



WILD CHILD

By

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Chapter One

Matt Cantrell frowned when he pushed open the front door to his Gold Coast beachside house. He was certain he'd locked it before he left for work. Positive. But it wasn't locked now. Adrenaline rising, he reached around the corner and flicked on a light, glancing around the wide spaces of the open plan room. The trail of feminine apparel littering the tiled floor erased the lines from his forehead. Marisa had apparently recovered from her sulk at him for having to work late and cancel their date. A slow, satisfied grin curled his lips as he shut the door. Maybe showing her where he kept the spare key hadn't been a mistake. A bout of hot sex was just the thing he needed to unwind.

He took half a step toward the bedroom, pausing to scoop up a shoe. When he fingered the flimsy leather straps, his smile turned feral. Damn, he'd thought he was in for months of empty-bed syndrome. With his current workload, he didn't have time to find a replacement. He picked up the shoe's mate and set them down, out of the way. The hair scrunchy came as a bit of a surprise. Marisa didn't like to wear her hair loose and always wore it up in a fussy style he wasn't game to touch. He registered the bright jewel colors of the scrunchy next, and a soft whistle broke the silence. The visit was definitely impulsive. His cock pulled tight in pure anticipation and an appreciative grin bloomed. Impulse wasn't normally Marisa either, but he was happy to go with the flow.

The phone rang. He detoured to grab it up impatiently, his gaze on his bedroom door.

"Matt Cantrell." He toed off his shoes and juggled the phone while he bent to yank off his socks.

"Matthew, thank goodness you're home." His mother's anxious voice poured down the line.

Alarm bells clanged. Matthew straightened in concern. The time difference between New Zealand and Australia meant it was late in Auckland. Too late for his mother to ring. "Mum? What is it? What's wrong?"

"Oh, Matthew. It's Zoë. She's gone!"

“Gone where?” he asked, his breath easing out in relief. A storm in a teacup. Zoë was always testing parental boundaries. This time wouldn’t be any different. He shook his head, thinking about his feisty sister. Stepsister, actually, since they weren’t related in any way. They’d become a blended family when his mother and her father had fallen in love and married. Not that he’d spent much time with his new stepsister since he’d already left home when Zoë and her father came on the scene. Prior to his mother’s remarriage, he’d started work at a large accounting firm in central Auckland and had already moved into a flat with three of his friends.

“We don’t know. We haven’t seen her since the day before yesterday,” his mother wailed.

“She’ll come round,” he said, wondering how soon he could join Marisa in his king-size bed. He didn’t want to think about Zoë. Hell, he tried not to think about her. The eight-year gap was a big one despite his sister’s maturity. *Stepsister*, his mind reminded him tartly. They weren’t related. “She’s probably staying with university friends.”

His mother sighed. “That’s what we argued about. She’s dropped out. Says she doesn’t want to be a teacher any more. And she’s running with a wild crowd. I’m sure she’s sleeping with one of them. She came home with bruises all over her neck.”

Hickeys? Matt’s hand gripped the phone so hard his knuckles whitened. He’d moved across the Tasman Sea to avoid temptation--the siren lure cast by Zoë. He snorted inwardly. And the joke was she had no idea. He cleared his throat. “What do you want me to do?”

“I wondered if you’d heard from her.”

“Not since Christmas. She told me off because I couldn’t make it home.”

His mother laughed--a forced laugh, but at least she sounded more in control. “She was furious with you. She sulked for days.”

“Which makes it unlikely I’d hear from her,” he said in an even tone, ignoring the fact that she had filled his thoughts every day since.

“I know, but it was worth a try. Matt, I’m so worried. Since Christmas, she’s been acting very strangely. Ring me if you hear from her.”

“Sure, Mum. Don’t worry. She’s an adult. You have to let her make her own decisions. Her own mistakes.” Shit, he didn’t want to think of her. And definitely not as an adult. Thoughts of adults led to thinking of the things they did. *Together*. Hell, he’d thought he was over this thing for her. A hickey for God’s sake. A hickey implied more togetherness than he was

comfortable knowing about her love life.

“Matt? Are you there?”

“Yeah, sorry. I’m working long hours.” A yawn punctuated his statement.

“Go to bed, dear.”

“Good idea,” he said, relaxing a little at the idea of Marisa waiting for him. Naked. Warm, willing feminine flesh. Maybe he could hold his fatigue at bay for long enough to enjoy Marisa.

After promising to contact them if Zoë rang, he hung up. He rotated one shoulder, aware of the tension inside, and groaned, a low, pained sound. He’d wanted Zoë in a sexual way since the day of her nineteenth birthday. Like a bolt of lightning, it had hit him without warning, bringing confusion and guilt. The feeling was just as strong three years later. And still forbidden.

