in moving in. No matter what he said, he could not dissuade her. She loved the high ceilings, the large skylights, and the distinctly artistic community of the area, while the low rent agreed to Alexander’s sense of economy.

“How are we going to turn this into a home?” Alex asked skeptically, as he walked around the vast expanse of dusty space.

“Leave that up to me, *mon chéri*,” replied his new bride.

With her boundless energy and artist's flair, Brigitte soon transformed it into a comfortable and functional home. The old hardwood floors were sanded and varnished. The brick walls were painted a flat white and the ceiling a starkly contrasting black. Stand-alone walls were built to provide privacy for the two bedrooms and the bathroom. The remaining space was left open, and once the industrial-size windows and the skylights were cleaned until they gleamed, the place was unrecognizable.

"Et maintenant, all we need is some color," declared Brigitte.

"It looks great already," agreed Alex sounding more excited than he actually felt.

Brigitte was not finished. Over the next few weeks she found a variety of old, but solid second-hand furniture, which would give the apartment some character.

"You can't be serious," said Alex, sounding close to the end of his confidence in the project. "I agreed to a loft because I know you need space and natural light for your studio. But I'll be damned if I'll live like a pauper. This furniture is garbage. It's probably full of fleas."

"Don't be ridiculous. There is nothing wrong with this furniture. All it needs is new upholstery. You must trust me," Brigitte insisted.

For days, samples of fabrics in dozens of colors hung from every available surface, until Brigitte made the final selection. One morning a truck pulled up and all the old furnishings were carted away. Two weeks later they were brought back, looking like new.

The dusty old loft was unrecognizable. Huge screens in bright turquoise, sunny yellow, electric blue, and bold pink separated the living and the dining room from the kitchen. One space was left totally bare except for the enormous easel standing directly before the window. That was to be Brigitte's studio.

From the ceiling hung long rows of black funnel-shaped light fixtures. Newly covered in shiny white vinyl, the furniture looked like it had come straight from a high-end retailer. Tropical plants filled every corner, and Brigitte's oils livened every spare inch of wall space. The effect was electrifyingly modern.

Brigitte was triumphant. "*Voilà*," she said. "Now what do you say?" she asked her husband.

"I say, you are a witch. A beautiful, talented, sexy witch." He took her in his arms.

From across the room, Réjeanne signaled to David and led him away. "Let's go for a walk," she whispered to him. "I think your *Maman* and Alex want to be alone right now."

Brigitte was consumed with passion for her husband. He was her friend, her lover, and her savior. Sometimes she wondered what might have happened if she had not phoned Alex and prevented him from flying away that day. She shuddered at the thought.

For weeks in Paris she had avoided Alex's attentions. Then came the day she learned he was flying back to New York. If she hadn't picked up the phone and called him, God only knew what might have happened. One thing was sure. She would not be in New York any more than she would be his wife. Lucien would have done as he pleased, and David might have been torn from her forever.

For the first time in a long time, she felt loved. Abandoning her career to follow Alex had been a small price to pay for what she enjoyed now: a loving marriage, and the reassuring knowledge that Lucien was out of her life forever. Since the wedding a few weeks ago, nightmares no longer plagued her.

Alex carried Brigitte to their room and threw her on the bed. "Alex, what are you doing?"

He unbuttoned her blouse and buried his face between her breasts. Brigitte laughed throatily. At the beginning, she had been terrified of sex.

Slowly, gently, and ever so patiently, Alex had helped her overcome her fears. Not only had he not seemed to mind Brigitte's inexperience, but it appeared to excite him. Now, he found one of her nipples and sucked greedily. She moaned. "Oh, God, Alex I want you so much."

"I've created a monster," he said, chuckling. He pulled up her skirt and slipped his hand inside her panties. "I love you," he whispered in her ear.

Brigitte's knees went weak as a surge of desire filled her. She felt so much love she thought her heart might burst. "And you'll never love anybody else?"

"And I'll never love anybody else," he repeated dutifully as he climbed on top of her. A moment later he was inside her, moving at a deliciously slow pace, until Brigitte could no longer tell where her body ended and his began.



While Brigitte struggled to adapt to life in New York, Alex fought his own battles. Since his carefree days in Paris had come to an end, reality had set in.

In Paris, falling in love with Brigitte and their

quick decision to marry, had seemed like the best thing that had ever happened to him. Now, back in New York, it often felt more like insanity.

I'm only twenty-five years old. What am I doing with a wife and a son? It wasn't that he didn't love his wife. He was completely captivated by her. Although he couldn't think of a single woman he would rather make love to, he missed the feeling of being free. Occasionally, he remembered the vows he had spoken on their wedding day, '...forsaking all others,' and he felt trapped.

Also weighing heavily on his mind, were his new financial responsibilities. It had been months since his last pay check, and he now had an extended family to support. Although Brigitte had insisted on helping financially, he had been adamant about being the sole provider.

"Don't you understand?" he argued. "I don't want your money. I am your husband. What kind of a husband would I be if I allowed my wife to pay the bills?"

"But Alex, I really don't mind. We're married now. The least I can do is help until you find a job."

"Absolutely not. I won't have it."

Brigitte had grudgingly conceded. Over the next few months, Alex watched helplessly as his

bank account, which he had so painstakingly grown to a sizable sum, dwindled steadily. His sense of urgency rose.

Every day, rain or shine, while Brigitte busied herself with their new home, Alex continued his search for work. He studied the classifieds, applied at every employment agency and mailed countless resumes. He even swallowed his pride and went back to see William Brandon, his old boss.

To his immense relief, he did not run into Anne Turner. At her desk was an efficient looking middle-aged secretary, who gazed at him with professional disinterest and ordered him to sit and wait.

“Mr. Brandon is busy. I’ll see if he has a minute for you,” she told him and left him stewing in the reception area. She hurried down the hall to Brandon’s office, the sound of her heels muffled in the deep carpeting. Alex glanced around.

Nothing in the reception area had changed. The same expensive paintings hung on the walls and the same classical music played softly from the hi-fi. It was almost as though he had never left.

A voice suddenly broke through his thoughts.

“Alex, what the hell are you doing here, you old son of a gun?” It was Ben, one of the guys from the bullpen they had nicknamed, ‘purgatory.’ “I thought you had decided to stay in Europe indefinitely.”

Alex chuckled. “Naw, life was too hard there. Who can take all that fine wine and French food? Give me a good old hamburger anytime. Is Andrew around?”

“Didn’t you hear? Andrew left months ago.”

Before Ben could say anymore, the secretary reappeared. “Mr. Brandon will see you now.” Alex hurried down the hall to the executive office.

William Brandon sat back in his chair, puffing away at his eternal cigar. He looked at Alex with distaste. “Well, if it isn’t the boy wonder. You didn’t do too well in Paris, did you? What makes you think you can just waltz back into your old job?”

Alex struggled with his ego for a few seconds. He needed this job. Then he saw the amusement in Brandon’s eyes. The fucking bastard was enjoying his discomfort.

Without a single word, he turned and walked out.

