

A woman in a white wedding dress is seen from the back, looking out a window. The window has a grid pattern and is decorated with Valentine's Day-themed items: a calendar page showing the number 14, two red hearts, the text 'XOXO', and a sign that says 'Valentine's Day'. The scene is dimly lit, with light coming from the window.

Sydney Somers

Valentine's Day

Call Me *Cupid*

SAMHAIN publishing, LTD.

She's getting a second chance with the right man. Again. And again. And again...

Call Me Cupid

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On the day before her wedding, the last thing AJ needs is the ex she never truly got over showing up to complicate things. But when fate throws a curve ball and she wakes to relive the same day over and over, the only person who may know what's going on is the one man she can never trust her heart to.

Cooper thought he wanted closure. Seeing AJ again proves he's anything but ready to let go. With a Greek god in his corner he's got all the time in the world to convince AJ that she still loves him—if such a bold move doesn't push her straight out of his arms forever.

Warning, this title contains the following: explicit sex and graphic language.

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Call Me Cupid

Sydney Somers

Dedication

For my sister, Ryan.

Thanks for always letting me bounce my craziest ideas off you. And for not telling me I'm off my rocker when you wonder how I'll be able to pull them off. I love you.

Chapter One

“Rise and shine.” The muffled greeting, followed by a cheery knock that sounded more like the tapping of a secret password, was just enough to bring AJ Hanson fully awake.

Still groggy, she rolled over and lifted her face off the pillow long enough to glance at the tableside alarm clock and see that it was *way* too early to get up.

Even if it was the day before her wedding.

“Amanda Jean, you drag yourself out of bed right now.”

She grinned at the sound of her mother’s *I’m still the boss of you* tone. Talk about making a girl feel like sixteen again and desperate to sleep in until at least noon.

Throwing the covers off, she padded barefoot across the hotel room’s plush beige carpet. Her hand barely tightened over the knob before her mother threw it open and bustled right past AJ in her usual whirlwind of boundless energy. There were countless days growing up where it felt like AJ spent more time chasing after her mother than it being the other way around. Today looked to be no exception.

“There is way too much to be done today to spend it daydreaming in bed, young lady. You’re getting married tomorrow.” Her mother grinned, then planted a quick kiss on AJ’s cheek before grabbing her hand and twirling her around.

It was easy to get caught up in her mother’s overwhelming—and sometimes smothering—passion for life, and AJ smiled right through her yawn.

Setting AJ into a spin before turning around, her mother knocked a pink carnation-filled vase right off the small table. It might have survived

the landing, if the armoire hadn't been in the way. They both cringed at the resounding crash of breaking glass. Water splashed over the rim, leaking through the chunk now missing from the vase and onto the carpet.

"Oh, darn," her mother said, then dashed into the bathroom, returning a moment later with a towel to soak up the mess. AJ retrieved the broken pieces and tossed what was left of the vase in the trash.

Her mother brushed a loose strand of hair behind her ear. "At least it wasn't a mirror." She fished through her pockets. "Where's my list?"

AJ stretched her arms over her head, and moved into the bathroom. Considering it was the day before her wedding, she was remarkably calm. No jittery nerves, or stress over what had yet to be done. And there was plenty that hadn't been accomplished yesterday or the day before.

She gave herself the customary morning assessment, pleased there were no bags lingering under the green eyes she inherited from her mother. She snagged a clip from the top of the vanity and pulled back her shoulder length black hair, still happy she'd cut inches off a couple weeks ago. After washing her face quickly, she poked her head out to see her mother digging through the bags she hadn't bothered to unpack when they checked in yesterday.

"You hardly brought anything with you."

AJ rolled her eyes. "I brought plenty. We're only here for another night."

Her mother tsked, withdrawing the small jewelry box AJ had hastily packed since she never bothered to decide on accessories days before she wore them.

Unlike her mother.

How the woman could be so carefree yet still be so meticulous was something AJ had given up trying to wrap her brain around years ago. AJ was neither overly carefree or meticulous, but fell happily in the middle.

Just the way Kirk liked her.

AJ grinned. She was getting married tomorrow. She and Kirk were so well-suited. They just made sense together. And they hardly ever fought,

even after being together for almost two years now. With much in common and sharing similar tastes in everything from food and entertainment, to decorating and pet peeves, it was natural that their friendship deepened into something more. They both often joked that they would never have to worry about arguing over foolish things, like who was the last to remember putting the toilet paper back on the roll, since they both did it without forgetting to begin with.

Considering Kirk's attention to detail, it had surprised her he was leaving the last minute things to her, insisting he had to look after some personal business. He'd be back in time for the rehearsal dinner tonight and she could fill him in on anything important. With her mother at the helm, AJ anticipated few surprises and knew the wedding would go off without a hitch. She hadn't wanted such an elaborate affair, one of the few things she and Kirk hadn't agreed on, but she let him talk her into the garden wedding. Once she'd dreamed of a quiet ceremony with only a handful of friends and family, and a groom who would look just as handsome in khaki's and bare feet...

"Hold this a second." Her mother thrust the jewelry box out, already rooting through the bag again, and letting go before AJ got a good grip on the box. It slipped right through her fingers, dumping the contents on the floor.

"For heaven's sake, I've got butter fingers today." Her mother laughed, and they both bent to pick everything up.

AJ paused, her fingers closing around a locket that had been carefully tucked away in the bottom of the box. Out of sight.

Habit had her flipping open the small hinge. Her heart kicked against her ribs as she studied the tiny picture inside.

"I remember the day he gave you that," her mother said. "I think you cried."

AJ nodded. She had.

But then again, she'd cried more than once over Cooper, especially at the end of their rocky relationship. She closed the locket and held it in her palm as a familiar ache settled deep in her chest before she pushed it back.

Not today. Not any day.

And how many times had she told herself that before?

"I can't wait to see him. It's been too long."

AJ continued to stare at the locket, her mother's words taking a few extra seconds to penetrate.

"What? When will you be seeing Cooper again?"

Her mother arched a brow. "Tomorrow. At the wedding. Don't tell me you forgot he was coming?"

AJ gaped. "You said you invited him. You never said he was *actually* coming." Her heart continued to pick up speed. It had been months since they'd last crossed paths and she could still remember the heat from Cooper's gaze had nearly incinerated her on the spot.

"You should have told me," AJ continued.

Her mother paused, her brows furrowed a little too perceptively for comfort. "You said you understood that he and your father were still pretty close and that it was okay to invite him. You said you were still friends."

"I think I said we were civil. Not friends exactly. And I didn't think he would actually come."

Her mother shrugged and finished cleaning up the jewelry, tucking everything neatly away once more.

AJ moved from the floor to the edge of the bed, vaguely aware she still held the locket in her hand.

Her mother sat next to her. "You're not okay with this, are you?"

Of course she was. She had to be. If she wasn't, that might mean she still wasn't over him. And she was so over Cooper McLain.

"I'm just thinking of everything we still have to do today is all."

Her mother studied AJ carefully with that *suspicious mother* look every woman with children mastered from the point of conception.

To prove she was perfectly unruffled by the latest development, AJ stood up and strode for the bathroom. "Let me grab a quick shower and we can get started."

She closed the door and faced herself in the mirror. "You are over him. Way, *way* over him," she reminded herself, then laid the locket

down on the vanity and made herself forget all about Cooper.



“You’re so not over her.” Cooper McLain scrubbed a hand over his face, staring bleary eyed at his reflection. He looked like crap.

A night of drinking yourself into a stupor did that oddly enough. His mouth tasted like he’d downed a few shots of sawdust before he’d damn near crawled back to the hotel and crashed on the chair for the first couple hours. At some point, he’d roused enough to at least kick off his shoes before dropping into bed.

Cooper glanced at the clock. Shit. He’d slept all day. Not that he was in any hurry. He didn’t even know what the hell he was doing here. The fact that his brother was visiting with his girlfriend wasn’t any reason to check himself into a hotel for the night. But then, it wasn’t about getting away from his brother as much as it was getting closer to AJ.

Cooper cursed under his breath and turned away from his reflection, annoyed with himself. He turned the shower on, stepping under the purposely cold water to both wake up and get a grip on himself. He planned on going to the wedding only to make himself realize it was really over and to wish AJ the best with the lucky bastard. God knows he’d given her more than enough reasons to be miserable that she deserved this.

Then what the hell are you doing here the day before?

He’d asked himself the same question a hundred times since he checked in last night. Then a few more times between every drink he chugged back wanting to forget that he’d pushed the best thing in his life right out of his arms. And two and a half years ago to boot.

Now AJ was marrying someone else.

His gut clenched, and he almost laughed. He’d been convinced that ugly feeling was nothing more than an ulcer left from his days as a cop too caught up in his work and an inch shy of burning out. Now he recognized it for what it was.

The thought of AJ spending the rest of her life with anyone but him left him sick to his stomach.

He finished showering and dried off, really regretting that last beer. Or was it three?

"Too little, too late," he grumbled under his breath. She was moving on. It was time he did too. His cop career was over. He and AJ were over. He needed to start fresh.

Feeling slightly more alert, Cooper strode back into the bedroom. He spotted the blond-haired man stretched out on the bed, surfing through the channels on the TV.

Cooper clutched the towel he'd been about to pitch back into the bathroom around his waist. *Great.*

"To what do I owe your unexpected visit?"

Eros, Greek god of love and desire, didn't take his eyes off the small screen. He cocked his head, trying to follow the movements of the naked couple on the low-budget film. He cringed.

Cooper arched a brow. "You ordered porn?"

Eros snorted, then pushed up, turning off the television with a wave of his hand. "I came to see my favorite descendant."

"Right," Cooper drawled. "It's Valentines Day. I'm sure there are about a hundred million people that need your company more than I do right now. Go play with your bow and arrow."

"Is it just me, or am I detecting a smidge of hostility today?" Eros frowned. "Hangover, huh?"

"Yeah, and unless you're going to," Cooper snapped his fingers, "will it away or however you do that shit, let's not talk about it." He turned around, realizing the curtains were open. Cooper stalked across the carpet, his aching eyes and head thanking him the second he yanked the drapes shut.

"Why don't you just tell her already?"

Cooper glared at him. "We're not going there today, you got me?" It had only taken him a few visits—after Cooper figured out he really wasn't crazy—to realize Eros didn't tolerate wimps or ass kissers. The god came knocking when he was bored, not because he was looking to reward descendants he never expected with a better life.

Eros grinned. "Easy there, *Zeus*, and cool it with the castrating looks,

or I'll be willing away more than your hangover."

Cooper snorted. The one thing he'd learned about his great-great-great-into-infinity grandfather since the ageless god had poofed into Cooper's perfectly normal world a couple years ago, was the guy wouldn't raise a hand to hurt his "descendants" as he liked to call them. Not unless they badmouthed Psyche. Then they were toast.

"I don't know why you just don't—"

"No," Cooper growled. They'd been over this. Eros was not going to screw with AJ's head or heart on this. No way. He'd done enough of that all on his own in the past.

Eros shrugged. "Suit yourself. But you're fucking up here, you know that right?"

"Go bug my brother."

Eros sighed. "He's not nearly as much fun. Although I have to say, since you got shot, you've been a bit of a bore."

Cooper let the reminder roll right off him, ignoring the stiffness that seemed to grip the muscles in his leg, following Eros's comment. "I wasn't such a bore last night."

"Before or after you puked your guts out in the men's bathroom that, by the way, didn't even look fit enough to take a piss in. And I'll piss just about anywhere."

"How do you know about that?"

Eros crossed his arms. "Who do you think made sure you got back here in one piece?"

Cooper frowned, combing his memory, but coming up with nothing. He remembered the drinking. Lots and lots of drinking. And then the cab? And sleeping.

"You were a mess. And that scary dude, who you claimed had a third nipple, was ready to mop the floor with you."

Ignoring the troublesome god, who derived far too much pleasure in the chaotic state of Cooper's life, he headed for the closet. He paused, turned back. "I was in a fight?" Considering he hadn't woke up with anything broken or aching aside from his head, that must have meant he won.

Cooper grinned.

With a sound of disgust Eros followed him to the closet. "You couldn't even stand up by that point. I think you even threatened the guy with a swizzle stick."

He would have groaned *if* he actually believed a word the god was saying. His weapon of choice would never have been a swizzle stick.

Eros pushed away from the closet. "I can see when I'm not being appreciated."

"Like that's meant anything to you before."

"You're a stubborn ass, you know that."

"I think they call it genetics."

Despite the fact that Cooper had been a total asshole for the duration of his visit, Eros grinned. "Sure you don't want me to help you out with AJ?"

"No."

Eros's lips twitched.

"Don't interfere," Cooper warned, not trusting the mischievous glimmer in the god's eyes.

"Or what?" In true Eros fashion, he vanished into thin air without waiting for a response.

"Eros?" Cooper snapped. "I mean it."

The god didn't answer.

Perfect.

His ex was getting married, and he had a bored Greek god on his hands looking to stir up trouble. If he had a lick of sense, he'd go the hell home.



AJ came to a standstill. Wine glass halfway to her mouth, her heart thumping, she could only stare as Cooper walked into the hotel's small reception area that they'd rented for their rehearsal dinner. With the actual eating over with, the wedding party and guests relaxed as more family members also staying at the hotel had drifted in to join them.

But she wasn't paying attention to another soul in the room. She

watched Cooper hesitate in the doorway, turn to leave, and then turn back around again. Even from across the room, he looked good. The same critical sharpness and *don't fuck me around* tilt of his head made him look every bit the cop role he filled so well.

Too well.

From the way he stood, something about him reminded her of the day he made detective—cool, precise determination rolling off him in thick waves.

His gaze tunneled through the surrounding crowd, and when those intense blue eyes finally landed on her, she couldn't suck in a deep enough breath of air.

AJ whirled around as though she hadn't felt the weight of his stare and searched for her sister. From the corner of her eye she saw him maneuver through the laughing and chatting bodies to get to her.

She tipped back the wine glass and downed the remaining contents.

You're over him. So cool it.

Her hand trembled as she set the empty glass down on the closest table.

Yeah, that worked real well, she thought wryly.

She tried and failed to force herself to look at him as he approached. AJ closed her eyes and stole another quick breath. She squared her shoulders and turned to face him, making certain the polite smile she managed to pull together couldn't be interpreted as anything but sincere.

Forget that she was shaking inside. Badly.

The slow smile that curved his mouth, transforming his face from hard-ass police officer into something much softer—sexier—made her stomach tug.

"Hi," he said slowly.

AJ swallowed. "Mom said you were coming to the wedding."

His grin widened. "She said you were okay with it."

"I am."

He crossed his arms, the gesture instantly getting her back up. "I'm fine with it," she repeated, her voice purposely cooler.

She could do this, be polite, friendly. They'd done it a number of

times since their break up almost three years ago.

So why was this time so different?

Because you're marrying someone else tomorrow.

"How've you been?" AJ waved over his shoulder as her aunt left the party, probably for the night.

"Good. What about you?"

"Good. Busy."

"I'll bet." He drawled it out, shoving his hands in his pockets.

An awkward silence settled between them.

"I figured you would've had a big case on the go." He always did. Always had.

Cooper shook his head, his gaze dipping to her mouth and holding there.

Heat rushed through her veins, then promptly fizzled out as she remembered all the nights he'd left her home alone, each case increasingly more important than the last, until there hadn't been enough room for her in his life. Not when he ate, slept and breathed the job.

She had finally wised up and realized she couldn't live like that. Couldn't settle for second place every damn time.

Cooper nodded towards the terrace doors. "Can we talk?"

"Isn't that what we're doing now?"

"Alone."

She shook her head. "I don't think that's a good idea."

An expression she couldn't decipher crossed his face and he took a step back. "Maybe I should go."