A sea between them wasn’t helping. Perhaps he’d try London. Maybe an ocean or two would do the trick.

Matt stared at a silky black top. He picked it up and rubbed the sumptuous material between his fingers. Suddenly, his tiredness dropped away. He loosened his tie and tugged it off, draping it over the back of a cream leather chair along with Marisa’s top. Nimble fingers undid the buttons on his pale blue business shirt. The shirt joined the top and tie. He slipped into his bedroom.

The room was in total darkness, the whisper of breathing the only audible noise. Matt smiled. After stripping his trousers and boxer shorts off and placing them beside the bed, he tugged back the covers and crawled into bed. Marisa was lying on her side, facing away from him. He slid closer, smoothing his hand across her shoulder. Leaning down, he pressed a kiss to her bare back. She smelled of flowers--carnations to be exact. Nice. Different from Marisa’s usual spicy perfume. He liked this one much better.

When he nuzzled behind her ear, she stirred with a sleepy sigh. Smiling, he pressed a kiss to the smooth skin and stroked his hand down her arm and across her hip. She murmured again, starting to rouse. Good, cause he was definitely beginning to stir, his cock pressing insistently against her curvy backside. Time to rev up this interlude. He slipped a finger into the valley between her butt cheeks and traced a path toward her pussy. Her warm flesh parted. She sighed and spread her legs a fraction, just enough that he was able to graze his finger across her clitoris. She moved again, pressing her luscious ass against his swollen cock. Marisa had put on a bit of weight. He liked it. With soft, gentle strokes, he massaged her clit until the

tiny bud swelled. Marisa stirred again and froze. Then, she let out a shriek loud enough to wake the dead in the local cemetery and leapt from the bed.

"Keep away from me." The note of fear told him she wasn't playing games.

"I'll get the light."

"No! Just go, and I won't tell anyone."

He froze in the act of reaching for the light. His gut churned with acute apprehension. He knew that voice. Suddenly, all the new things he'd noticed about Marisa made sense.

With a sick and sinking sensation in his stomach, he stood and fumbled with the bedside lamp. Soft light bathed the masculine room. He swore, low with feeling. "What are you doing here, Zoë?"

Instead of answering, she stared at him with big, brown eyes. When her gaze dropped, he cursed again and reached for his trousers, rapidly stepping into them and forcing the zipper over his erection.

"Put some clothes on." There was a distinct snap in his voice. Self-loathing sat heavily in the bottom of his gut. His mother and John would die of shock if they found out. *They weren't going to find out.* He sure as hell wasn't going to confess to his monumental cock-up.

"I'll make coffee." He strode from the room but couldn't resist a last look at her. She caught him in the act, and he jerked as if touched with a hot poker. Matt swore. Her curvy image was seared on his retinas for life.

Instead of making coffee, Matt strode across the terracotta tiles and headed straight for his liquor cupboard in the ultra-modern kitchen. He opened the door and pulled out the first bottle that came to hand. Whiskey. Unscrewing the cap, he drank straight from the bottle. A peaty flavor cut across his taste buds. He closed his eyes and swallowed. Mistake. Zoë's sexy shape flashed in front of his eyes. He'd... Matt shuddered, still able to feel the warm, clinging flesh of her pussy even though he wasn't touching her any longer.

"Do you grope every woman you find in your bed?"

"It's my bed," he snapped, his eyes flicking open. She wore his robe belted around her trim waist. Shit, he wasn't the one in the wrong here. He was the innocent victim in this ... debacle. "You were naked."

"Because the airline lost my luggage," she said, folding her arms across her chest. His eyes followed the move, noting that in the years since he'd last seen her, she'd filled out in a spectacular fashion. His cock jerked in displeasure, reminding Matt he required satisfaction. But that wasn't

going to happen--not with this woman at any rate.

"Why did you leave your clothes all over the place?" he demanded, trying to wrest control of the interrogation from her.

"Do you have sex with all the naked women you find in your bed?" The tip of her tongue darted out to moisten the plump curves of her lips. He followed the innocent move with avid attention. He'd forgotten how beautiful she was with her tangle of long dark curls hanging loose around her shoulders, her deep brown eyes, olive skin and sexy, kissable lips. Wild child. He shook himself from the sensual spell, but his palms itched with the need to touch.

"Matt?"

"What?" *Concentrate, dammit.* "I'm asking the questions here."

She ignored his question. "Touching me was no big deal. I've had sex before. I won't tell tales."

Matt realized his mouth had dropped open and snapped it shut. He'd lost control of this situation the minute he'd realized he'd had his hands all over his stepsister. "I thought you were Marisa," he snarled. "What the hell else was I to think when I arrived home to find a trail of clothes leading to my bedroom?"

"Marisa?" Her bottom lip quivered.

"My girlfriend."

