

An Excerpt from *The Lair*:

“Remind me to monitor your intake, sunshine,” Gabe muttered an hour later. They’d gotten back to La Tana and Fausta had grudgingly let them in. Dani was practically asleep on her feet. “Hey, you can always give us a key,” he’d joked, but his aunt hadn’t said a word.

Once in their suite, Dani had perked up enough that Gabe could point her in the direction of her bedroom. He reluctantly bid her good night. *God she was beautiful*. Perfectly proportioned and so graceful, although she didn’t put on airs *at all*. He’d spent the entire evening fighting the impulse to touch her everywhere, even in places that demanded privacy at the very least. He’d known instinctively she’d get along great with Marco and Gina, and she hadn’t disappointed him.

Man, she was killing him. He rubbed the back of his neck to rid himself of the knot he felt starting to form. Both tired and wired, he couldn’t tell which was more to blame, the booze or the stress of keeping his desire in check. He reached into the small refrigerator for a beer before realizing he was already half pickled, so he opted for water instead. Damn, he was thirsty. Drinking half the bottle before he’d even pulled his shirt out of his slacks, he sat down to focus on the investigation. Maybe *that* would keep his libido where it belonged. He pulled out the report that Marco had given him earlier that evening.

“I think we’re on to something,” Marco had told him quietly. “We found a match.”

He was just beginning to scan the document when the bedroom door opened and Dani appeared. Her hair was tousled and she walked a bit uncertainly, like she was slogging through

mud in high heels, even though she was barefoot. She wore a short, ivory-colored cover-up of some kind and she looked nervous.

“I’m ready,” she said.

He looked at her quizzically. “Ready for what, bella?”

“For us ... you know.” He didn’t have a chance to reply before she tottered up to him and threw her slender arms around his neck, locking her lips with his.

After his initial shock, Gabe took a moment to enjoy the feel of Dani’s curves against him. Despite all the alcohol he’d consumed, his body still reacted immediately, hardening in response to her softness. She felt so damn decadent—like falling into the most luxurious bed when you’ve been sleeping on the floor all your life. And oh, did she smell good, like some small, sweet flower. He smiled inwardly at her earnest attempt at seduction, and cursed his inner cop—the prig who wouldn’t let him take advantage of her while she was intoxicated.

Reluctantly he took her by the upper arms and peeled her away from his body. “Uh, sweetheart, I don’t think this is a good thing to be doing ...”

“What?” she asked, her voice soft and earnest. “Don’t I measure up to your other women friends? Don’t I? Just a little?” She stepped back and before he could stop her, she dropped the cover-up, revealing a perfect—and perfectly naked—female form encased in a five-foot-two-inch frame. Her breasts were full, high, cream-colored mounds with luscious pink nipples. Her waist was small and her hips slightly flared. She was biting her full lower lip, practically screaming for his approval.

An image flashed before him of Dani pregnant. She was ripe and luscious—the epitome of Woman. Instead of cooling him off, the thought of her big with child—*his* child—only made him hotter, and made what he had to do all the more difficult. He looked at her a long time, so

long that he could see uncertainty, followed by embarrassment, overtake her. He reached down and picked up the wrap, putting it around her shoulders.

“I’m sorry,” she mumbled. “I thought ...” She turned to go, but Gabe took her shoulders and turned her back toward him.

“If you think for one second that I don’t want to bury myself in you right now, you are sadly mistaken,” he said roughly. He pulled her wrap off her shoulders once again, but only so that it imprisoned her arms, pressing her breasts together and lifting them. With his right hand he pushed the wrap beneath her breast, raising it even higher so that it spilled out of its cover and he could suckle it. Dani let out a gasp, automatically pressing herself against him. After a minute, Gabe realized he’d better stop before his body took over completely.

“When you and I make love, I am going to be all over you,” he rasped. “You are going to feel me everywhere and know when I’ve taken you higher than you’ve ever been before.” He tore himself away and covered her back up. “And the next morning, you’re going to remember everything I did to you and want me to do it all over again. Count on it. Now go to bed.”

“But—”

“Please,” he said firmly, turning her around and practically pushing her back into the bedroom. It took several minutes after her door shut for Gabe’s upper brain to start functioning again. “Keep your eye on the prize,” he repeated like a mantra. “Keep your eye on the prize.” The prize, in this case, was a Dani who felt no regrets about whatever physical gymnastics they might partake in together. He’d waited this long for the timing to be right; he could wait a little longer, even though it was damn near going to kill him.

A half hour later he'd sobered up enough to focus on transferring details from Marco's report to his own little notebook. Turns out a name from the hotel reservations list, Tino Abruzzo, had matched fingerprints uncovered at the scene, but interviews with the boat owner apparently showed no nexus between Abruzzo and the racing syndicate.

He was sitting on the sofa, working by the light of a small table lamp, when the light went out, pitching him into darkness. The small refrigerator stopped humming. The air from the suite's ventilations system stopped circulating.

There was no sound at all.

He opened the door to see if the sconces leading to their suite had been affected. All of them were out. It was completely black. "Must be a circuit," he murmured, wondering if the old house still used fuses. He made his way back to the daybed to stretch out and wait for a staff member—Fausta, no doubt—to deal with it. Worst case, he figured he could get back to his notes in the morning.

He must have nodded off because the light from the lamp woke him. Just as he remembered where he was, he heard a sound from somewhere down the hall.

Someone was screaming.