Damn, now she felt guilty. They were still friends, sort of. She reached out and grabbed his arm, keeping him from turning to leave. His gaze dropped to the fingers she curled around his shirt, then up to her face.

She immediately let go. "Stay. Dad loves talking to you. I heard him complaining that you hadn't stopped by long enough to watch a hockey game with him lately."

Cooper smiled and her stomach did that predictable flip thing again.

“There you are.”

A smile came instantly to her lips at the sound of Kirk’s voice. And with it, a feeling that should have been anything but relief eased her rigid spine.

Kirk slipped an arm around her waist and held out a hand. “I’m Kirk.”

Cooper didn’t hesitate on the handshake. “I’m the ex.”

“Ah, I see.” The grip on AJ’s waist tightened. “I didn’t know you were coming.” Kirk shot AJ a glance that fell just short of annoyed.

Cooper nodded over his shoulder. “It was AJ’s parents who talked her into inviting me. She didn’t know I was actually going to show.”

“I see,” Kirk said again.

AJ frowned up at him, surprised at the distaste in Kirk’s voice. He wasn’t normally so clipped with anyone. That had been one of the things she’d always appreciated about him. He wasn’t the overly passionate type, but reliable, steady. Everything she needed. Looking at Cooper, it almost felt childish to admit—even to herself—she’d found those characteristics so appealing in Kirk because they were the opposite of her ex.

“I’m going to go say hi to your parents.” Cooper ignored Kirk’s jealous tone and walked away.

“You should have told me he was coming.”

“Mom just mentioned it this morning.” AJ reached out and straightened Kirk’s tie. “Where did you disappear to?”

Kirk blinked. “Just last minute wedding stuff.”

AJ laughed. “Last time I checked, everything had been left to me.”

“Not quite everything.” Distracted Kirk glanced around the room, his attention pausing on Cooper and the blonde standing next to him at the bar. AJ recognized her from Kirk’s office.

“I’m going to go mingle.” He kissed her forehead and headed over to a small group that consisted of his brother and parents.

The rest of the day started to catch up to her. The running around, the things she still had to look after in the morning, the fact that her husband-to-be and her ex—whose gaze she could feel boring into her—

were sharing the same space.

Where was her sister? Taking so much after their mother, Melody never failed to give her a hundred different things to ponder at once. And right now she wanted to think about anything but the fact that Cooper had come.

A few more relatives sidled up, exchanged a few words, and departed. It couldn't have been more than a few minutes of distraction, but when she scanned the room, she didn't see Cooper. Both relieved and...

She shook her head. No way was she going there tonight.

Spotting the terrace doors, she decided a little air and a peek at the gardens where she'd be married tomorrow might be exactly what she needed to settle herself down. The soft February breeze caressed her face, unseasonably warm for this time of year. AJ crossed to the wrought iron railing and looked out over the illuminated gardens.

"Nice night."

AJ whirled at the voice that came from the shadows to the left. Her breath trembled out as Cooper stepped forward and came to stand next to her. She had to tip her face back to see his face, his expression masked by the dim lighting. He stared at her for a long moment, his gaze inspecting every angle.

He glanced out at the gardens. "Does he make you happy?"

"Yes."

Cooper nodded thoughtfully. "I'm glad."

Music drifted from the opened window behind them.

He reached out, gripping her waist and drawing her close, moving to the slow sway of the beat.

AJ tensed, her palm flat on his chest. "What are you doing?" And just where had her voice gone too?

The smile he offered in response took her back to the day they met when he hit on her at a friend's place. "Dancing."

She tried to squirm free. Unsuccessfully.

"Come on," he pleaded. "One last dance before you're a married woman."

The warm pressure of his arms holding her tight battered away at her

resistance. "One dance."

He beamed, and she glanced away, focusing on anything but his handsome face.

For a full minute they managed to simply...dance. She felt him watching her.

"Do you ever think, ever wonder what things would have been like if we...if things hadn't ended the way they had?"

The regret she heard in his voice brought her head up. *Big mistake.*

Now she was looking directly into his eyes. Eyes that melted into hers countless nights as they talked, laughed, made love. When she realized she was staring at his mouth, she stepped out of his arms.

"That was a long time ago."

"Not to me."

"Don't do this Cooper." She started backing away.

He moved quickly, snaring her wrist and keeping her close. "There are things I need to say."

She shook her head. "Don't."

"I can't let you marry someone else without at least getting some stuff off my chest."

"Cooper," she warned. Damn it, she couldn't do this. He couldn't do this to her. He had no right coming in here and making her think about things. Like how they used to be. How he used to kiss her. Hold her. Drive her absolutely insane.

She clung to the last one, using it to pry his fingers off her wrist. "I'm going now."

"AJ," he began. He broke off, and shoved his hand through the longish brown hair. She noticed for the first time how long he was wearing it now and wondered if his superiors at his precinct ever gave him a hard time about it.

And there she went again. Why did he always make it so hard to run two coherent thoughts together?

"AJ?"

The crisp voice startled them both and they turned at the same time to see Kirk in the doorway. "You ready to call it a night?" He glared at

Cooper.

“Yeah.” She nodded goodnight at Cooper, and turned to follow Kirk inside. She saw Cooper’s hand rise as though to stop her. He let it fall back to his side, then faced the gardens as she went in.

Kirk didn’t say anything until they were in the hotel’s hallway and heading upstairs. But instead of commenting on Cooper as she expected, he talked about his dad’s new investment plan. She tried to fit in the appropriate responses, but felt distracted.

And it was Cooper’s fault.

Kirk used her keycard to open the door for her.

“You heading to bed too?”

Kirk shook his head. “Not really tired yet.”

AJ frowned. He figured she was ready to call it a night and he was going back downstairs? She sighed inwardly, not really caring. She wasn’t about to start an argument over it the night before their wedding when she assumed he just didn’t want her near Cooper. Any other time the jealousy would be cute. Tonight it was just annoying, but she really was too tired to give a damn.

She knew her frustration stemmed from her encounter with Cooper and it would be stupid to take that out on Kirk. He’d never been anything but supportive and understanding, and didn’t deserve a scene, no matter that she was suddenly chomping at the bit for one. She couldn’t remember Kirk ever so much as raising his voice, yet she crazily wished he would. Wished that he would demand to know what she’d been doing on the terrace with only inches between her and Cooper and it clear he was interrupting something. He’d been jealous enough when he learned who Cooper was, yet now that they were alone, he didn’t appear the least bit concerned. Instead he simply looked eager to return to the party.

Cooper had no right walking back into her life, the night before her wedding no less, with the need to get anything off his chest. If she couldn’t fight with him for pulling such a stunt—forget that a small part of her wanted to know what he’d been about to say downstairs—then she’d take venting with the next closest thing.

But true to his nature, Kirk didn’t press her for more details, or ask

her why Cooper would bother attending their wedding at all. He merely commented on her looking tired, and with a quick kiss, headed back down the hall.

Inside her hotel room, AJ undressed and fell into bed. But her last thoughts of the night were not of her husband-to-be.



The sound of knocking brought her awake. Instantly AJ thought of Cooper. That he had come looking for her to finish that talk. Heart thudding, she opened her eyes, blinked at the morning light pouring in through the drapes she'd forgot to close last night.

"Rise and shine."

Smiling at the sound of her mother's voice, AJ realized she hadn't even said goodnight to her last night. She stretched and sat up.

"Amanda Jean you drag yourself out of bed right now."

She was getting the *Amanda Jean* routine two days in a row?

Rubbing her gritty eyes, AJ crossed to the door and her mother breezed in before she even got the door open the whole way.

"There is way too much to be done today to spend it daydreaming in bed, young lady. You're getting married tomorrow." Her mother grinned, then planted a quick kiss on AJ's cheek before grabbing her hand and twirling her around.

AJ frowned, the overwhelming sense of déjà vu penetrating her groggy brain. "Today. I'm getting married today."

Her mother laughed. "That would be nice wouldn't it? To have all those last minute things already taken care of." Her mother spun her around and AJ watched, stuck in some kind of surreal stupor, as the vase filled with the carnations flew off the small table and crashed into the side of the armoire.

Chapter Two

Cooper pressed the heel of his hand against his right eye and groaned. Without lifting his head off the pillow he could tell he'd left the drapes open again and he was still fully dressed. His mouth felt like he spent the night chewing cotton balls and his head...

He sat up, glancing down at his clothes. He regretted the fast movement immediately as his head pounded viciously. If he didn't know better he'd think it was another hangover. Considering how that played out the other night, he'd stopped at two beers last night and had fallen asleep with the TV on.

And not wearing his clothes.

Cooper stood, looked down at the rumpled but still made bed, then back at his clothes.

He hadn't been wearing these last night, had he?

The pain in his head made it difficult to focus. Once he had a shower and coffee, things would be better.

AJ's getting married today.

Scratch that. Nothing was making today any better.

With another groan, Cooper dragged his sorry ass—headache and all—into the bathroom, stripped and stepped under the water.

Marginally more alert, he went through the motions of getting dressed and tossing his clothes in a pile on the chair. Every step he took made another second tick off inside his head, in turn tightening his gut as he realized he was that much closer to watching AJ walk down the aisle.

He couldn't go. There was no way around it. Closure be damned. After last night he wasn't about to put himself through it. Cooper let his

eyes drift shut, almost feeling her in his arms, the way her body moved with his to the music. God, she'd looked fantastic, and when he caught her fixated on his mouth for that half a second, it was all he could do not to drag her against the wall and press against every soft inch of her.

Now he was just torturing himself.

Cursing, Cooper crossed to the door, noticing the time on the digital clock. Christ, he'd slept the day away again. At this rate he had barely enough time to go downstairs for a coffee before he had to make a real decision about going to the wedding in just under two hours.

He let himself out of the hotel room. The ache between his temples hadn't subsided, even with the couple aspirin he'd popped after his shower. He really needed coffee. And not the crap they left for the one-cup machines in the rooms. Who only drank one measly little cup anyway?

The lobby was fairly quiet for a Saturday afternoon. Cooper figured people would have been checking in and out, but only a few people lingered. He headed for the hotel's restaurant, snagging one of the complimentary newspapers on the way.

Once the hostess got him rigged up with a full cup of black coffee, he tried to pretend the day was like any other—and not the day he would forever lose AJ. He skimmed the headlines, reaching for his coffee.

He frowned at the date. This was yesterday's paper.

"Excuse me." He flagged a passing waitress. "Do you have any copies of today's paper?"

Her gaze drifted over the front page, and she arched a brow. "That is today's paper, sir."

He pointed to the date. "This says, Friday the fourteenth."

"Yes," the waitress said carefully. "That would be today's date."

"Today is Saturday the fifteenth."

She shook her head, and turned away as another patron waved her over.

Cooper stared at the paper. Today was the fifteenth. Yesterday, had been February fourteenth...

No.

Hell no.

Shoving back the chair, Cooper tossed a couple bills down on the table, grabbed the paper and left the restaurant. To be sure he wasn't way off-base with his gut, he stopped by the front desk.

"Could you tell me the date, please?"

The manager didn't even bat an eye at the request. "February Fourteenth. Valentines Day."

Fuck.

Pivoting on his heel, Cooper strode for the elevators. The ride up was frustratingly long and someone felt compelled to get on or off at every damn floor between the lobby and his.

He slammed the door to his room behind him. "Eros!"

The air didn't even stir.

"Don't ignore me, you meddling bastard. Not today."

Still nothing.

Cooper cursed and started pacing. "I told you not to interfere."

"Someone had to."

Cooper whirled and spotted the Greek god leaning in the doorway to the bathroom, a towel draped around his waist.

"This better be important mortal because Psyche was just getting to the soap."

"What did you do?"

Eros shrugged indifferently, but his eyes told a different story. "I don't know what you mean."

"Don't you have other descendants' lives you can screw with more than mine?"

"But you're one of my favorites."

"Bullshit."

"Okay, so I just like torturing you." The god's lips twitched.

"Undo whatever the hell you did."

"No can do."

Cooper glared at him. "Now."

"Careful mortal. Descendant or not, I'm not in the mood to have my buttons pushed."

"Fine," Cooper snapped. "Care to tell me exactly what is going on then."

"You'll get the point soon enough." And with that parting comment Eros disappeared.

Well, wasn't this just perfect.

He sank down on the edge of the bed and pushed both hands through his hair.

And then it hit him.

AJ wasn't getting married today after all.



AJ was losing her mind.

That was the only plausible explanation. She'd already ruled out dream. Her arm still stung from the series of sharp pinches to test that theory. And she had a very low threshold for pain. If anything would have brought her out of a dead sleep it would be that.

But she wasn't dreaming, was she?

AJ stared at the people milling about the reception area, dishes already cleared, people talking and chatting. About the exact same things they'd talked about yesterday. Which was really today. Again.

Damn, her head hurt. None of this made sense. As far as she could tell she was the only one who noticed that things were set in replay mode. Her mother had only patted her hand when she said as much earlier this morning, then went on to talk about how pre-wedding jitters could get people all worked up.

After twelve hours of repeating the entire day all over again, she sure as hell was worked up.

She took a sip from the wineglass she held, as much to soothe her nerves as to ease the immediate tightness in her throat when she spotted Cooper stride through the door. He didn't pause, his gaze zeroing in on her right off the bat. Unlike the last time round, her heart pounded with the knowledge of the brief dance they shared last night and wondering if they would again. Considering the entire day had played out the same way as yesterday, she imagined he would try again.

“Hi,” she said softly.

The frown on his face eased. “Hi.”

“I’m glad you’re here.” And damn if that wasn’t the truth. The whole day had gone to hell and back, and she was helpless to do anything but be along for the ride. Nothing made sense, but seeing him here settled something inside of her.

“Can I talk to you?” He didn’t wait for her permission, but glanced once over his shoulder, then led her out onto the terrace.

If he had tried this yesterday, she would have instantly dug in her heels. Considering she needed to hash this out with someone—the only person left who just might believe her—she went willingly.

Alone outside, the warm evening air teased her hair as she stopped next to him, overlooking the gardens the same way they had last night. She waited for him to say something, but he continued to stare straight ahead.

“This is going to sound really weird,” she began.

“There you are,” Kirk said from the doorway.

AJ sighed. Now was not the time.

He came up and slipped an arm around her waist, holding out his hand. “I’m Kirk.”

Cooper didn’t shake his hand this time. “Could we have a few minutes?”

AJ shifted her attention from Kirk to Cooper. There was no mistaking Cooper’s immediate dislike for her fiancé. Had she just been too preoccupied with Kirk’s similar response yesterday to notice Cooper’s feelings were mutual?

Kirk forced out a laugh. “I’m sure you’ll understand if I steal my wife-to-be away for a bit.” He lightly gripped AJ’s elbow to lead her back inside.

She shook her head. “I’ll be right there.”

Kirk hesitated, his gaze darting back and forth between the two of them. He finally nodded and disappeared back inside, but not before the quiet look of disapproval tightened his face.

“And he makes you happy,” Cooper snorted, the comment more of a

statement of disgust than a question.

"I suppose you think you did such a stellar job in that department."

He looked instantly contrite. He pushed his hands in his pockets, only to remove them a few seconds later.

"We both know I messed up with us."

AJ gaped. Not once, not even when he asked her not to move out and she said it was over, or anytime since then when the subject came up, did he ever own up to his part in things.

"Don't look so surprised," he added with a sheepish grin. "I figure everything out eventually."

She drew in a deep breath, the intensity of those blue eyes scorching her from the inside out. The next words out of her mouth surprised them both if the look on his face was any indication.

"Dance with me."

Her head told her to shut the hell up and go inside with Kirk. Other parts, ones she didn't want to examine too closely, insisted she see if the insane things she felt last night in his arms were just because it had been so long. She needed to know that's all it was. Needed to know she could dance with him and not...