"Looks like she stood you up." The hurt expression disappeared, replaced by an enigmatic one. An impish smile glinted in her eyes. "I'm going back to bed. You coming?"

Zoë wanted to laugh at the shock on Matt's face. She shivered inwardly as pleasure surged in a molten rush to the achy spot between her legs. Her nipples were tight and crying out for attention. Tim, her childhood partner in crime and the only male she'd ever had sex with, had never made her feel like this with just a touch. Oh, they'd enjoyed their experimenting and remained close friends, but this... This was in a whole other league. She turned for Matt's bedroom, putting an extra sashay in her steps. She'd never felt more feminine, more aware of her needs. A secret smile curved her lips as she undid the robe and let it drop to the floor. She'd loved him forever and instinctively knew what she felt wasn't the love of a sister for a brother. It was more. Bigger. And now that she was here, she realized he was the reason she found every other man lacking. Despite what people might say, they weren't related. She was old enough now. Love between them wasn't a sin. Nothing this beautiful could be a sin.

“You can’t-- For God’s sake! Put some clothes on,” he said in a strangled voice.

“I always sleep in the nude.” The expression on his face--he looked like he’d eaten a sour apple. She wanted to laugh so much her chest hurt. Then his gaze lit on her breasts and lingered. As he stared, her nipples tightened. The humor inside dropped away, replaced by growing lust. She trembled, sensual need winding her tight inside. With great daring, she gave into her need and stroked the palms of her hands across her taut nipples.

“Stop that,” he muttered. “God, I’ve fallen down a bloody rabbit hole. It’s the only explanation.”

The tide of red on his cheekbones gave her hope. If he didn’t feel the same way, he would have had her covered up from head to toe and consigned to the couch. Instead, he stared.

“Don’t you ever pleasure yourself?” she murmured, going with instinct.

“Whoa!” He held his hands up in front of him and backed up. “Too much information. You take the bed. I’ll sleep on the couch.”

Her fingers stroked her nipples until they were even harder. Through lowered lashes, she saw he watched every move despite his protests. Her hands stroked lower, across her quivering belly. She traced a path around the curly thatch of hair that protected her womanhood and delved between her legs. A streak of pleasure greeted her touch. Already, her juices flowed, easing the way. Her finger skated across her clit and another wave of pleasure shimmered through her body.

“Zoë. You have to stop,” he said in a tight voice.

She lifted weighted eyelids to stare at him. He was gorgeous, with a broad chest, muscles in all the right places. His blue eyes glittered while his short sable hair was charmingly ruffled. He’d looked pretty good in the buff, too. No bandy legs or hidden gut for Matthew Cantrell.

Her finger circled her clitoris. The resulting jolt made her groan.

Matt blinked and seemed to shake himself. “I’m going. And you should stop. You’ll go blind if you touch yourself too much.”

She chuckled. Was that desperation she heard? “Don’t think so. The optometrist said I had twenty-twenty vision. Besides, this is your fault. You started it. I don’t suppose you want to come and help me finish?” She waited, the tension in the room suddenly thick enough to hack at with an axe.

“You’re my sister!” he snarled, his hands tightening to fists at his side.

He edged toward the door.

“Stepsister, if you want to be technical about it,” she corrected. “We aren’t related.”

“Mum and John are worried about you. I’ll ring them and let them know you’re here.”

“Scared?” she taunted.

His reply was muttered, but she thought she heard, “Hell, yeah.”

Zoë stretched like a sleepy kitten and watched his hurried retreat. She grinned. Coming to the Gold Coast was the best idea ever. All she needed to do was keep him off balance, and her dreams would come true.

Chapter Two

Matt closed his bedroom door with a soft click when what he really wanted to do was slam it loud enough for every man, woman and child in New Zealand to hear. It took every ounce of control he possessed to go against the instinct.

His teeth gritted together so tightly his jaw ached. All he could see in his mind's eye was Zoë, with her hand between her legs, pleasuring herself. A violent tremble shook him. Walking away was the hardest thing he'd ever done.

He headed straight for the phone, knowing his mother was probably still awake and worrying.

"John? Yeah, it's Matt. Zoë's here. She's just arrived." He didn't intend to go into details about a trail of clothes leading to their less than pure daughter. Only trouble lay in that direction. He cast a hard stare at the wooden door to his bedroom. He wondered what Zoë was doing and groaned out loud.

"Matt, are you listening?" his stepfather asked.

He started and felt the rush of heat to his face. "Yeah. Sorry. I remembered something I needed to do at work."

"Matt? Zoë is with you?" His mother came on the other line.

"She's here." And how. The minx was lying in his bed having a party for one. His cock jerked insistently, and his traitorous brain suggested he should toss his scruples and join in.

"I don't know what we're going to do with her," his stepfather muttered.