She tipped her face up, thinking of their conversation last night. "Do you ever think about us and what might have happened if things hadn't ended the way they had?"

He blinked in surprise, then his gaze dropped to her mouth. "Every damn day."

The softly murmured confession worked like an atmospheric vacuum, sucking up every spare air molecule.

Cooper lifted a hand, trailed his thumb along her jawline.

Her eyes drifted shut. She had to let go of him. Had to walk away. She couldn't think about going down this road again. Not even for a few minutes. And especially not when she was set to marry someone else.

She ordered her fingers to release the hold they had on his shirt.

Cooper leaned in, his cheek brushing hers, his mouth next to her ear. "I've missed you, AJ."

She nearly whimpered, but whether it was from her heart breaking

all over again or because she knew she had to let go, she didn't know.

He caught her chin in his hand, freezing her in her tracks.

She wanted to back up, but the warm pressure of his hand against her back felt too good. "I've had one hell of a day, you know."

"I'm sorry," he whispered.

Without a doubt she knew he wasn't apologizing for her bad day. This was something else. Something far more important.

Cooper leaned forward and slid his mouth over hers. She sighed against his mouth, reaching up to wrap her arms around his neck.

He groaned, tugging her closer.

The sweet friction of his mouth against hers drove AJ out of her mind. But when his tongue swept across her bottom lip and slipped into her mouth to stroke deep, fire crackled under her skin. She clung to him, her body familiarizing itself with every hard contour.

His hands moved down her back, and when he cupped her bottom and pulled her more firmly against him, she moaned. He broke from her mouth, lips skimming down her throat. He slipped a hand under the edge of the short dress she wore, his warm palm edging up the outside of her thigh.

Cooper nipped her lip, then drew it between his. "And I've sure as hell missed this." Laced with need, his voice tugged at her memory. Without trying, she recalled a hundred different times he'd devoured her mouth with a similar intensity, his hard, naked body pinning her to the mattress as he buried himself deep inside her.

She shook her head.

"Don't," Cooper pleaded. "Don't pull away. Not yet." He claimed her mouth again, more feverish this time, each stroke bolder than the last until she curled her fingers into his shirt.

Someone cleared their throat.

AJ stumbled back, horror and guilt colliding in her stomach in a vicious swirl as she spotted Kirk in the doorway.

He opened his mouth, then snapped it shut and spun around, going back inside.

Cooper snared her wrist when she started to follow.

She jerked her hand free.

“We need to talk.”

She glanced back over her shoulder. “I think we’ve done enough for one night.”

Inside the reception area she searched the thinning crowd and spotted him leaving the room. She jogged after him, aware of her mother staring at her.

“Kirk, wait.”

He hit the button on the elevator, closing the door before she could catch up with him.

AJ slapped her palm on the door. *Shit*. She’d really fucked up. As if kissing Cooper on the day before her wedding—*second* day before her wedding—wasn’t bad enough, she would have to get caught in the act.

The look on Kirk’s face...

She would fix this. She’d make him understand that it was just a big mistake. Damn Cooper for showing up and making her feel things she shouldn’t feel. Things she had convinced herself were dead and buried.

She and Kirk had a solid relationship, one they’d promised each other was based on consideration and honesty. They’d shared much of their pasts and prior relationships before they recognized the wisdom of building a long-term relationship on top of a firm friendship.

And how did she repay all those times they’d talked about the key to a healthy marriage being open, honest communication? She let Cooper kiss her.

She pressed her forehead against the doors. Who the hell was she kidding? She’d kissed Cooper right back, clung to him. And it had been wrong. Wrong to hurt Kirk like that.

AJ squared her shoulders. She’d fix this. Fix it and forget that the past she had with Cooper wasn’t as dead and buried as she thought.

She clicked the button on the elevator and waited.



This time when Cooper came awake with the hangover from hell, he bolted upright, ignoring the way his stomach clenched in response to the

quick movement. Memories from two days' worth of Fridays rose to the forefront of his mind.

As he realized he was again dressed in clothes from a couple nights ago, he knew it had happened again. Last night he'd made sure to strip down before crawling into bed after spending hours trying to track AJ down once she ran after Kirk.

He smiled remembering the soft part of her mouth, the throaty moan that drifted past her lips as their kiss turned hot and hungry.

Cooper glanced at the clock. It was after two in the afternoon. Again.

Damn it. He ran into the bathroom, scrubbed his face and ran his hands through his hair. A quick change and then he was out the door. Last night he'd spent an hour and a half camped outside her hotel room door, waiting for her, which made it easy to find his way there again.

He came up short at the sight of AJ's mom standing outside the door.

"Honey, you need to let me in," she said gently. Helen's expression brightened when she saw Cooper coming towards her.

While Helen hadn't said a word to him for a couple months following his and AJ's break up, they'd slowly gotten back to being on friendly terms. With his own parents having been killed in a car accident more than ten years ago, he and AJ's parents had grown rather close. So much in fact he still stopped by now and then to catch a hockey game with her Dad.

Helen gave him a half grin. "AJ won't open the door to anyone."

Cooper stared at the closed door. "Did she say why?"

"No. She started to say something about it starting all over again tomorrow so it won't matter anyway. Whatever that means. I'm hoping it's just nerves. Her sister and I have been taking turns all day trying to coax her to let one of us in as we try to make sure things are ready for tomorrow in case this is just cold feet."

Cooper knocked on the door.

"The rehearsal dinner starts in a few hours."

"So Kirk doesn't know she's barricaded herself in her room?"

Helen shook her head. "He's been gone most of the day."

He tried knocking again. "AJ?"

“Go away, Cooper.”

He felt Helen watching him closely. “Why don’t you let me in?”

A bitter laugh came from the other side of the door, one that sounded suspiciously close to tears. “You are the last person I want to talk to right now.”

“Come on, let me in.”

“No.”

Helen nodded over her shoulder. “I’m going to go take care of a couple things. Maybe you can get through to her.” The look on her face said she had her doubts.

“AJ, open the door.” He wasn’t as polite about it this time.

“Go to hell.”

“There are things we need to talk about.”

“I have nothing else to say to you. I’m getting married...tomorrow.” He heard her curse.

“That’s what we need to talk about.” And he wasn’t about to launch into *that* conversation in the middle of the hallway.

The door was thrown open. A tear stained and flushed face stared back at him. “Leave me alone, Cooper. I don’t need you screwing with my head or my he—” She huffed out a breath, her lips set in a determined line. “We don’t have anything to talk about that will change the fact that you turned away from me. We’ve both moved on. And I...I can’t take any mind games right now, okay?” Her voice wobbled and she sandwiched her lips together.

Cooper lifted a hand to touch her, but she backed away, shaking her head. “I want you to leave.”

He hated the pain reflected in her eyes. Pain that reminded him a little too much of the way she’d looked when she carried the last of her stuff out of their apartment. He had tried to stop her then too and she had begged him not to. Begged him to let her move on with her life.

He swallowed past the tightness in his throat. “Okay.”

She turned away from him and stared out the window. He closed the door gently behind him, thankful Helen wasn’t waiting in the hallway. By the time he reached the elevator, his own disappointment that she didn’t

want him anywhere near her was quickly overrun by his growing anger.

In his hotel room, he stared at the ceiling. "Enough is enough, Eros."

"Funny, you don't sound like a guy who kissed the woman he loves for the first time in over two years last night."

Cooper whipped around, unimpressed by the sight of Eros lounging in the corner chair. "I want you to stop this."

"Can't."

"You mean you won't."

Eros stood up. "No, I mean I can't. It has to play itself out now."

"What has to play out?"

"I don't know that either. I'm not psychic."

"So we're just supposed to keep going through the same day over and over."

"Pretty much."

Cooper sighed. "And it stops when?"

Eros shrugged.

"That's the best you can do? You started this whole thing and you're just gonna sit back and watch the show?"

"Which reminds me, I need to pick up some of that caramel covered popcorn that Psyche likes. A good do-over day really works up her appetite."

"So glad we could entertain you two," Cooper ground out through his teeth.

Eros grinned.

"I'm assuming only AJ and I are aware the day is repeating itself. Any other rules I should know about."

Eros nodded gravely. "Just keep an eye out for your other self. If the two of you meet, it will bring about an apocalypse of epic proportions."

Cooper stared at him slack-jawed.

"Nah, I'm just fucking with ya."

A knock at the door kept Cooper from lunging across the room to put Eros in a choke hold. Which would get him nowhere but his own ass kicked more than likely.

"Cooper?" The sound of AJ's voice skated up his spine.

"Have fun." Eros flashed him another amused grin and vanished.

Cooper crossed to the door. The sight of her tired and vulnerable pulled at his gut. He started to reach out to touch her, hold her, then remembered the way she'd backed away upstairs.

"I just came to ask you not to come down to the rehearsal dinner later tonight."

"You're still going to it then."

She nodded. "And I want to spend the evening with my family and my...fiancé. Celebrating."

She didn't look like she was in the mood to celebrate anything.

AJ squared her shoulders. "You won't come then?" Was that hope or fear he heard in her voice?

He leaned against the doorjamb. If Eros was telling the truth and there was no stopping them from reliving the day over and over, then he had no choice but to do everything he could to take the sadness from her eyes and give her back the spark he'd always loved about her. A spark that used to come into her eyes every time she looked at him.

"Sorry. Can't do that."

AJ gaped. "I don't want you there."

"I think you do."

Outrage flashed in her leaf green eyes. "You're not invited."

"That's supposed to stop me?"

"Damn it, Cooper. Let me get on with things."

Eros had other plans but he doubted this was the time to tell her all about his Greek god relative from hell.

"I want you to leave. Go home. Go be a detective, God knows that's all you ever cared about before."

"And I was an idiot."

She looked taken aback, then shrugged it off. "Good-bye, Cooper." AJ strode down the hall.

"Wait a minute." He shut the door and followed after her, barely managing to catch the elevator door to keep it open long enough to slip in with her.

"Fuck," she cursed.

The older couple sharing the small space glanced curiously between the two of them.

"You can't do this. I'm getting married tomorrow."

Doubtful, Cooper thought. "Will you listen to me?"

"No." AJ glared at him. "I listened to you for months. Apologizing about being late, forgiving one excuse after another when you had to work late. Every day. I slept in our bed how many nights alone because you just couldn't tear yourself away from your work?"

"You're right. I was an ass and I don't deserve you."

"Finally something we agree on," she snapped. The elevator doors slid open on the next floor and she darted out, but not before Cooper glimpsed the sheen of tears in her eyes.

"AJ."

She ignored him and strode down the hall, stopping at the end. She pulled Kirk's extra key that she'd snagged when they checked in from her purse, and slid it into the slot.

Cooper didn't hesitate to follow on her heels. He came up short, nearly knocking AJ off her feet. He gazed past her head.

The bastard.

Naked and poised between some blonde's legs, Kirk stared in shock at the two of them.

Chapter Three

“Sliriously...seriously,” she corrected, her lips slightly numb now. Okay, a lot numb. “Am I not pretty enough?” AJ twirled the end of a garnish umbrella at the bartender. The hotel bar was quiet this afternoon, giving the bartender some time to talk. And AJ had plenty to say. He sat across from her in the corner booth she’d chosen out of immediate sight of most of the bar should anyone come looking for her.

She tucked her feet up under her, her shoes lost under the table somewhere. She had worn some in here, hadn’t she? More importantly, did she care?

With a smile on her lips that only came from three hours of non-stop drinking, she propped her chin in her palm.

“I don’t get it. I’m a good catch. I’m fairly attractive. I’m nice and thoughtful and a good listener. So what’s the problem?”

The bartender—Mike or Matthew or something—gave her a goofy grin, one that suggested he might be interested in helping her get to the root of her problem by getting into her pants after his shift. “They obviously don’t deserve you.”

AJ pushed up on her hands and pointed awkwardly at him to punctuate her point. “*Exactly.*” She took another long drink, draining the fruity concoction the bartender made for her.

She studied the frothy liquid in the bottom and dipped a finger in to get the last of it. Whatever it was, it was damn good. “So how is it a nice, average girl like me ends up with first a man who loved his job more than me, and then a nice, reliable guy who I have lots in common with,” she paused, “possibly too much in common with. And that guy I catch boinking some bimbo the day before our wedding.” She snagged the

bartender's wrist and stared at his watch. "He's probably doing her right about now."

Recalling the look on Kirk's face, she started laughing. She reached for her glass, realized it was empty.

"Time for a refill, I think."

"You sure?"

"Well..." She cocked her head and sucked her bottom lip between her teeth thoughtfully. "Seeing as how I'm probably going to wake up in the morning the same place with the same wedding obsessed mother banging on my door, I think I should definitely keep going. No hangover to worry about." She laughed again and stabbed one of the cherry garnishes he'd brought over for her with the little umbrella.

"Someone's having a good time."

The low voice brought her head up, and she was just drunk enough to truly appreciate the unexpected sight of Cooper standing next to her.

"Mark, a drink for my ex here, huh?"

The bartender and Cooper exchanged a look of understanding. They obviously were both following that she needed another drink in order to maintain her blissful state of drunken oblivion.

Nothing like a good buzz to make a girl forget she was trapped in some time warp way worse than any movie. At least Bill Murray didn't have to deal with both a cheating fiancé and an ex who looked way too good.

AJ bounced down the booth to make room for Cooper. She patted the bench. "Have a seat."

"Maybe we should go upstairs."

"I like it here." Where her mother and Kirk wouldn't find her. If he wasn't too busy screwing the blonde to notice she'd gone AWOL. She laughed bitterly, wondering if it was a good thing or not that Kirk didn't remember she'd walked in on him—which was what, technically five Valentines Days ago now?

It was damn hard to keep it all straight with the days blurring into each other until she'd almost confused herself into thinking maybe Kirk only cheated to get back at her for kissing Cooper, only to realize he

wouldn't have remembered that either.

Her life was a mess.

No sooner had the thought flitted through her mind than she swatted it aside. That was why she was here. To forget that depressing fact, just for a few hours.

"How long have you been at it?"

"Drinking? A while." She grabbed the empty glass Marshall had left on the table. She coated her fingertip with some remaining fruit juice.

Cooper sat down next to her.

"Here, try this." She rubbed her finger along his bottom lip.

He caught her wrist in his hand, a fierce expression on his face. Her stomach tugged under the hot stare he raked down her face. His lips closed over her finger, drawing it into his warm, wet mouth.

AJ closed her eyes, her body heating from the inside out. She slowly drew her hand back. She wanted to be mad at him. Yesterday had been her mad day. The day before that she'd cried. After finding Kirk with the woman from his office, she spent the rest of night hiding out from him and Cooper.

Waking up to her mother once again prattling about wedding plans, she'd broken down, told her mother everything. Concerned it was more than wedding jitters, her mother took her home. Cooper had come looking for her there in the evening, but she refused to see him. And then the whole thing started all over again yesterday. All cried out, she told both men off and spent the day shopping, and then the night at her sister's place.

And wonder of wonders, she thought wryly, she'd awakened back in her hotel room this morning.

The whole thing was really getting annoying. No. Annoying was trying to sleep and hearing a mosquito buzz in the room only to have the little pest vanish when the light was turned on. What was happening to her now was far beyond *annoying*.

This...this was just fucked up.

Morgan returned with her drink, and one for Cooper.

As the bartender left, she lifted her glass. "What shall we toast to?"

“How many drinks have you had?”

“Not enough.” She motioned him to pick up his glass.

He complied.

AJ grinned. A thickening tingle hummed in her middle as she let her gaze pause on his mouth.

She set the glass down, forgetting her urge to take a drink.

Right now there was something she hungered for far more than alcohol. And seeing as how Cooper wasn't going to remember a thing tomorrow, she let the last of her inhibitions die a real quick death.

His eyes flared as she straddled him, the rise of the paneled wood above the booth hiding them from the bartender and anyone else who might stroll into the bar. Then again, she was pretty much past the point of caring what anyone thought.

The muscles at the back of Cooper's neck bunched under her palm. He shifted beneath her, lifted his hips so his arousal rubbed against her sex.

Her insides clenched, and he settled his hands at her waist.

“Think this is a good idea?” He didn't particularly sound like he was complaining.

She lowered her face to within an inch of his mouth. “Considering how the last few days have gone. I could be doing much worse.”

He pushed his hand into her hair, settling it at the nape of her neck. “We need to talk.”

“Later,” she murmured and slanted her mouth across his.

Her blood ran hot, firing her bloodstream as butterflies of the *need-sex-now* kind back-flipped in her stomach. AJ rocked against him, seeking the delicious friction that would feed the craving burning between her thighs.

His arms tightened around her, his chest hard against hers. Her breasts felt full and heavy, her nipples aching. The thought of his mouth, and tongue wrapping around the hard points, his hands sliding over her bare skin, stroking the folds of her sex, sent her entire system into complete meltdown.

She shuddered in his embrace, the kiss deepening as their tongues

tangled. Cooper moved from her mouth, down to the sensitive flesh just below her ear. He nipped it with his teeth, passed his tongue over the same spot and pulled it between his lips.

AJ caged his face in her palms, tipping his chin back even farther. She needed to taste more of him.

Groaning, Cooper drew back. "We need to stop."

"No." She kissed him again.

"If you don't, I'm going to take you right here."

AJ smiled. "Good."

He shook his head, and slammed his eyes shut when she arched against his hard cock. "You've had a lot to drink."

With a laugh, she trailed her hand between their bodies. "The alcohol, I can honestly say, has nothing to do with my wanting you right here, right now."

"Then what's it about?" He clenched his jaw as she cupped his erection through his pants.

Since he wouldn't believe her anyway, she shrugged. "Well, if you want to know the truth. I'm reliving the same day over and over and tomorrow you won't even remember this." She leaned forward to capture his mouth once more.

"The same way you think I don't remember dancing with you the other night?"

"Exactly," she whispered.

"Or kissing you the other night?" Cooper added.

AJ's eyes snapped open, and she froze.



He watched the play of emotions run over her face. Surprise, disbelief, amusement, and then it finally clicked.

She straightened. "You remember kissing me?"

"The other night. And a thousand times before that."

She frowned. "What else do you remember?"

"Dancing with you. Our little chat in your room, then in mine."

AJ cocked her head, waiting. "So you know then."

"About Kirk, yeah." He kept a firm hold of her when she started to squirm away. "I've been reliving the same day over and over right along with you."

She closed her eyes, inhaled deeply, then snapped up her glass and downed half the contents.

"How is this happening?" She shifted on his lap. The movement reminding him of how achingly hard he still was.

He sank his fingers into her thighs and raised his hips, rocking against her.

AJ hissed out her next breath. She shook her head. "I have to go."

Cooper caught the nape of her neck and tugged her forward. "Stay with me."

"Cooper," she began.

"You wanted to do more than run a few minutes ago."

"That was when I figured you wouldn't remember a damn thing."

He grinned. "So you only planned on using me then?"

She tried to scramble off his lap once more. He held tight and lowered her until she was on her back, pinned beneath him in the booth.

"I'm guessing you don't remember the time the other day in the elevator."

Her forehead scrunched. "We didn't do anything in the elevator."

"Right," he drawled. "I must have dreamed that. But I clearly recall making love to you on the terrace."

If her arms weren't underneath him, he suspected they'd be crossed across her chest right about now.

"We did not do anything but dance and kiss *once* on the terrace."

"Good thing we're reliving the same day and can fix those oversights." He bent his head, watched the war wage in her eyes. Her lips parted against his, but her body remained tense.

Cooper took his time, sliding his mouth slowly over hers, teasing her mouth wider. He swept his tongue inside, groaned at the hot, sweet taste of tropical fruit. She gripped his shoulders and tipped her head back, letting him deepen the kiss.

Fire burned through his veins and his cock throbbed. She rolled her

hip into him, both of them moaning at the contact. In the back of his mind he processed the sounds of others in the bar, but nowhere close to them. Any second the bartender could round the sheltered area to check on them.

AJ arched beneath him. He pushed the hand at her waist under the edge of her shirt. Her smooth stomach tightened under his palm. He trailed his fingers higher and cupped her breast. The silky fabric whispered under his skin. Her nipple poked through the material, and when he brushed his thumb over the tip, AJ whimpered.

Bolder now, Cooper pushed her bra aside, the heavy weight of her breast filling his palm. He wriggled her shirt up and leaned down, closing his mouth over the hard peak. Her back arched as he drew her nipple deeper into his mouth with one slow, wet tug after another.

She raked her nails down his back.

Cooper leaned more on his side, giving him room to slip a hand under the flimsy skirt she wore.

"We should stop," she whispered, her eyes still closed. She trapped her bottom lip between her teeth.

"No, we shouldn't."

AJ opened her eyes and he held her gaze as he traced the edge of her panties. He pressed his palm against her sex, already imagining himself thrusting inside.

"You don't want me to stop."

She didn't disagree this time.

"I think you want more." He trapped her nipple between his lips again and sucked hard.

Her soft pants of breath combined with the need ravaging inside him, an eagerness to feel her find release in his arms.

Cooper stroked her cleft first through her underwear, then slid beneath to find her already damp for him. He tunneled through the curls and skimmed a fingertip over her clit.

Her hips bounced against his hand, her throaty moan the sexiest sound he ever heard. She wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him back to her mouth. Her kiss was a thousand times more potent than

before and left a fierce growl wedged in his throat. He wanted to tear her panties off, free himself from his pants and fuck her right here.

Over and over again.

Instead, he satisfied himself with pumping two fingers into her sex. Cooper caught her next moan with his mouth, tasting as much of her as he could. Her tongue danced and swirled over his.

"Make me come," she pleaded, the heated whisper broken and desperate.

He teased the slick knot between her legs with one figure-eight after another, then plunged his fingers into her once more. And again. She rocked her lower half in time with each thrust, one hand gripping the edge of the table.

Cooper kissed her hard and fast, then dipped down to flick his tongue over her nipple before grazing the tip with his teeth, and sucking it into his mouth. He continued to build the pace. Over her clit first, harder now, and then he sank his fingers into her wet sex.

Her body bowed upwards. He barely caught her cry of release with his mouth in time. AJ shuddered in his arms. Every muscle in his body strained to take her now, but he held back.

She opened her eyes, her green gaze hot and satisfied.

Cooper heard the approaching footsteps and jerked upright, taking her with him. He straightened her shirt as he went, and tucked her close to his side just as the bartender rounded the corner.

"Can I get you guys anything else?"

"We're good," Cooper answered, absently rubbing AJ's back.

The man nodded and disappeared.

Cooper hauled her back into his lap, finding her mouth with his. His heart knocked against his ribs, his body never so aroused in his life. "Let's get out of here."

"Okay," she breathed.

She edged out of the booth ahead of him. She weaved back and forth, gripped the table.

He was beside her instantly.

AJ shot him a wobbly smile. "I think I've had too much to drink

today.”

Cooper slipped an arm around her waist. She leaned into him as they left the bar and headed for the elevators. When the doors closed and the elevator started to move her face went white.

“You okay?”

“Yeah,” she said, but shook her head. The elevator stopped to let the other person behind them off. She had a death grip on his hand.

“You’re not okay are you?” The elevator bounced gently, continuing its trek upward.

AJ whipped around and dove for the small wastebasket in the corner like a drowning victim desperate for a life preserver.



“Rise and shine.”

Not again.

AJ groaned and sat up. Memories of the last day’s events came back to her and she smiled, falling back against the mattress.

Cooper.

She’d fallen asleep in his bed last night. After her embarrassing moment with the garbage can in the elevator, her body had decided she should suffer for the vast quantity of alcohol she’d chugged back. He had taken her up to his room where it was doubtful her mother or Kirk would come looking for her. She’d immediately passed out on the bed, waking hours later with the mother of all headaches. Cooper had ordered her some food, coaxed her into taking a quick shower and then tucked her back into bed.

For the first time in nearly three years, she’d drifted off with his arms tight around her. Waking up and finding herself alone, on the other hand, made her heart ache.

AJ touched her lips. The man had a mouth like a god. And what they had done yesterday—and in a public bar no less. Never before had they been so...reckless.

Her body warmed thinking about the feel of his hands on her, whispering over her skin. A delicious ache bloomed between her thighs

and she pressed them closer together, desperate to ignore the incessant pounding on her door.

“Amanda Jean, you drag yourself out of bed right now.”

Groaning, AJ shoved the covers off. How many more days could she do this? The only thing that made the prospect of the coming day any brighter was knowing Cooper was going through it too. She’d wanted to talk that over with him, but once they hit the elevator last night, the rest of the night consisted of trying not to throw up again.

On the way to the door, AJ grabbed the vase and moved it to the top of the armoire.

She tuned out her mother as she went through her customary spiel, complete with a quick spin that didn’t end with a smashed vase this time.

“Get a move on,” her mother added when AJ didn’t make a move to get dressed, and started digging through her bags. She thrust AJ’s jewelry box at her.

Making sure to catch it this time, AJ opened it and dug through to the bottom. She lifted up the locket Cooper had given her.

“I remember the day he gave you that,” her mother said. “I think you cried.”

AJ closed her eyes, torn by the hope she felt trying to take root in her heart. So he’d felt her up in the hotel bar, had kissed her, danced with her. Had anything really changed? The man had taken the day off to see her get married. That didn’t mean anything, did it?

AJ sighed. Even if Cooper had come looking to talk her out of marrying Kirk, that hardly meant things would be any different between them. Cooper’s job was more important to him than anything.

With a heavy heart, she sat on the bed and scrubbed her hands over her face. She didn’t even know what she wanted. Seven days ago she thought she had it all figured out. Thought she had the perfect little future set for herself. And now she couldn’t stop thinking about Cooper.

“I saw Cooper yesterday.” There wasn’t any point in trying to explain that yesterday had just been another February fourteenth in a growing string of them.

Her mother paused. "I don't think he mentioned that when he stopped by the house last night."

AJ frowned, confused at first, then realizing her mother meant the night of the thirteenth. "Cooper stopped by to see Dad?" She'd long ago told her mother not to feel the need to tell her every time Cooper popped by to visit her dad. Now she wished she hadn't been so insistent on pretending her ex hadn't shared a bond with her father. With only two daughters, and Cooper without a father, the two had gotten close from the beginning. She remembered thinking it took her dad longer to get over her and Cooper's break up than it had her.

Her mother nodded. "I wasn't home but your father said Cooper came by to tell him about the new business he was going in on."

She cocked her head. "New business?" Since when did the workaholic cop have time for a side business?

"A friend of his from college started his own private security company."

"What about his job?"

"Apparently he resigned from the force a couple months ago. Your father just got around to mentioning that after Cooper left yesterday. Men. I swear your father wouldn't remember his own name if I didn't have to call it a dozen times a day to get his attention away from a hockey game."

AJ bolted to her feet, snatched the shirt and pants her mother held, and darted into the bathroom. In ten minutes she showered, combed her hair, touched up her face and slipped on some shoes.

Her mother had made the bed while she'd been in the bathroom, and stared at her as AJ breezed straight for the door.

"All set already?"

"I'm going to see Cooper."

"You are?" Her mother frowned. "You're mad he's coming to the wedding aren't you?"

"No. I'm glad he came."

Her mother mulled that over, her face carefully blank. "When will you be back?"

"I'm not getting married. I caught Kirk sleeping with some blonde yesterday." Almost yesterday anyway.

"What?"

Knowing her mother would forget her shock in less than twenty-four hours, AJ ran over, hugged her, then exited quickly. To avoid giving her mother time to come after her.

The elevator ride down two floors to Cooper's was excruciating. The lift inched along as though it knew how eager she was to get there. Smiling, she ran down the hall, and knocked on his door.

No response.

She knocked harder, wondering if maybe he hadn't yet checked in, when the door was suddenly yanked open.

AJ brought her hand up to her mouth.

"I look like hell, don't I?" Cooper ran a hand through his hair, his eyes still half shut.

"Did you sleep in those clothes?"

He glanced down at himself. "Sort of." He held the door open. "Come in."

The smell of stale alcohol assaulted her senses. "Hard night."

"So it would seem." Cooper looked across the room. "At least I'm up early this time. On my own I can't seem to get up before two o'clock."

"That would be the hangover, I'm guessing."

"Which is actually rather amusing since you're the only one of us that actually drank yesterday."

Even rumped and mussed from a night of pseudo drinking, the man looked incredible.

"Here." He led her over to edge of the bed. "Sit. I'll shower quick. Don't leave, okay?"

She grinned at him. "Okay."

He hesitated in the doorway, then held up his hand. "Five minutes." He continued to stare at her.

AJ laughed. "Did you want to cuff me to the bed to make sure I don't go anywhere?"

"That's tempting, but since I'm fresh out of handcuffs at the moment,

I'll just have to trust you." With a devastating grin that uncaged the butterflies in her stomach, he ducked into the bathroom.

When the door shut, AJ gazed around the room, asking herself if coming here had been the best move on her part. Hell, spending the day alone held zero appeal. If she had to keep doing this day over again, might as well spend it with someone who knew it was happening.

She lay back on the bed and stared at the ceiling. It was like being trapped in some freakish *Twilight Zone* episode. She could almost believe that Cooper remembering each day was fate's way of telling her something. God knew, finding Kirk doing the blonde had certainly told her something.

Before she inevitably started to dissect what had led to Kirk cheating on her and how long it had been going on, a train of thought she'd visited numerous in recent days, she pushed the mess to the back of her mind. She didn't want to think any of it now. She wanted to be selfish. Wanted this time with Cooper for however long it lasted.

In three minutes—tops—the bathroom door opened. A cloud of steam escaped. Cooper leaned in the doorway, a thick white towel draped around his hips.

She sat up, trailing her gaze from his bare feet, past the towel, over his sensational chest and up to his face. "Thanks for looking out for me last night."

"No problem." He crossed the room sat down next to her on the bed. "You sleep okay?"

AJ laughed. "I went to sleep in your arms and woke up to my mother banging on my door for the seventh day straight. I don't think okay fits this situation. Weird and freakish, definitely."

He lifted a hand, cupped her jaw. "I was hoping I'd wake up to see you lying in bed with me." He trailed his thumb back and forth across her cheek. "I've missed you so much."

Her throat tightened. "I don't know that I can take hearing those kind of things right now. They mess with my head."

Cooper shook his head. "I'm not trying to." He brushed her hair behind her cheek. The tenderness in his eyes gave way to a flash of

desire, a heat that she felt all the way to her toes.

She roped her arms around his neck and leaned in, meeting him halfway as his mouth came down on hers. Hot and smooth, his tongue slipped inside. AJ moaned, parting her lips to take the kiss deeper.

Cooper picked her up and settled her in his lap. One hand tunneled into her hair as the other slid under her shirt to cup her breast. A soft flick of his thumb across her nipple, and she moaned against his mouth.

He rolled, pinning her beneath him on the bed. His hands were on the hem of her shirt, ready to yank it over her head.

Someone knocked at the door.

Cooper frowned, and gazed down at her. AJ shook her head, doubting her mother would have followed her down here even if she knew what room Cooper was staying in.

The knock came again. "I know you're in there."

The unfamiliar voice had Cooper stalking to the door. "Where the hell have you been?"