"She's such a wild child," his mother agreed. "I wonder where she gets that from?"

"Don't start, Jenny," his stepfather said in a hasty voice.

Matt grinned. Old discussion. A family joke, but it certainly seemed Zoë was taking after her father. Wild child. His smile died, replaced by a sliver of fear. His mother had said Zoë was in with a bad crowd at home. Shit, he hoped she hadn't been sucked into the drug scene. Learning that she had experimented with sex was way more than he was comfortable with.

“So it’s all settled,” his mother said. “Zoë can stay with you for a month or so while she gets her head sorted out.”

“No!” Matt blurted in horror. God, she couldn’t stay with him. He’d never live to tell the tale. They’d kill each other--if they didn’t end up doing a horizontal tango first.

“Matt, I know it’s an imposition, but if she stays with you, it will set my mind at rest.”

Matt cursed under his breath. Imposition. *Hell*.

“Besides, aren’t you working long hours at the moment?” his mother continued blithely. “You’ll hardly see each other, but you’ll be available if she needs you.”

“What about my love life?” Matt demanded.

“Matthew Gregory Cantrell,” his mother said in her best don’t-mess-with-me voice. “There will be no hanky panky while Zoë is there. Understood?”

“Now, Jenny. Matt’s an adult. You can’t make him give a promise like that. It’s his house.”

His mother sighed. “All right. But if you’re away from home overnight, make sure Zoë knows how to contact you.”

Matt knew when he was beaten. They were right. With the hours he was working at the moment, their paths would barely cross. And the girlfriend thing wasn’t an issue since it was obvious Marisa was still sulking. “Zoë can stay for a while.”

He chatted a little longer before saying goodnight. Matt eyed the closed bedroom door again. A month would pass quickly, and he had plenty of work to keep him from stepping over the line.

* * * *

“Wake up, sleepyhead.” Zoë held a steaming cup of coffee under Matt’s nose, moving it back and forth. On the odd occasion he had stayed in Auckland, he hadn’t coped with mornings. Didn’t look like that had changed. His chin was covered with dark stubble and there were shadows under his eyes. The leather couch looked comfy. Guilt assailed her for an instant before she forced it away. She had adult feelings for him. She was an adult. It was time to stop running.

She set the coffee aside and shook his bare shoulder.

“Hey,” he murmured in a husky voice. His arms curled around her neck, tugging her down on his chest.

A smirk curved her mouth. Nope, he hadn’t changed. He still took a

long time to get going in the mornings.

He nuzzled her neck, then kissed a path across her jawline toward her mouth. Her heart thudded erratically against her ribs as their lips connected. Her tummy quivered. No way was she about to act the outraged virgin when his sinful lips were finally nibbling hers. Quashing the traitorous thought that told her she was taking advantage, she decided to use every weapon in her arsenal to win this battle.

His tongue stroked across her lips, and she eagerly opened her mouth. Their tongues stroked together and the kiss quickly became wet. Carnal.

Zoë sensed the exact moment he woke. His arms stiffened. His lips stopped moving, and he shoved her away so quickly she fell off the cream couch to the floor. She stared at him in a reproachful manner, slowly climbed to her feet, and rubbed her butt. "That wasn't very nice."

"What the devil are you doing?"

"I brought you coffee." She gestured at the cup of coffee on the low, glass-topped table. "You were the one who grabbed me." She turned a fraction to pick up the mug. The shirt she wore rode up to reveal the lower cheeks of her bare ass.

"Go put on a robe," he snapped.

She suppressed a grin. Ooh, this was fun. She didn't think she'd ever seen him so rattled. Apart from that one time when she'd kissed him after opening her birthday present. He'd gone as stiff as a garden rake. All of him. A giggle erupted. *Oops*. Bad timing. She wanted to show her new sophistication not remind him of her lack of years.

"It's too hot for a robe. I didn't think you'd mind if I borrowed a T-shirt. Do you have any boxer shorts I can wear?"

His blue eyes widened. His gaze drifted up and down her body.

She straightened and stuck out her chest. A late bloomer, she'd done a lot of growing after he had left.

His gaze lingered on her breasts, and her nipples tightened to pointy crests.

"When you look at me like that, I can feel it right here." She wantonly touched her breasts, delicately tracing across her fabric-covered nipples.

"And down here." She cupped her mound.

"Mum and John asked if it was okay for you to stay here with me."

Her hand jerked from her body as though an icy-cold glass of water had hit, cooling her skin too rapidly. Thinking about parents and Matt in the same sentence wasn't going to help this relationship progress. That was part

of the reason she'd come over to invade his territory.

"What did you say when they asked you to let me stay?" she asked, watching him closely so she didn't miss a single nuance.

He stood with a loud sigh. "I didn't have any option. I said 'yes'."