AJ climbed off the bed just as a drop dead gorgeous blond edged past Cooper into the room. The stunning male specimen belonged on a million or two billboards for a men's underwear line.

Instead he stood just inside the door, wearing ripped jeans and a baseball cap.

And no shirt.

"You've been ignoring me," Cooper continued.

"Now why would I do that?" The man sidestepped Cooper and headed right for her. "You must be AJ."

Chapter Four

Cooper glared at Eros. For the last three days he'd been trying to get the god's attention, and right when he was in the middle of getting seriously hot and heavy with AJ, Eros chose now to appear out of the blue?

He should just be thankful he'd knocked instead of popping straight into the room. Considering the way he'd questioned his own mental health the first time Eros did it to him, Cooper wasn't in any hurry to spring that on AJ.

AJ glanced uncertainly between the two of them, then allowed her hand to be enveloped by Eros's. An enchanted smile hugged her lips as his troublesome relative brought her hand to his mouth.

Cooper rolled his eyes.

"When Cooper said you were beautiful I had no idea he wasn't bullshitting me just a little."

"Cooper's mentioned me?"

Eros snorted. "The man never shuts up about you."

"Time to go." Cooper jerked his head towards the door.

Eros ignored him and flopped down on the bed. "I just got here. I thought you wanted to talk to me." He grinned at Cooper.

"Fine. We'll talk then. How much longer?"

Eros shrugged. "That's not my call."

AJ frowned at them. "Is this about work?"

"No."

"Yes," Eros answered at the same time.

"I should go." AJ's smile slipped a little.

Cooper planted himself between her and the door, arms crossed,

before she took more than two steps away from the bed. “No. Stay. He’s leaving.”

With a melodramatic sigh, Eros stood up. “Remember our deal, Coop.”

Cooper scowled. He’d given his word when the god first revealed himself that he wouldn’t tell anyone the truth about Eros—not that many people would believe him anyway. Only Eros made that call, if and when, he was good and ready to introduce himself properly.

“Yeah,” he growled out. He’d gone this long without telling AJ about his pain in the ass relative. A little while longer wouldn’t hurt anything. And if Eros didn’t come clean after he was done hitting the replay button on their lives, Cooper would have to persuade him.

“See you around, AJ.” Eros glanced at Cooper. “Stop pussyfooting around. People don’t get chances like this everyday you know.”

“Remind me to thank you after I kick—” He caught AJ’s curious stare. “To thank you properly for getting involved.”

Eros laughed and clapped him on the back. “Looking forward to it. I might even let you get in a punch just for fun.”

“So gracious of you.”

“Just doing my part to make you mortals feel good about yourselves,” the god added in a low voice.

Eros let himself out of the hotel room and Cooper flipped the lock behind him, turned, and faced AJ.

The fine lines tugging her brows together made her look adorable, sexy. He ached, thinking about peeling her clothes off, feeling her body warm and naked beneath his. Exploring every inch with his mouth and tongue until she arched against him and her soft moans filled the air between them.

“Want to leave the hotel for the day?” AJ’s question brought his attention back to her face. “I could stand to get away from here for a few hours.” She crossed to the bag he’d left open on the top of the chair and dug through it.

AJ handed him a small pile. “Get dressed.” Her grin was contagious, and he smiled back at her.

In two minutes he was changed and ready to go. He might have been willing to leave the room, but the second they were alone and the elevator doors closed, he jerked her into his arms.

Cooper tipped her chin back, sweeping deep inside her mouth. Her tongue swirled over his and his cock snapped from mid to full attention. He pushed her up against the wall of the elevator, flattening her body with his, drinking in every inch of her through touch alone.

She moaned against his lips, the wanton sound playing havoc with his insides. He slipped his hand under her shirt and groaned when he reached her breast.

She squirmed, smiling. "There's a camera in here."

"Well then, I guess we're giving someone something good to watch."

With his back to the camera in the corner behind him, Cooper dipped his fingers past the waist of her pants, unsnapping the only button in the process. The smooth silk of her panties teased his fingertips, and as he cupped her sex, he could feel she was already damp. With a little pressure and a slow roll of his thumb over her clit, she bumped her hips against his hand, her breath choppy.

The soft ding of the elevator stopping at the next floor forced him to back up, but the wild, untamed need in AJ's eyes made him lean back in for a quick kiss. Three people filtered into the small space. Cooper couldn't keep his eyes off AJ. He shouldn't have waited so long to...what? Have Eros set them in some kind of repeating loop just because he could?

As much as he wanted to be annoyed with the god for doing what he wanted, if Eros hadn't done something he might have let her walk down the aisle to marry that two-timing asshole. Cooper might have neglected her, focused too much on work, but no other woman had ever entered his head.

Gripping her hand, Cooper led her out into the lobby. Sunshine poured in through the tall glass windows. A beautiful woman, who he didn't know how he could live without, was tucked against his side. And if he was lucky enough he might get back to working those clothes off her real soon.

“Stop!” AJ gripped his shirt and hauled him behind one of the tall pillars.

“What?”

She pointed to the front doors. “Kirk.”

Cooper leaned around to see the bastard quietly arguing with the same blonde they’d come across him screwing.

“I’m not in the mood to deal with him.” She started to retrace their steps only to freeze once more.

Cooper spotted Helen waiting for the elevator before AJ said anything.

Pulling her along after him, he moved down the short corridor on their right. The door to the stairwell closed soundly behind them.

AJ pushed him back against the wall, her hands gripping his shirt as she leaned up and kissed him. Soft at first, each tentative taste grew longer, harder.

Pure, territorial lust pooled in his gut. He cupped her ass and hauled her as close as he could and slipped a thigh between hers.

A collective groan fused on the air between their mouths. His heart knocked in his chest, his fingers itching to have nothing between them. Certainly not clothing.

Her breath heavy, AJ drew back. She laid her face against his chest, and Cooper folded his arms around her.

“Why did you want to come to the wedding?”

The question caught him off guard. That’s what he got for thinking with his cock.

She tipped her face up, her expression carefully blank.

“I thought it was to finally let you go.”

“And now?”

“I’m not letting you go. Ever.”

AJ’s heart did a mad tattoo against her ribs.

“So you’re saying...” The words dried up on her tongue.

Cooper smiled, slow and sexy. “That I want time to prove that I do deserve you. That I can make you happy again.”

She swallowed past the lump in her throat.

He shook his head. "Don't say anything. Not yet. Just..." His gaze fell to her mouth. "Ah, hell."

Like a man desperate for air, he took full possession of her mouth, inching back into her heart with every shaky breath she tried to draw in. Her mind spun with the implications of what he said, of their past, their present. She couldn't think straight with him kissing her like this. Half starved, and on the threshold of losing complete control.

He moved, caging her between his hard chest and the wall at her back. He feasted on her jaw, her throat, her collarbone. One slow lick after another knotted her womb into a tangled ball of raw nerve endings.

His hand edged under her shirt, and when his fingers found her nipple, she sucked in a sharp breath. The pressure from his thigh against her sex upped the need clawing through her system. She wanted him naked. Wanted to touch him and be touched.

"I think we need to go back upstairs," he breathed.

She reached between them and gently gripped his erection through his pants. "You sure?"

His blue eyes glittered fiercely. "You tempted me yesterday in the bar. I seriously doubt I'm up for being tortured like that again today."

She shuttled her palm up the thick length of his cock. He hissed out a breath, and growled, "You're trying to kill me here. I know you are."

AJ laughed, the sound quickly extinguished by his next kiss.

He pushed a hand down her pants and caressed her sex.

"God," she mumbled. Her internal temperature spiked and the throbbing deep in her core intensified to the point her knees wanted to give out.

"Maybe we should take this upstairs," she said against his jaw, nipping the stubbled skin.

A door opened overhead, and the sound of heels clicking on the stairs broke them apart.

Cooper took her hand and hauled her up the steps behind them. Already breathless, she could barely keep up with his brisk strides. At the top, he turned, kissed her hard and fast, then opened the door to his floor.

In front of his door, she stole another kiss, smiling as he fumbled with the keycard. After his third attempt to get the door unlocked, she held her hand out.

Cooper stepped up behind her as she took a turn fiddling with the fussy locking mechanism. His hands spanned her waist, his chest firm and warm at her back. The thick ridge of his erection fit snug against her bottom.

He pitched forward, making her sex clench. She shoved the key into the lock, jiggling it hard.

“Are you having trouble too?” he whispered against her neck, scraping his teeth over the flesh under her ear.

She rocked back on her heels, her bottom grinding his cock. “Nope. No trouble here.”

The knob turned in her hands, and Cooper pushed her inside. He slammed the door, and turned, trapping her against it. Warm hands cruised over her skin, and then he yanked her shirt off. His hands covered her breasts, his thumbs rubbing her nipples through her bra.

AJ sighed. *Damn*. How could she have ever forgotten how hot they were together?

He bent his head and caught one hard point between his lips. “Jesus, you make me so hard. All I can think about is fucking you for hours.”

“Then stop thinking,” she panted, “and do something about it.”

Cooper grinned. “I’m working on it.” He undid the button on her pants and worked his fingers down to her cleft.

She slammed her eyes shut. “Work faster.”

He traced a lazy path through her folds, circled her clit.

AJ swayed forward, adding more pressure to the hand doing a fantastic job feeling her up. She cried out when her bra was tossed aside and his lips, warm and greedy, tugged on her nipple.

He scooped her into his arms and carried her to the bed.

If she hadn’t had her eyes open she would have missed the near wince cross his face.

She stilled. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.”

"I know when you're lying to me." She glanced down. "Is it your leg?"

He dropped her on the bed, coming down on top of her before she had time to drag in her next breath. His body pressed her into the mattress, his warmth seeping into her naked skin.

"What happened?" she insisted.

"I was shot," he murmured against her mouth.

She smacked a palm against his chest and shoved him back, sitting up. "What?"

He shook his head, tried to pull her back to him. "Later."

"When were you shot? Where? Why didn't I know?"

"Two months ago. My leg. And I'll tell you everything later."

"Cooper—"

He captured her mouth in a fierce kiss. "I promise I'll answer every question you can think of. Later." He ran his gaze over the length of her. "Christ, AJ. If I don't get inside you soon, I'm going to go out of my mind."

Cooper ached. Every muscle, every nerve ending strained to possess her. To slide his cock in deep and hold on for dear life.

She nodded slowly, the desire in her eyes feeding the flames ravaging his body. He tugged at her pants, tossing both them and her panties to the floor. Naked and spread out beneath him, AJ looked every bit the Greek goddess, a forbidden present from Eros. One Cooper would likely spend the rest of his life thanking the arrogant god for.

AJ sat up and slid her palms under his shirt. She held his gaze as she tugged it over his head, then leaned up and took his mouth with hers. He wrapped one arm around her waist, but she wriggled free and went to work on his jeans.

He sighed deeply as she released his cock from the tight confines of his pants.

"That's better," she murmured.

"Much."

She closed her fist around him. Cooper hissed out a breath. As she stroked him from base to tip, AJ moved to her knees where she could

both kiss him and drive him to the edge of madness at the same time with her hand.

Up and then down, each gentle twist and pull had him arching off the bed. He fisted his hands in the bedspread when she bent and flicked her tongue across the head of his cock.

He couldn't stop himself from pushing his erection past her lips. The wet heat made him groan.

AJ shifted closer, and he reached out, sliding his hand over her ass and between her legs.

She moaned, taking him deeper in her mouth as he traced her clit, and pushed two fingers into her sex. The vibration of her groan against his cock was the last straw. She licked up and over the tip and he couldn't take it anymore. He started to edge back, but she gripped the base of his cock, holding him still as she continued to stroke her tongue from one end to the other before sucking slowly.

Cooper growled. "Keep that up and I'm only going to last three seconds inside you."

Smiling slyly, AJ pushed him onto his back. "We do have all day. Probably tomorrow and the day after that too." She straddled his waist, and rubbed her sex up and down his shaft, but not allowing him to sink inside where he wanted to be the most.

Cooper grabbed her by the waist, but she used her knees to give her the leverage she needed. Unable to force her, he skimmed his thumb across her clit.

She shuddered.

"There we go." He grinned, using the distraction to coax her forward.

Another slow glide over the silky knot and she rolled her hips forward. The response brushed her, warm and damp, down the length of his cock.

Cooper bit his lip and hauled her forward, impaling her on his shaft.

AJ cried out and slid farther down until he was buried to the hilt. She started to rock upwards, but Cooper stopped her, lost in the sweet feel of her hot walls clenched tight around him.

He eased his grip and she shifted up, rocked back down. Again. And

again.

Slow and easy, she rode him. She pushed her hair back from her face, her breasts arched forward. He lifted a hand and caressed the side, gently tugging her nipple until her hips bounced harder against him.

“Damn,” she hissed, and increased the pace.

Cooper locked his jaw, lifting up to meet her with each thrust.

She leaned down for a kiss, then straightened, changing the angle and hammering down harder.

Cooper groaned and sat up, keeping her trapped in his lap. With his hands tangled in her hair, and her legs wrapped around his waist, he held her against him, pumping faster.

AJ threw her head back, her cry of release shattering the room’s quiet.

Rolling her beneath him, Cooper slammed into her. Bursts of lightning shot down his spine as he filled her over and over. With a deep shout, he came, burying his face against her throat.

Heaven. Pure and simple. She was it for him.

Breathless, he lifted his head and stared deep into eyes that had captivated him from the moment they met.

She gave him a completely feminine smile of satisfaction. “That was pretty impressive.”

He eased off her, rolling to the side. “It wasn’t too bad, was it?” He played with the ends of her hair. “I like your hair like this, did I tell you that?”

She shook her head.

Cooper dropped a soft kiss on her forehead. “I do.”

AJ stretched out on her side, her head propped up with her hand. “Now about this getting shot thing,” she began. “Does that have anything to do with you not being a cop anymore?”

“You heard already, huh?”

“This morning.”

“Getting shot just made me see what I began to suspect when you finally left me. I was getting sucked under. Letting it all get to me. I got sloppy, got myself shot—”

“Why didn’t you tell anyone?” She narrowed her eyes at him. “You’re a dumbass you know that.”

Cooper laughed. “I just had the best sex of my life and you’re calling me dumbass? There is something very wrong with that.”

“I still wished you had said something. Does my dad know?”

“I told him about it a couple days ago.”

“Something else he forgot to mention to my mother.” AJ laughed, then leaned over. “Where?”

Cooper pointed out the scar on the inside of his thigh. Another inch to the left and it would have taken out his artery.

She leaned forward and pressed her lips to the scar.

Both touched and aroused by the gesture, Cooper drew her up until she was half-sprawled across his chest. Her mouth melted under his.

“You hungry?” AJ asked, sitting up. “I’m starved.”

“What were you thinking?”

“That we try to break out of this joint one more time.”

A stir in the air warned him trouble was coming.

“There you are, Cooper. Have you seen Eros?” The voice belonged to a stunning redhead he’d only met a few times in the past couple of years.

Psyche.

Chapter Five

AJ blinked. She didn't know which should freak her out more. The fact that there was a complete stranger in the room and AJ was completely naked. Or the fact that the woman appeared out of thin air.

Definitely the *out of thin air* part.

AJ scrambled backwards on the bed, dragging the blanket with her.

"Oops." The redhead grinned. "Am I interrupting?"

"Damn it," Cooper growled.

AJ darted her gaze back to his face. Okay, why was he not wondering what the hell just happened? Thirty seconds ago they'd been alone in the room. Then a woman magically appeared at the foot of their bed without having come through the door, and all he could say is *damn it*?

"I guess Eros isn't here, huh?"

Cooper glanced awkwardly at AJ. "There is a rational explanation for this."

Doubtful. AJ looked past his shoulder to the redhead giving her a critical once-over.

"So this is her?"

Cooper stood up, then remembering he was naked, hastily yanked on his pants. "Go. Now."

The woman grinned, ignoring him. Her stunning blue eyes landed on AJ. "I'm Psyche. Nice to finally meet you."

AJ glanced helplessly at Cooper. "What the hell is going on?" Her voice trembled. Shock. She was in shock. And why wouldn't she be? She'd been trapped in a cycle of reliving the same day, and now she had to deal with a woman materializing right before her eyes and making polite chit-chat.

A woman Cooper clearly knew.

"Eros isn't here."

Psyche nibbled her bottom lip. "She still doesn't know everything, huh? My bad."

"Doesn't know what?" They sounded like they were talking specifics and from where AJ was sitting, the whole big picture was one big black void.

"I know how this looks," Cooper began gently.

AJ laughed, the sound borderline hysterical. She was suffering from a serious psychotic break. And who wouldn't given what she'd been through for the last few days?

Cooper sat next to her on the bed. "Let me start at the beginning."

"I could always take away the memory of my visit," Psyche suggested.

AJ gaped. Take away her memory?

"No," Cooper snapped.

"Damn right, no." AJ backed up. She lowered her voice to a whisper. "Can she do that?" She shook her head, instantly erasing the remote possibility someone could possess such an ability. "Who is she?"

"She's..." He trailed off and looked at the redhead.

Psyche shrugged. "If you think she's ready."

Ready for what? Her mind was spinning and every realistic possibility to explain what was happening slipped right through her fingers. Considering the permanent repeat mode her life was set in, it shouldn't have surprised her that nothing about this made sense either.

The fact that Cooper seemed to know exactly what was happening stunned her though.

He glanced at the bedspread draped over her. "Did you want to get dressed?"

Was he trying to stall here? "I want to know what's happening. *Now*."

"I should have known you wouldn't be in love with some weak, simpering mortal." Psyche beamed in approval.

"You're not helping." Cooper didn't take his eyes off AJ.

"Maybe I should go then."

"Good idea."

AJ caught movement from the corner of her eye and sucked in a breath as the man she'd met earlier materialized to the left of the bed.

She squeezed her eyes shut, popped them back open, expecting—hoping—to find just her and Cooper in the room. That she could handle. That would make sense.

This...

She felt all three watching her.

"You're Eros," she guessed, studying the man standing anxiously next to the redhead. "Eros as in—" AJ shook her head. She couldn't even bring herself to finish the thought.

"Greek god. Yeah," Cooper finished.

A strangled sound that fell somewhere between a laugh and a cry of distress worked past her throat.

"They're real."

"Right," AJ said slowly. Greek gods were real. *I mean everyone knew that, didn't they?*

Oh God, she was really cracking under the pressure.

"AJ." Cooper caught her chin in his palm, forcing her gaze from the two strangers in the room. She stared into his apologetic blue eyes. "This is real. Eros exists and..." He frowned. "This is going to sound crazy, I know, but he's sort of related to me."

The weird twisting in her stomach got worse. "Do they have anything to do with what's happening to us?"

There. She said it. Out loud.

Psyche nodded at Eros. "Talk to him about that."

The blond man—god?—smiled at her. "About that," he started.

AJ stared at Cooper. "They did this. Whoever they are. Someone did this and you knew? Why didn't you say anything, why didn't you stop it?"

She staggered to her feet, her mind still trembling on the urge of disbelief. How could this even be happening to her?

"I didn't ask him to do this," Cooper said softly.

"You could have said something."

He knew. Supposing all this was true and the two in front of them

were *gods*, then Cooper knew. Had known from the start that this was part of some...game to them? He watched her stumble through this. Watched her walk in on Kirk, and still the game didn't end. She'd cried, got mad, drunk, and still he didn't say one word.

Just sat there as her life fell apart at the seams.

Like before, it didn't matter how she was feeling. He went on about his day. Didn't he know what this was doing to her? She had loved him once and found the strength to make a clean break. Found someone else, and now it turned out she'd picked a real winner there too.

Days ago she knew what she wanted. Or thought she had. Then everything went to hell. A couple hours ago she thought maybe, just maybe, she was still in love with Cooper.

And knowing he had a part in this...whatever the hell this was...

Damn him.

Her head ached, and she pushed her hands over her eyes. She dragged in a sharp breath, fighting for clarity.

"Make it stop." She glared at Eros. "I want my life back."

"That's out of my hands."

"No." She took three steps towards him. "That's not good enough. Fix it."

"That's not my call."

"What does that mean? Did you not start this whole thing?"

Eros nodded.

"Then stop it. I don't want to do this anymore." She slammed her lips shut, cutting off the tremor in her voice she felt coming.

"There's no point in arguing with him. He won't listen to a damn word."

AJ whirled on Cooper. "Then maybe you haven't tried hard enough. If at all."

"I didn't want this, but—"

Her eyes bulged. "But? But you what? Liked it too much?"

"It might not have been planned but I won't regret a second of the time I've had with you."

Acutely aware of the other two watching her every move, she propped

her hand on her hip. "If you two are so *godlike*, how about poofing out of here and giving us some privacy?"

With a quick nod, they both did exactly that.

AJ's knees buckled and she dropped onto the edge of the bed, her eyes glued to where the two of them had been standing moments ago. She hadn't actually expected them to do it.

"It threw me for a loop the first time he visited me too." Cooper sat next to her. He lifted a hand and touched her face.

AJ jerked to her feet. "I need to go." She needed to get out of here. Out of the hotel. She couldn't think here. Not with Cooper looking at her like she was breaking his heart.

She had to go. AJ moved for the door, not caring her clothes were scattered around the room. With the bedspread clutched to her chin, she wrenched the door open.

"You can't take off."

"Watch me," she snapped over her shoulder.

"AJ, you're wearing a bedspread."

In the hallway she whirled around, her eyes narrowing. "No one is going to remember this in the morning anyway, so who in the hell cares."

She whipped around, nearly colliding with an old man leaving his room. She kept on going.

"AJ!"

She reached the elevator first, stabbing the call button with her finger.

"We need to talk about this."

"No we don't." Not right now. Caught between furious and stunned, she doubted she could handle a conversation with herself, let alone one with a man related to a Greek god.

Another suspiciously insane laugh caught in her chest.

The elevator doors slid open and she strode inside, ignoring the incredulous looks from the five other passengers.

She pointed a finger at him. "Stay there."

"AJ."

The elevator doors scrolled shut.

With Cooper on the other side.

Fuck!

Cooper pounded a fist on the elevator, glowering at the guy next to him.

“Women,” the man muttered sympathetically.

Now there was the understatement of the year. Cooper stalked back to his hotel room.

“I know you two are still hanging about.” They wouldn’t want to miss the freaking show, he thought wryly.

“Didn’t go well, huh?” Psyche said from the doorway.

“I don’t think Cooper wants to talk about it.” Eros was stretched out on the bed.

He couldn’t decide who to tell off first. Eros for starting this whole mess, or Psyche for bringing about a quick end to one of the most amazing moments he’d had since first meeting AJ.

“How’s she taking it?”

Cooper crossed his arms. It was either that or try to strangle the immortal god. “She’s not here is she? How do you think she took it?”

“She’ll come around.”

“And you’ve made sure of that, haven’t you?”

“This could have been over long before now.” Eros snapped up the remote and crooked his finger for Psyche to take a seat next to him on the bed.

“Oh, yes, another one of your cryptic responses.”

Eros lifted a shoulder. “It’s not my problem you’re holding things up.”

“Me?”

Eros nodded.

“What the hell am I not doing then?”

Eros zippered his lips.

Cooper sighed. “The whole ‘it’s out of my hands’ thing is getting old, you know.”

Neither god looked at him. They were too busy studying the television. The exaggerated moans told him Eros had porn on again.

They both cocked their heads. Eros pointed at the screen. "Have we ever tried it *that* way?"

Psyche frowned intently. "I think so. A couple centuries ago, that time we were in Rio, or maybe Jamaica." She wrinkled her nose. "It didn't really do it for me."

Cooper stared incredulously. "Thank you for taking such an interest in my current crisis."

Eros shut the television off. "You're the stupid ass still talking to us, when it's her that you need to be working on."

"I guess you missed the part where she stormed out of here wearing just a bedspread."

"Wasn't she fabulous? She doesn't take crap from you. You did good with her." Psyche grinned at him.

Eros let Psyche nudge him to his feet. "If you want to sit here on your ass, kind of like you might have done if I hadn't interfered, then that's your problem."

"Wait," Cooper said before they could leave. "If we have to do this day over thing again, could we at least skip the hangover part and let me wake up at a reasonable hour?"

"Man," Eros groaned, "that was my favorite part."

Psyche elbowed him.

Eros winced. "Fine. Done. Abracadabra and all that jazz. Later mortal."

In a blink they were gone, and Cooper was alone.

Thankfully. Miserably.

He wanted AJ here with him. By now she was probably pacing her hotel room, still wearing the bedspread.

The first thing he needed to do was talk to her. But she made it clear she didn't want to talk to him.

He sat on the bed.

He'd had to let her go before and it took a gunshot wound to prove to him how much his life had gone to shit from where he imagined it years ago. He and AJ might have been working on a family by now. Hell, maybe they would have been parents already. And instead he'd wasted those

years. There would always be criminals on the streets and he couldn't save the world by trying to catch every criminal, every second of every day.

His own instincts had suffered from such an unrealistic goal. Two months ago he'd been faced with a decision. Reassess the way he did his job and hope he didn't tread back down the same road again, or get himself in a position to carve out the future he'd once wanted. He chose to try something new, to let go of a career that had been slowly driving him under. He didn't regret that decision. Not when it brought him to this place.

Back to AJ.

And right now sitting around here contemplating things, wasn't getting him anywhere.



She didn't have a key. And she didn't even care.

People up the hall stared as she stood in front of the door to her hotel room and AJ couldn't make herself be the least bit embarrassed. For a moment she envied the people who would wake up tomorrow and not remember the hilarious and no doubt pitiful sight she made standing in the middle of a five-star hotel with nothing but an aqua silk bedspread hastily draped over her shoulders.

She closed her eyes, but the tears were too thick. Any second now they would slip over her lids and stream down her cheeks. Her heart hurt. That was nothing new where Cooper was concerned, but damned if she hadn't set herself up for things to be different this time.

AJ knocked, and when her mother opened the door, the tears came.

Her mother frowned. "Honey?"

With one arm holding the blanket up, AJ threw her other one around her mom's neck.

"What happened?"

The bitter laugh that ripped loose chased back the tears for a few minutes. She lifted a hand to wipe her face, but her mother beat her to it.

"Come sit down and tell me what happened. You flew out of here so

fast before. I've been looking everywhere for you. And Kirk did not look happy when I yelled at him for cheating on you."

AJ gave her a watery smile. "You did?"

Like all the times when she'd been upset as a child, whether it was from falling off her bike, fighting with her sister or after arguing with her best friend, her mother took her by the hand, her expression loving and patient. And it only made AJ want to start crying all over again.

"What happened that sent you running through the hotel dressed like this?" The corner of her mouth twitched, but AJ couldn't even find it in her to be annoyed with her mother for finding something amusing about the situation. Good that someone could. She was too busy being mad at Cooper.

At Kirk.

At herself.

Herself more than anyone else. She'd let this happen. Maybe not the whole repetition of days, but she'd let things go as far as they had with Cooper, had somehow given Kirk a reason to think he wouldn't get caught sleeping with someone else.

Oddly enough, if not for reliving Valentines Day she never would have caught him. Would have married him today, tomorrow, yesterday. However the hell it went. Who could keep track. At least that was one good thing to come from this mess. But who to thank? Two immortal gods that shouldn't even exist, or the man who set this all into play?

A man she was still in love with.

She squeezed her eyes closed. A week ago she thought Kirk loved her, thought she loved him. And she still did, even hurt by his betrayal. But things weren't the same, had never been the same with him as they'd been with Cooper. She'd had thought that was for the better once. Now she knew it was because the feelings she had for Kirk just didn't run as deep as they did for Cooper.

And didn't that just make the whole mess more complicated?

AJ took a breath and opened her eyes to find her mother watching her carefully.

"The wedding's still off."

Her mother nodded slowly.

AJ waited. Her mother hugged her.

"That's it?" AJ sniffed and wiped at the corner of her eye. "I tell you the wedding is off and just like that its okay?"

"Well I wouldn't go that far. Some deposits will be lost and forget the caterer."

"You don't think I'm being too quick to end things?"

"Do you think you are?"

AJ started to shake her head. "I didn't expect that from him. I just walked in there and found them..." Anger and hurt swirled to the surface. Had she missed some sign that Kirk wasn't happy with her? Or had, he too, not felt some connection that so obviously seemed to be lacking in their relationship?

"Kirk sleeping with another woman had nothing to do with you."

AJ shrugged. She couldn't fully agree with that, but damn if her head didn't hurt trying to sort through it all. She was still so angry at Kirk—more so for not living up to the expectations she'd believed could make up for the other things their relationship lacked. Things she had turned a blind eye to until Cooper walked in and reminded how much a heart could pound merely at the sight of the right person.

It was hard to break it down where her responsibility for the end of her and Kirk's relationship began and ended. Yeah, he'd cheated, but here she was unable to dwell on it that much when her heart was aching because of another man altogether.

Damn if this wasn't enough to give a person hours of discussion material with a shrink.

"How does Cooper fit into all this?" her mother asked in the same soft tone that always came right before she kissed AJ's wound's better.

"I don't know." Because sitting seemed impossible suddenly, AJ pushed to her feet, glaring at the bedspread that tripped her in the process. "I thought he was the past." She glanced over her shoulder at her mom. "I still love him and I wish it didn't hurt so much."

"Is he why you're trying out this new fashion statement?"

She nodded, fresh tears swimming in the back of her eyes. "I thought

maybe things would be different between us...”

“I could understand better if you’d tell me more.”

And have her mother offer to drive her to those therapy sessions straight away? Not a chance. At the same time she knew her mother deserved some kind of an explanation. She only wished she had one.

“I think I need to go home.”

Her mother stood and studied AJ’s face carefully before nodding. “But I’ll be stopping by to check on you at home later.”

Which was code for “you’re still not off the hook completely Amanda Jean”.

AJ hugged her mother, glad to have her here. Nothing was really any closer to getting worked out, but she felt marginally more together even if that wouldn’t stop everything from starting all over again tomorrow.

Her mother squeezed her hand. “But for your father’s sake, put some clothes on before you go anywhere.”

Chapter Six

With Eros and Psyche screwing up someone else's life, Cooper finished dressing and left his hotel room. After a short elevator ride, found himself outside AJ's room. He lifted his hand to knock. The door was yanked open before his fist connected with the wood.

"Cooper?" Helen stared up at him, and sighed. "What did you do to my little girl?"

He scanned the room over her shoulder. "Where is she?"

"What is going on with you two?" She turned around as he moved past her into the room. "Last time I checked the two of you were barely friends. And then this morning she runs out of here to see you, and comes back in tears."

His gut clenched. "Where is she?"

Helen crossed her arms. "She just checked out, and if I wasn't more interested in castrating Kirk for cheating on my daughter, I'd be raking you over the coals for whatever you did to her."

Cooper headed for the door. "When did she leave?"

She blew out a hesitant breath. "You just missed her."

He backtracked and gave Helen a quick kiss on the cheek. "I'm going to make things right."

She eyed him warily. "You better hurry then."

Grinning, Cooper dashed back into the hall in enough time to catch the lift back to the lobby. Each second ticked off in his head. He wanted to catch her in time. Didn't want to have to go through all this again tomorrow. Or the day after that. He wanted to get on with his life. He just needed to convince AJ to be a part of it.