"Ooh," she squeaked, raining his face with kisses. "Thank you."

Matt jerked his face upward just as she moved in for another shower of kisses. Their lips collided. They both stilled, lips pursed and touching. Hungry. A groan escaped. His arms came around her, and he pulled her flush with his body. His erection prodded her belly and frankly felt uncomfortable, but she wasn't about to complain. Cupping her head, his mouth covered hers hungrily, as if he couldn't get enough, and she gave into the kiss without a fight, parting her lips, letting the heady sensation swell and build inside until she felt breathless.

Pulling away abruptly, he muttered a curse. "Coffee. I'm not awake. Not responsible for my actions."

Yeah, right. Zoë hid her smirk. She had him running scared.

"I thought I'd get a job in one of the beachfront cafes. Are there any you'd recommend?" And she'd like to research her idea to open a coffee shop.

"Try Broadbeach first," he said, avoiding her eyes. He rubbed his hand across a bare chest. "I'm going to have a shower. The paper should be in the mailbox out front." He paused and gave her bare legs a hard, disapproving stare. "Don't go out there without putting on clothes."

The bathroom door slammed, and he shot the lock.

"Well, damn," she said, clicking her fingers. "I'll have to go onto plan B."

* * * *

Matt thought about Zoë all day. He tried to concentrate on work, but she kept invading his head. He'd had his tongue halfway down her throat. He'd wanted to throw her down on the nearest flat surface and plunge between her legs.

His stepsister.

He groaned with feeling. She was going to live in the same house for the next month. The woman had teasing down to an art. How the hell was he going to survive?

After checking his watch, he decided he might as well head home for all the good he was doing for his client. He stuffed papers in his briefcase and downloaded the work he'd done on the budget so far to a flash drive.

Maybe he'd be able to work at home on his laptop.

Fifteen minutes later he parked the car in the driveway, grabbed his briefcase, and strode inside.

The sun still shone overhead and the tang of salt wafted on the soft sea breeze. A gull wheeled lazily overhead, riding the air currents. Perhaps a swim would rid him of the headache that threatened to expand and squeeze his brain like a vise.

He paused inside the front door to stare around his dining room and lounge and into the kitchen. The tiled floor was clear of clothes as were the cream couch and matching chairs. Not a single dish littered the sleek glass coffee table or the sparkling marble bench top in the kitchen. The house was silent. That could be a good omen.

Or not.

He wondered where she was before cursing under his breath. Damn, he had to stop this stupid mooning about her. They could not become involved. No matter how much his bloody libido demanded otherwise.

After setting his leather briefcase on the wooden table to the left of the couch, he strode into his bedroom. A quick glance confirmed she wasn't hiding, intending to jump out and pinch his butt, or worse. The bed was made, the navy blue duvet cover smooth without a wrinkle. The top of the dresser bore discarded change, a business card, the accountancy magazine he'd brought home to read, and a clothes brush. A faint trace of lemon polish scented the room, courtesy of the weekly housemaid service. He'd have thought Zoë was a figment of his imagination except it was hard to miss the battered black and red backpack lying on the floor on the far side of the bed. Her luggage had obviously turned up.

Sighing, he pulled his swim shorts off a shelf in his walk-in wardrobe and stripped off shoes and socks, the short-sleeved business shirt and black trousers he'd worn for work. Clothed in his swim shorts, he grabbed a towel from the bathroom cupboard and left the house via the double French doors in the front.

Matt took a deep breath and crossed the lawn to open the wooden gate leading to the beach. The easy access to the sea was one of the reasons he had purchased this house. Worth every cent he'd paid for it.

A feminine laugh dragged his attention to the right. A group of young males surrounded a single female. His jaw tensed. His gut tightened. It looked as though Zoë had met every lifesaver from the surf club down the beach. Bronzed men, not much older than Zoë, surrounded her, practically

fencing her in. Matt crossed the sand separating them in three giant steps.

“Zoë,” he said.

The men turned as one and collectively took a step back.

“Matt,” she said, sounding exasperated. “You’re scaring them.”

He wanted to do more than scare them. Zoë was... Damn, she wasn’t his. She was his stepsister. He mentally consigned her to the correct pocket.

“Is this your boyfriend?” one asked.

“Yeah,” she said with a naughty twinkle in her eyes.

Matt stared for the scant moment it took her to climb sinuously to her feet. Then he gaped. Zoë... Hell, she was sin incarnate with that luscious, curvy body. He was instantly aroused and thinking of sex, hard plunging strokes that filled both him and his partner with drugging pleasure. He eyed the young men with a hard-edged stare and saw they, too, had their tongues practically hanging out. One turned to him with obvious envy on his face.

Then, she was in his arms, her voluptuous breasts brushing his chest, her lips clinging to his.

“You’re home early,” she murmured in a throaty, come-to-bed voice.

“Yeah.” Hell, every bit of blood in his body had zapped south. He was having trouble thinking. This was Zoë and he wanted...

“Are you going for a swim? Can I come? Thanks for the job-hunting tips,” she added, sending a smile at the lifesavers. When Matt stood in stupor, she grasped him by the hand and tugged him toward the water.

“Don’t forget to swim between the flags,” one of the men called.

Zoë waved acknowledgement before concentrating her dazzling white smile on him. With her dark curly hair loose around her shoulders, the silver hoops in her ears and the tiny red bikini, she looked like a modern-day gypsy girl. And he wanted her badly. Badly enough to overcome his personal scruples? Their parents’ censure? He thought about that for an instant and acknowledged his answer wasn’t a simple one. It was a maybe.

Sighing, he waded into the water, the surge of incoming breakers stalling his getaway. A splash at his side told him the minx was keeping up with him without difficulty. He’d forgotten her love of the water. He snorted, the sound a derisive one. A high school swimming champion, she could probably outlast him.

An incoming wave hit him mid-chest and almost knocked him off his feet. She grabbed his arm and hauled him upright. The next wave struck almost straight away, knocking their bodies together. From chest to groin, they were plastered against each other. He groaned and lowered his head to

kiss her almost before the thought formed. Damn his scruples. For once, he was going to swim with the flow.

Their lips clung together while the breakers pounded them, trying to wrench them apart.

“Maybe we should relocate?” she said, closing one eye in a saucy wink.

“You’re going to need to walk in front of me all the way up the beach.”

“Oh, yeah?” She waggled her eyebrows and smoothed her hand down his chest and beneath the water. Her small hand wrapped around his cock. His breath hissed out as a wave rocked their lower bodies and moved her hand. A streak of pleasure killed the last of his scruples. He dragged her hand away from his cock and propelled her back toward the beach.

“What about our swim?” she asked, but he heard the underlying laughter. Wild child. Huh! She was a minx, plain and simple, sent to turn his life upside down.

They made the trip across the wide expanse of sand in double quick time. She laughed, the carefree sound pulling his cock tighter, his lust growing. He picked up the speed.

“What’s the hurry? We have the rest of the night.”

He stopped dead. “The rest of the night?”

“Yeah, you have a problem with that?” Her brown eyes were wide and guileless. He knew better. She was a temptation, a hussy. He resumed his rush toward the house, entering via the double French doors. Once they were inside, he yanked the vertical blinds into place to give them privacy and turned to wrap his arms around her. His mouth slammed down on hers as he backed her toward the nearest cream wall. He flicked the back closure of her bikini top and peeled the fabric from her breasts. He lifted his mouth from hers and gazed at the generous curves he’d just revealed before tracing his finger across the golden skin.

“Do you sunbathe topless?”

“Naked.”

Matt pictured her stretched out without a stitch of clothing and shuddered. “I don’t think I want to know the details.”

“Then you shouldn’t ask,” she murmured. “Kiss me. My nipples, I mean. Take one inside your mouth and suck. Hard. I like that. It turns me on.”

A husky laugh escaped. “Appreciate the advice.”

“You gonna act on it, or do I need to have a party by myself?”

“Like hell,” he snapped. “I’m not going anywhere. I’ve taken all the teasing I can take.”

Chapter Three

Zoë pursed her lips, her dark eyes full of laughter. “Poor baby.”

“Damn straight.”

Matt flicked his fingers across her nipples and watched them pull to tight crests. The expression on his face--one of intense concentration and latent sensuality--made her breath catch. He leaned down and lifted one nipple to his mouth, maintaining eye contact the whole time. Nerves hit without warning, her stomach cinching tight with a mixture of anxiety and excitement. This was a step into the unknown. What if it was a mistake? What if her actions changed everything between them, not in the way she wanted, but in a bad way? His mouth closed around her nipple, his tongue flickering across the peak. Hot, sensual flames licked across her skin. He drew hard, sucking just as she'd instructed, driving the worry from her mind.

Zoë moaned, feeling the sensation bungee straight to her clit. Heck, he'd merely touched her and she felt as though she might go off like a firecracker. Despite implying she'd masturbated last night, she hadn't. After feeling his touch and seeing his hot gaze on her almost naked body, pleasuring herself had seemed like second best.

He flicked his thumb over her other nipple before giving it a sharp tug between finger and thumb. She clutched his head, wanting to be in a position to force his mouth right back to its current location should he decide to move or have second thoughts.

“You're choking me.”

“Don't stop!” A trace of panic threaded through her words.

“I can't breathe.”

Okay. Perhaps she'd better lighten up if she wanted him to continue. It wasn't good to look so needy. She let go of his head to feather her fingertips over his chest. They drifted lower and scooted beneath the waistband of his swim shorts. Her hand glided lower still, and she curled her fingers around his cock. A satisfying groan filled the air.