People milled about the hotel lobby, and he searched the area until

he spotted AJ dragging a suitcase towards the front door.

He jogged after her, catching her hand before she slipped out the door.

Her eyes snapped fire. "Let go."

"No."

"Now is not a good time to talk."

"Too bad," he argued. "Nice to see you changed into some clothes."

"I figured the lobby was a bit different than the elevator."

Cooper still didn't release his hold on her. He tipped his head to the side. "This way."

"No."

"There are things I need to explain." Like how he hadn't asked Eros for this. He couldn't let her leave thinking he'd been out to screw with her life.

"Now's not a good time."

"Just give me one minute. Please, AJ."

She pressed her fingers to her temples. "I can't believe any of this is really happening."

"I didn't ask for this. I didn't. I've hurt you and there's a lot in the past I take full responsibility for, but I didn't put Eros up to this."

"Cooper..."

"What the hell is going on here?" Kirk stalked across the lobby.

"Great," they both mumbled at the same time.

Their gazes locked.

"I suggest you let go of my fiancée." Kirk tried to slip an arm around AJ's waist, and she shrugged him off.

Cooper glared at him. "You wish, buddy."

AJ pried her wrist out of Cooper's hand. "Go away Kirk. I'd sooner spend the next three lifetimes swearing a blue streak at him, then look at you right now."

Kirk's mouth fell open.

Cooper grinned.

"That wasn't a compliment," AJ bit out at him, then glared at Kirk. "Go back to the blonde from your office. We're done here."

Kirk sputtered. "Your mother has been throwing around accusations all morning. I think we need to talk. Come back upstairs."

"If I wasn't about to go upstairs with him," AJ nodded at Cooper, "you can bet your ass I'm not going anywhere with you."

Kirk's eyes narrowed. "I'm not asking you, I'm telling you."

"I don't think we really have anything to say to each other. The wedding's off."

His eyes narrowed to slits. "I don't think so."

AJ sighed. "I saw you with the woman you work with, Kirk. I know about your little affair."

His mouth opened, but no sound emerged as he glared at Cooper. His gaze dropped to where Cooper's hand hovered possessively at AJ's back. "What the hell is this?"

Cooper held out his opposite hand realizing Kirk wouldn't have remembered their original introduction the first night of the rehearsal dinner. "I'm the ex."

Not surprisingly, Kirk didn't take the offered shake, but stared accusingly at AJ. "Looks like maybe I'm not the only one your mother needs to talk to."

"Leave my mother out of this," AJ warned in a voice that would've had Cooper backing up if he were in Kirk's shoes right then.

"She's been riding my ass with this bullshit about me cheating on you all morning, so I'll say whatever the hell I want about her."

Cooper clenched his fist.

AJ was faster. Her small fist connected solidly with Kirk's jaw.

Eyes wide, the man stumbled back a step from shock. Blood leaked from his split lip.

"I hope you make your office blonde happy," AJ snapped, then pivoted on her heel and stormed back across the lobby.

Shit, her hand hurt.

AJ stopped and released the handle of her suitcase and shook her hand, making sure she could still close her fingers.

She was vaguely aware of Kirk stalking away, then Cooper hauled her

close. He slanted his mouth across hers, the kiss teeming with pure wild abandon, and ending before the last few minutes fully sank in.

He rested his forehead against hers. "Do you have any idea how hot that was?"

AJ smiled, feeling ridiculously good about the move herself. "But damn it hurt."

"Let me see." Cooper studied her hand, brushed his lips across her flushed knuckles.

"We're still not okay," she said quietly.

"I know." He kissed her softly. "But we will be."

She wanted to believe him. She only wished it didn't feel like the speed limit on her life was now set at max speed and she couldn't seem to get past ten miles per hour to keep up.

AJ allowed him lead her away from the front door, where they'd already gathered enough attention. The adrenaline that whooshed through her system when she decked Kirk was drying up, and she felt worn out.

She huffed in a breath. "I'm having a hard time keeping up here. I don't get...I mean...you're related to a god? That sounds insane, you know that."

"Tell me about it."

"What happens now? I mean we just keep doing this over and over?" Frustration edged into her voice.

"Until I figure out what I'm not doing anyway."

"Why you?"

Cooper shrugged. "According to Eros, it all comes down to me."

"Why did he do this? If you didn't put him up to it, then why? Why me?"

The lazy grin that curved Cooper's lips made her stomach tug. "I guess he knew I wasn't ready to let you go."

"But what about me? What about what I want?"

He cradled her jaw in his palm. "What do you want, AJ? Whatever it is, I'll give it to you, even if it kills me."

"I don't know." So much had changed in such a short time. "I need a

day, a few hours, some time to just take it all in and think.” She had to be sure about risking her heart all over again. “And you’re done with being a cop?”

He nodded slowly.

“And you’re okay with that? Truly? I don’t want to be the reason you walk away from that life.”

“I’m sure.”

“Okay.” She edged out of his reach. “I’m going home.”

He started to shake his head.

“Just for a while. A night. I’d say there’s a one hundred percent chance I’ll be waking up back in my hotel room, anyway.”

Cooper shoved a hand through his hair, looked ready to object again, then finally nodded. “Okay.”

“Okay.” She leaned in, too easily falling back into old habits, and pressed her lips to his, then hastily backed away before he could persuade her to stay. “I’ll see you in the morning.”



AJ was stretched out on the couch in her apartment, staring at the ceiling trying to sort through everything when someone knocked at the door. She sat up, wondering if it was Cooper since her mother had already stopped by to check on her.

A quick peek told her it was Kirk on the other side. Her gut clenched. Her hand hesitated at the knob but she pulled it open anyway. The two of them needed to talk even though, more than likely, he still wouldn’t remember any of this in the morning if the trend continued. At the very least maybe talking to him would help her to get a handle on the emotional upheaval triggered by everything that had happened.

The short time alone this afternoon had given her enough time to remember that as far as Kirk was concerned, she hadn’t walked in on him and the blonde. She owed it to both him and herself to talk about that since she hadn’t spared him more than a few moments before she punched him earlier.

Grim resignation was etched on his face, his hands deep in his

pockets. "I'm glad you're home."

"I was a little sick of the hotel."

"You only checked in last night."

She didn't bother to correct him. There wasn't much point.

AJ pulled the door open wider and gestured for him to come in. She followed him into the kitchen where he wandered and paced a bit, then swiveled to face her.

"You hit harder than I would have expected."

She shrugged. "I won't apologize for it."

"How did you find out?"

"Does it matter?" She might still love Cooper, but she hadn't slept with him while still planning on getting married. "How long was the affair going on?"

He shuffled in place. "A couple months."

That revelation stung a little more than she expected, and the stupid self-conscious whisper in the back of her mind again wondered why. Why had he cheated in the first place?

"Was it going to continue after we would have been married?"

He shook his head.

Not that she could believe that.

"It's over then? That's it?"

AJ crossed her arms. "What am I supposed to say to that? It wasn't some one time mistake, some lapse in judgment that you could explain away and ask me to forgive. You've been with her for a while."

"How about telling me how long you've been screwing your ex behind my back?"

For the second time today the urge to take a swing at him overwhelmed her. This time she kept her clenched fist trapped at her side, telling herself that wanting to vent that way wasn't going to help matters.

"Cooper and I haven't seen each other until today." Today as far as Kirk was capable of understanding.

"Didn't look that way to me."

"I don't care how it looked. Don't turn this around on me. I'm not the

one who's been having the affair."

His eyes narrowed. "So you say."

"If you've just come here to put the blame solely on me for the way things turned out, there's the door."

He stalked past her, then stopped, sighed. "It's not because I didn't love you." He turned around. "Things weren't supposed to end up this way."

"Tell me about it."

"So we walk away then?"

"Kirk..." she began, then trailed off.

"And you haven't been sleeping with him?" There wasn't any accusation in his tone this time. "But you care about him?"

She nodded slowly.

"Are you still in love with him?"

She waited only a beat. "Yes."

"Are you two getting back together?"

"There's still a lot to work out."

"But most likely," he assumed. "That's moving pretty damn quick." The slight bite to his voice got her back up.

"No more so than sleeping with another woman while planning to marry me the next day."

He opened his mouth to shoot off another reply but paused at the last minute. Whether he realized that fighting and blaming each other wasn't worth it or he just didn't have a good comeback, she didn't know.

"I don't want this relationship to end with hating you, Kirk." And she didn't hate him. Not really. She was mad at catching him like that and a little hurt.

And that was the sad, but almost reassuring truth.

She should be more hurt, more crushed. She should be cursing him to hell and back, or at the opposite end of the spectrum, clinging to his claim that whatever relationship he had with the blonde was going to be over. She should be crying or yelling or something, shouldn't she? Or maybe she'd already had done enough of that.

Or maybe it didn't hurt nearly as bad because she never let herself

love him as much as she loved Cooper.

He offered an apologetic smile. "That's good, because I don't want to be hated." He bowed his head, then reached for her hand. "I still care about you, still love you. I'm sorry for saying what I did about your mom. And I'm sorry things turned out like this."

"Me too."

"You sure we should call it quits?"

"Do you really believe we'd stand a chance of making each other happy in the long run any more?"

He only gave her a half-hearted shrug before nodding towards the door. "I'm going to leave before I end up saying something else that makes you take another swing at me."

The comment was almost enough to ease some of the tension between them.

When he left, AJ returned to the couch and stared at the ceiling, thinking about how her life had taken a one-hundred-and-eighty degree turn, and what starting over with Cooper would mean.



AJ rolled over, punched her pillow and flopped her head back down. While it felt good to be in her own bed, she knew that once she fell asleep it would slip away from her again.

She'd spent the last few hours racking her brain, trying to get a handle on everything that had happened. At the end of it all, the one thing she kept coming back to was Cooper and how much she still loved him.

AJ smiled.

Creak.

She pushed up on her elbows, straining to hear beyond her bedroom. Another groan of wood, and then...a soft curse?

AJ reached over and flicked on the bedside lamp at the same moment a shadow filled the empty doorway.

"I didn't want to spend another night away from you." The hope in his voice that she wouldn't turn him away kept her heart from getting firmly

lodged in her throat.

She sat up as Cooper moved into the room and perched on the edge of her bed. "How did you get in here?"

He grinned. "I know my way around a lock."

"My mother gave you the spare didn't she?"

He ignored the question with an innocent look. "I thought you would have been sleeping."

"Oddly enough, I have too much on my mind." She moved over in the bed to make room for him to stretch out. The same way she used to do when she waited up for him to come home late from work once upon a time.

He didn't need any verbal invitation, and lay down next her on his side.

AJ inched closer, seeking the warmth she knew she would find snuggled up next to him.

He sighed contentedly, slipping an arm around her waist.

"I'm glad you're here."

"Me too." His breath teased the hair across her forehead.

"I don't want to go to sleep now."

"Oh yeah?"

She laughed at the playful tone in his voice. "Not because I'm horny." She laid her hand over his. "I don't want to go to sleep and wake up to find you gone again."

"Whether we're in the hotel or here or wherever, I'm not going anywhere."

"Promise?"

"I want to spend the rest of my life loving you, AJ Hanson. Even if you're not ready to hear that yet."

He lowered his head and swept his mouth across hers. "I love you. I haven't stopped loving you."

AJ smiled, her heart expanding in her chest at hearing the words. "I love you too."

He kissed her again, the tenderness giving way to a passion she only felt in his arms.

Cooper pulled back and stared down at her, his eyes glittering. "Are you horny *now*?"

She arched a brow. "You're just telling me what I want to hear to get into my pants."

"That's hitting way below the belt there."

"So you're not trying to get into my pants?"

"I meant what I said," he vowed.

"And?"

"Okay, so I want in your pants too." He slipped a hand under the tank top she wore to bed. "I don't hear you complaining." Cooper brushed his lips down her throat.

"Rise and shine."

Cooper cursed under his breath. "I think I'm going to have to insist you start knocking." He sat up, but stayed next to her on the bed.

"Ah, but then I wouldn't be treated to a little show." Eros lounged against the doorjamb.

"You want a show, talk to Psyche."

"I agree with him," came another voice from beyond the bedroom. Psyche's.

With her pulse settling back to its normal pace following another unexpected appearance, AJ glanced at Cooper. "Do you ever get used to them popping in like this?"

"Not really."

"Where would the fun be in calling first?"

"Where do I begin," Cooper said between clenched teeth.

"Fine. We didn't come to stay long. Just to let you know we're good here."

"Done?" Cooper tensed beside her, the god's words plunging her heart into her stomach. Was this the part where none of this happened, or they pulled some of that erasing memories bullshit?

"That's right," Eros said slowly. "No more *Groundhog Day* for you guys." He grinned. "I have *got* to rent that movie again."

"And you love Bill Murray," Psyche said, strolling through the door. "I like your apartment, AJ."

"Thanks," AJ answered vaguely. As if her only other conversation with these two wasn't surreal enough.

"How?" Cooper asked.

"You said the magic word."

Cooper frowned. "Please?"

Eros rolled his eyes. "Love. You said, 'I love you'."

Both of them stared at the god. Cooper looked annoyed. "That's it? That's all I had to do? Was tell her I love her?"

The blond god cocked his head at Psyche. "Tell him what he's won, Vanna."

"So it's over then. Just like that? No more reliving days?" AJ asked.

"You were expecting some big finish were you?"

"I... You know, it's fine." She figured it wasn't wise to push her luck and ask any more questions about the whole experience.

"Good. I'm beat." Eros held out his hand for Psyche, then glanced at Cooper. "You'll cover the rules, I assume."

"Rules?" AJ echoed.

"Yeah, the one where you don't tell another mortal soul about us." Eros winked.

"As if they'd believe me." AJ shook her head. Her mother hadn't believed her about reliving the same day over and over. Somehow she figured it would be a bit much to explain that a Greek god triggered the whole thing, and worse, he was related to Cooper.

That still didn't stop her from leaning towards Cooper. "Exactly what would he do?"

"You ever hear of Prometheus?"

"The guy who stole fire to give it to the world?" She winced thinking of how Zeus punished him by chaining him down and letting an eagle peck his liver out every day only to have it grow back each night and start the whole nasty process over again. Not her idea of fun.

"So we're cool, then?" Eros asked.

"Yeah." Cooper gave them a wave that preceded their vanishing act.

AJ flopped back on the mattress. "That is so going to take some getting used to, you know that?"

"I'm glad to at least have someone else to share the spotlight with."

"Tomorrow things go back to normal." She said the words slowly, not quite believing them.

"So it seems." Cooper stretched out next to her, his palm sliding up her stomach. "Now where were we?"

"I think you were trying to get into my pants."

"Right," he drawled. "Let's work on that, shall we." He kissed her slowly, thoroughly.

A board creaked.

"Eros!" Cooper growled without taking his eyes off AJ.

"I'm going. I'm going," came the muttered reply, followed by Psyche's, "Goodnight."

"He grows on you." Cooper sighed, then took complete possession of her mouth with a bone-melting precision that could only have been inherited from a god.

But the love she felt in Cooper's kiss was all man.

And he was all hers.

About the Author

To learn more about Sydney Somers, please visit www.sydney somers.com. Send an email to Sydney at sydney@sydney somers.com or join her Yahoo! Newsletter to keep up to date on Sydney's upcoming releases, contest info and sneak peeks at what she's working on now.

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/flirtingwithpassionnewsletter>

Look for these titles

Now Available:

Spellbound: Say You're Mine

Talons: Caged Desire

Coming Soon:

Spellbound: Don't Let Go

*Two people from opposing worlds must face lies, deception and treachery
to keep their secret love from being destroyed.*

Of the Moon

© 2006 Vivi Anna

Master Sorin de cu Luna is a Draconian warlord. Harsh and cruel, with a thirst for blood, the Draconians have taken over the lands and enslaved the human occupants. Born with varying traits and raised among humans, Sorin has come to loathe some of the more depraved Draconian practices, and hopes for a different future between the two races. Matters become even more complicated when he's summoned to the Draconian Overlord's wedding and falls for the one human woman he was sent to tame.