After loosening her grip a fraction, she ran a teasing finger along his length. Although her hand was cramped, there was enough room for leverage to tease. The idea of him changing his mind or stopping was abhorrent. She

hastily stroked and taunted him some more to push him far enough that he'd be desperate for release. Zoë smoothed her thumb over the tiny slit at the tip of his cock, smearing a bead of pre-cum over the smooth, broad head.

A powerful shudder racked his body. "If this is sin, then bring it on," he said, his husky voice and intense gaze making her hand still. Her breath eased out in relief. He wasn't going to call a halt. Not yet anyway.

He released her breasts and slipped his thumbs under the elastic band of his swim shorts. He pushed them down, maneuvering over his erection with care. Then he whisked her bikini briefs down too, leaving them both naked.

"Let's move this to the bedroom," he suggested, his gaze lingering on her breasts for a long moment before flicking lower. A breast man. Knowledge to file away for later.

"What, you don't want to take me against the wall?" She batted her eyelashes and watched the gleam that came into his blue eyes. Her breath became short. Choppy. Expectation made her nether region clench and tingle.

"Not this time." He scooped her off her feet with an ease that made her smile. Tim, her best friend and sex experiment partner, always groaned theatrically when he attempted to lift her. After he'd nearly dropped her on her naked ass, she'd refused to cater to the pirate fantasy any longer. Any fantasies they'd played out had involved her walking on her own two feet. Matt hadn't even grunted.

"You're very strong," she murmured, pinching his arm lightly.

"What I am is a desperate man. This is the fastest way."

He dropped her lightly on the bed and followed her down, effectively caging her body in place on the cool, cotton duvet. It made her feel small and feminine with his larger frame covering her. Yeah, definitely feminine and powerful. She smiled up at him and reached up to trace his lips with an impudent finger. With each breath, she inhaled his spicy aftershave and the tang of the sea.

"So now you have me here, what are you going to do with me?"

"Fuck you hard enough that you won't have the energy to make smart-ass remarks," he retorted.

"Matt!"

He grabbed her wandering hands and held them fast. "This is adult stuff, sweetheart. If a little frank language is going to outrage you, you'd better leave now. I like my sex hard and fast and gritty. And today that's

exactly what I need.”

Her teeth sank into her bottom lip while her heart thudded anxiously. She studied his face, trying to second-guess him. In the dimmer light of the bedroom, his expression was harsh and uncompromising. “Are you trying to scare me? Because it won’t work. I want this. I want you, and I’m ready to fight for what I want.”

“Good girl,” he whispered, his harsh face softening. “That’s the right answer.” He released her wrist to thread his hands through her long hair and lowered his head. “I mean it. I’m going to treat you exactly the same as I’d treat any of my women--”

“If you expect me to do housework, think again.”

“I don’t believe I mentioned housework.”

“Oh, you mean sex.” Her left eye closed in a cheeky wink. “Better get to it, or I might come to the conclusion you’re all talk.”

A grimace tightened his mouth. “Mum and John should have smacked your bottom and washed your smart mouth out with soap.”

“Mum and Dad love me. They love both of us.”

Matt snorted, and the sound held little humor. “This is a new one. I have never, ever discussed parents right before having sex.”

“Well, we can discuss my sexual fantasies if you’d like. Tim and I had a list of things--”

He slapped his hand over her mouth. “I don’t want to know what you and Tim got up to.”

They stared at each other during a lengthy silence where sensual tension ratcheted sharply upward. New aches sprang to life when she imagined them together, bodies sliding together in an intimate dance. And pleasure. Oh, yes. There was lots of drugging pleasure. Finally, a huff of frustration emerged from deep in his throat. The corners of his mouth twitched, so she knew he wasn’t really angry.

“New rule, Zoë. When you’re in my bed, there are only two people here. You and me.” He lifted his hand from her mouth, his gaze expectant.

Disappointment, especially his, was the last thing she wanted. “We can make our own fantasies, then.” She beamed at him, waiting for his bite. “I want to make love in a public place.” She waggled her eyebrows like a comedian trying for laughs. “Can we do that?”

He grabbed her by the shoulders and rolled her body so quickly, she barely had time to protest. She found herself facedown almost suffocated by the pillow. She shifted her head fractionally so she could breathe, then

yelped.

He'd smacked her bottom. Not hard enough to hurt but certainly enough to make her buttocks tingle. His hand came down across her ass again. The stinging intensified, but with it came heat, a surge of sexual awareness. She moaned softly, anxiously awaiting his next move.

Instead of striking her backside again, he cupped one buttock with his large hand.

"You okay?" His finger slid between her butt cheeks and moved toward her aching core.