Alexandreina de cu Soare is the last of her human bloodline. Born into captivity, she is a prisoner in the Overlord's castle. Fiercely loyal to her people, she endures what she must to give them hope for a better future. When she's given to a visiting emissary, her hope falters. There can be no faith in the brutal hands of a Draconian. Until she meets Sorin and realizes that hope can come in the most surprising and pleasant form.

Consumed by the heat of their passion, Sorin and Alexandreina find it difficult to hide their bond. Their union angers the Draconians, and the humans want to use it to their advantage. Thrust into a conspiracy to assassinate the Overlord, Alexandreina must use her relationship with Sorin. If Sorin can't be turned against the Draconian rule, than she is to seduce and kill the Overlord herself or her people will be slaughtered in the impending civil war between Draconian clans.

Enjoy the following excerpt from *Of the Moon*:

They strolled through the halls of the keep to Sorin's guest chamber. He asked many questions about the various artwork and wall hangings. When she answered, he seemed genuinely interested. Alexandreina found that very perplexing.

Sorin opened the doors to his chambers and gestured for Alexandreina to go in. She hesitated but entered, her chin lifted. She

would not show her fear. He could have her blood but she was certain he could never have her soul.

He shut and secured the doors behind him. Alexandreina jumped at the sound of the lock clicking. She stood in the center of the sitting room, uncertain of her actions.

Sorin swept by her regally, his long, dark cloak flowing behind him. "Shall we have a drink?" He poured two glasses of brandy from the provided decanter set on the table. He handed her one.

She nodded as she accepted it. Sorin watched her over the rim of his glass as she took a small sip.

"This is your first time," he stated without question.

She nodded, afraid her voice would shake.

"I thought as much. Rica is cleverer than I had expected."

"I'm sorry, my lord? I do not understand."

"No, I know you don't." He smiled. "Do not mind my ramblings. I often speak before I think."

She grinned back. "As do I."

"Then we have much in common I suspect, my lady."

Alexandreina's smile faded. She did not want to have anything in common with him. He was a Draconian. No matter what pretty words escaped his sensuous lips, she must not forget that.

Setting his drink down on the table with an audible clink, he spoke, "My lady, I release you from your service to me. I will have a guard escort you back to your rooms."

Alexandreina flinched back in shock. "Why would you do such a thing?"

"I have my reasons, and they need not concern you."

She set her brandy on the table and stood defiantly in front of him. "Well, they do concern me. Because when Lord Rica sees that I have no marks, he will question why. And no matter the reason, it will be my fault and I will be the one that suffers the consequences, not you."

"I will explain to him that I had no need of a blood-servant this eve. That my needs are already taken care of."

"He will be insulted if you refuse his gifts. You know this is part of the courts."

His brow lifted as he stared at her. She could tell he pondered her remarks. Maybe he was as perplexed about her as she was about him.

“Why do you argue so, when it is clear that you despise being a servant of any kind?”

“Because I fear Lord Rica’s wrath more than your sexual appetites.”

Alexandreina swallowed as she witnessed his face harden. A twinge deep in her belly flared like a flame while he stared at her. He unnerved her in more ways than she ever thought possible.

“If you truly knew my appetites, my lady, you would not be so sure in your fear.”

Taking a step back from him, she could still feel waves of heat swell off his body. It enveloped her in a warm embrace. Shivering from the contact, she thought it was not entirely unpleasant.

Alexandreina raised her head and bared her neck. “Take me quick and we will both be at ease in Lord Rica’s court.”

Moving swiftly, he stepped in close behind her. She could feel his presence at her back, molding intimately into her. As she felt a sigh of hot air on the side of her neck, she clamped her eyes closed, expecting the pain to be extreme.

Her eyes fluttered open when she felt a feathery touch on her throat. Sorin trailed his fingers over her flesh, gently caressing each spot.

“There is much pain when blood is taken from the neck. We could find a more pleasant spot.”

Alexandreina swung around and brought up her arm. Pushing back the sleeve of her gown, she bared her wrist to him. “From the wrist then.”

Sorin took her offered hand and raised it to his mouth. He pressed a gentle kiss to her wrist where her pulse thumped painfully against her skin. She could feel the slight dampness of his tongue as he licked her there. Ripples of pleasure surged over her unexpectedly. Her knees trembled and she feared she would swoon.

“It is far more pleasant in a more intimate place. The sensitive, soft spot on the top of your inner thigh is the most enjoyable way to be served.”

Her body quaked with his words. She did not want to feel desire. But she did. It raged over her, nestling deep within her sex. She blushed as her thighs tightened and quivered at the thought of him between them.

"I want it over with quickly. Enjoying it is not necessary. I can handle a lot of pain."

"Indulge me, my lady. You did agree to serve me, did you not?" He smiled slyly.

She nodded, knowing he had the upper hand. Although he seemed civil and polite, he still lorded over her. He could easily turn on her, and report to Lord Rica her disobedience. She would do just about anything to avoid that.

Taking her hand in his, he led her into the bedchamber. She could feel her heart pounding as they neared the massive bed. He guided her to the side, and sat her on the edge. Alexandreina scrambled back onto the fur cover and lay down, her hands fisted at her sides.

She watched, fear and desire strumming her nerves, as Sorin knelt on the bed at her feet. He took a foot in his hands, his touch gentle, and unlaced her satin shoe. He dropped it to the floor then undid the other. As Sorin took the hem of her skirt and began to raise it, Alexandreina clamped her eyes shut.

A cool breeze ruffled over her stocking clad legs as her skirt rose past her knees to her waist. She bit on her lip as the soft, refreshing air swirled around her exposed undergarments. Did he stare at them, wondering what treasure lay beneath? She slowly opened her eyes, too curious in her desire not to peek.

He was gazing down at her. However, she could not tell from his black eyes what he hungered for. Was he only thinking of her blood, or did he crave more from her?

He caressed her leg, feeling the silk of her stocking under his palm. He trailed his hands up to the edge of the fabric until he reached the soft amber skin of her thighs.

Alexandreina sucked in a ragged breath as he rubbed his hands over her flesh, his fingertips just brushing against the plain cotton of her underpants. Suddenly, she wished that she owned more luxurious lingerie. There were undergarments made from lace that molded to a

woman's form. She had seen some of the Roma servants in the keep wearing such things. Gifts from their blood-masters. Hand designed and imported from far away lands. However, she only had the plain and unappealing cotton garments that peasant Roma women wore.

"You are beautiful."

Alexandreina blushed. "I am sorry that I am not wearing something more appealing."

His hands stilled on her thighs, thumbs resting just below the secret place between them. He gazed up at her. "You would have dressed for me, if you had known of my differences?"

She wanted to say no. That she would never have dressed to impress any Draconian. That his opinion did not matter to her. But she couldn't. The way he looked at her did matter. In some small part of her, she did want to please this man. Draconian or not.

"Yes," she breathed huskily, unable to lie.

*When the stakes are high, she's ready to shed more than her inhibitions—
but will the man of her dreams rise to the challenge?*

Challenging Carter

© 2007 Kate Davies

Dani's been in love with Carter forever. But she's nothing like the women he dates—glamorous, exciting, spotlight-ready. Instead, she's stuck in the “best friend” role and can't seem to find a way out of it. Until a scheduling mix-up finds her enrolled in a strip aerobics class. Now this buttoned-down wallflower is finding her wicked side—and liking it!

What in the world happened to Carter's best bud? She's gone from sweet to sexy in ten seconds flat—and Carter's lucky enough to be around for the ride of a lifetime. But he knows from past experience that relationships don't last. He's got to get things back on track before the most important friendship in his life is damaged forever.

Problem is, Dani has no intention of going back to being “just friends”. It's about time someone challenged Carter's assumptions about love and friendship—and Dani's just the woman to do it!

Enjoy the following excerpt for *Challenging Carter*:

Holy shit.

“Dani?”

It was her. Of course it was her. He'd left her in this room not an hour earlier, and everyone else had gone home. It had to be Dani.

He just wasn't sure when the aliens had abducted her and replaced her with this—this living, breathing embodiment of sex.

He'd poked his head in the door, meaning to check on how she was doing. But instead of finding her squinting at a TV monitor, half a step behind as she unraveled the secrets of aerobics, he'd walked in on her taking her clothes off to the beat of the music.

She stood there now, eyes wide with horror. “What are you doing here?”

He simply stared. It was all he was capable of doing. Where did she get that figure? And how in the hell had he never noticed it before?

Dani's cheeks flushed and she crossed her arms over her chest, trying to hide the fact that she was wearing just a sports bra and he was holding her shirt. "How long have you been standing there?"

A heartbeat. A lifetime. Dropping her shirt on the ground, he muttered, "Long enough."

Then he strode across the room and kissed her.

It was a crazy, impulsive act, but the minute his lips touched hers he knew it was the right thing to do.

She tasted like sex and sin and forbidden fruit, and he couldn't get enough.

Which was crazy, because this was Dani, his buddy, his pal, someone he'd never even considered kissing before. But from the moment he'd seen her tight little ass thrust up toward him like an offering from the gods, he couldn't wait to get his hands on her.

Threading the fingers of one hand through her hair, he tilted her head a little. Without conscious thought, he stroked his tongue into her mouth, and after a moment's shocked stillness Dani met the invasion with enthusiasm.

Oh, thank God.

Smoothing his hand down her back, he cupped her backside in his palm and urged one leg up and around his waist. Pulling her closer, he angled his hips so his aching cock was pressed right between her thighs. He groaned at the contact. Only a few thin layers of fabric separated them, and by the breathy little gasps she was making, he guessed that Dani hated those layers as much as he did.

Carter wasn't sure what he'd been expecting, but it sure as hell hadn't been this enthusiastic response. Her hands were everywhere, on his shoulders, stroking his biceps, clutching the fabric of his shirt. Her body rubbed up against his as she kissed him back, her lips voracious, her tongue hot and wicked in his mouth.

Sliding his hands up her sides, he caught the edges of her bra with his thumbs and tugged, breaking off the kiss long enough to strip it off of her and toss it away. Her eyes slid closed and her head tilted back as he cupped her breasts, his thumbs strumming the nipples to tight little buds.

It was too tempting. He leaned down and sucked one into his mouth.

"Carter," she breathed, one hand tangled in his hair, holding him closer as he laved the sensitive flesh. He drew a path across her chest with his tongue, tracing around her other nipple before clamping his lips over it as well.

Her hands tugged blindly at his shirt, trying to pull it up and off him. He stepped back just long enough to oblige her, wanting the sensation of skin on skin as desperately as she did. They both sucked in a breath as his hair-roughened chest brushed against her sensitive breasts.

"Damn," he whispered. Her hips arched against him in time with the music, bringing him to the ragged edge of his control.

It wasn't enough. He needed more.

The elastic waist of her shorts was easily breached, and he slid his hand inside. "God, you're wet," he groaned, stroking one finger through her damp folds. She was tight, so tight, and he clenched his jaw against the hot pleasure of her inner muscles gripping him.

Dani squirmed in his arms, planting breathless kisses everywhere she could reach. Her response pushed him even higher, spiraling out of control until it was all he could do not to take her right here, right now.

"Carter," she whispered, her lips hot against his ear. "More."

More?

"I need you." Her hands slid beneath the waistband of his shorts. "Need you."

"Dani." He took her wrists in both his hands, holding her still. "Are you sure?"

"Mm-hmm." She tugged ineffectually at his grip, licked the whorl of his ear. "Very."

He shivered. "Um, okay, why don't we throw some clothes back on you, head over to my place..."

"No." This time, she bit his earlobe. "Here. Now."

Oh, God.

She tugged one hand free, slid it down inside his shorts, and curled around his...

He stepped back, gasping for air. She still gripped him, her hand sliding up and down his shaft with just the right amount of pressure. If she didn't stop now, he was going to come without her.

That would never do.

Drawing on the last of his reserves, he lifted her hand away, regretting the loss of her touch on his naked skin more than she'd ever know.

Naked skin.

Holy crap.

"Wait here," he ordered, his voice raspy with need. "I'll be right back."

Then, before she could protest, he took off out the door at a dead run.

Talons

A collection of five stories taking you to the height of passion

Talons: Kiss Me Deadly

© 2006 Shannon Stacey

Death is a collective--an unkindness of supernatural ravens with the power to take the form of men and to decide which humans live and which humans die with a mere touch.

When Khail lays his fatal touch on his next victim and she doesn't die, he's faced with a human immune to his deadly power who has seen him shift form--and he's able to have physical contact with a woman for the first time in centuries.

Falling for a shapeshifting messenger of Death wasn't on Bridget Sawyer's agenda, but things are about to get even more complicated. The Unkind is determined to claim her.

Talons: King of Prey

© 2006 Mandy M. Roth

In a place where realms combine and portals open passages to the unknown, a prophecy speaks of fertility being restored to his people through the taking of King Kabril's mate.

The prophecy neglects to mention she lacks something vital to his kind—wings. Kabril, King of the Buteos Regalis has no interest in taking a human mate. His kind believes humans are dirty, vile creatures who rely on machines to lift them into the air. The last place he wants to go in search of his mate is Earth, but he's left no choice.

Never did he expect to find love on a planet with one moon, people who lack wings and a stubborn vixen who makes his heart soar. When he does, he fears the truth about who and what he truly is will steal it away. Little does he know his enemies fully intend on doing the taking.

Talons: Firebird

© 2006 Jaycee Clark

Legend has it firebirds bring both good fortune and destruction, Reen has become an expert at both...

Reen is an expert at destruction and annihilation. She's a Hunter, an elite, one of their best assassins, she's also a legendary firebird—a creature of lore. Staker, a member of the Falcon order, is her soul mate from a bloody past she desperately tries to forget, but one that haunts her every moment. The two are thrown together in a desperate search for missing women.

The Collector is a man who loves the hunt, preying on the unusual, on the special—all to keep these women for his own

use. The Collector favors shifters, the rarer the better. He traps them, keeps them, and turns them into his own private collectables.

Staker doesn't want Reen to be a part of this dangerous mission, but she has other plans. Unfortunately, so does the Collector...

Talons: Caged Desire

© 2006 Sydney Somers

He's trapped...she's suspicious—to earn his freedom all he has to do is win her trust.

Locked in a cage for almost fifty years ago, Logan has had nothing but time to plot his revenge on those who wrongfully condemned him to spend eternity in the deepest regions of a South American rainforest. But with one look at the alluring vampire who holds his freedom in her hands, revenge becomes the farthest thing from his mind.

Eve Blake is puzzled by the wooden crate delivered to her door. Even stranger is the large golden eagle inside. It doesn't take her long to realize the majestic creature is far more than he appears. Finding a man in the cage previously containing the feathered animal gives Eve every reason to suspect the shifter was locked away for a reason.

Can she trust him when he promises not to harm her if she releases him? Or will her decision cost both of them more than they bargained for?

Talons: Seize the Hunter

© 2006 Michelle M Pillow

Fate is giving her the one man she'd never want for her very own.

Princess Ari of the planet Falconia knows it's her time to marry and has picked out several suitable men in her mind—none of which are Falcoan Army Commander, Rurik of the Fifth. The man tormented her as a child, causing her untold humiliations. But there is really no need to worry about such a match. Shifters cannot rule and Rurik is a natural born falcon shifter.

Trusting destiny, Ari sips from the Marriage Chalice, sealing her future. But things don't go as planned. It would seem fate is giving her to the man she despises. How can she find happiness with the one man she could never want for her very own?

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