"Very okay," she murmured, mentally willing that finger to slide right on down.

"Fuck," he cursed softly. "Do you know what it does to me when you respond so sweetly?"

"I have no idea," she murmured. "'Cause I can't see your face."

"Ah, Zoë," he whispered. "Spread your legs a little for me. Yeah. Just like that." The mattress moved when he stood, but he returned in an instant to lift her hips and place a pillow beneath her stomach. "You're very pretty," he murmured. "Just looking at you makes my cock swell. I want to plunge inside you with one seamless thrust and stay deep inside while your pretty cunt squeezes me. And that's just for starters," he said in a thick voice.

A wave of embarrassment swept to her cheeks, and she was glad her face and reactions were hidden from view. The idea of him staring at both her naked butt and exposed sex was mind-boggling. And a real turn on. Her pulse elevated and a sensual tingle crept through her body, starting from the region of her heart and gradually traveling to her swollen core.

She felt his finger gently part her folds, exposing her fully to him. A soft groan whispered past her lips. *Hurry. Please hurry. Speed was a very good thing.* She bit back her silent demands, trembling with the intensity of her need.

"You're wet for me," he murmured. To her delight, he brushed his finger across her swollen flesh, creating a shimmer of sensation. That special feeling needed bottling. If she could do that she wouldn't need to find a job--she could make a living out of selling flasks of sexual pleasure.

Matt moved again, tugging one of the bedside drawers open. He pulled out a box of condoms. The box creaked open before he chucked it on the top of the wooden cabinet.

A whole box of condoms. The tingles intensified until she thought she would go mad. She wriggled, rocking her hips and trying to ease the sensual

torture.

Smack!

Her buttocks stung with the sharp blow.

"Please, Matt," she pleaded, hardly knowing what she wanted. She raised her butt as high as she could without kneeling on all fours. He smacked her bottom again, and she groaned, feeling the gush of cream that ran down her inner thigh along with a ribbon of pleasurable sensation.

The crackle of foil sounded. Silence fell, and she heard nothing above her ragged breathing and the thunder of her heart. The mattress depressed with his weight. He parted her folds, then she felt his warm, moist breath on her sex. Her eyes fluttered closed so she could concentrate and savor every delicious sensation.

"Swollen," he stated, satisfaction clear from his tone. His finger tapped her clitoris lightly, and a jolt seared the length of her body. "Responsive."

His finger drifted away from her clit to make a brief foray down her cleft. He delved into the creamy moisture at the mouth of her pussy before sliding his finger inside. Her flesh clenched at his finger, but it wasn't enough.

"More, please, Matt. I need more."

"Shh," he soothed. "I'll make it better soon. I just wanted to make sure you're ready for me."

Any more ready and she'd explode. Jeesh, how old did he want them to be before they consummated this venture?

The finger eased from her moist channel so slowly she wanted to scream. He repeated the slow stroke. She half expected him to carry on the snail's pace, but he cursed softly and moved. His hand gripped her hips. She felt the blunt tip of his cock at her pussy and felt like crying in relief. Secretly, she wondered if he was going to tease her with his cock just as he'd taunted her unbearably with the slow pumping of his fingers.

But he surprised her.

He impaled her with one quick plunge. They both groaned, and her sheath clenched around his cock. He filled her beautifully, easing the empty ache that had assailed her for the last hour. He withdrew and set up a fast, stroking pace. Sensation layered on sensation as she struggled to keep up with him. The shimmery ache inside intensified. Each plunging stroke pushed her higher. His lips tickled when he pressed a kiss to the middle of her back.

“Come for me, sweetheart. You can do it,” he encouraged. “I know you’re close. I can sense it.”

She moved with him, angled her butt as high as she could. Each stroke hit the edge of her clit, the sensation growing higher and almost painful. Part of her wanted to halt the agonizing tingle, but she continued to rock against him, seeking to push past the ache into the pleasure she knew lay beyond.

“Zoë.” His teeth scored the tender skin of her neck.

She jolted, and the next surge of his cock pushed her over the edge into pleasure that made her body soar. Her pussy pulsed endlessly, clutching and grabbing at his masculine flesh.

His strokes grew frenzied before he froze, his breathing hoarse as he catapulted into orgasm.

“Shit,” he murmured.

“Is that a good shit or a bad one?”

Matt grunted and withdrew. A snap of rubber sounded as he removed the condom.

When he returned to her side she still lay brazenly on her stomach, legs asunder and her ass poking up in the air.

After removing the pillow and chucking it on the floor, he rolled her over and drew her close, their sweaty bodies sticking to each other. Lingering pleasure and the afterglow filled her body. She lay quietly and wondered what he was thinking. When the silence became too much, nerves made her chatter.

“So,” she said. “When can we try out anal sex, and where do you think is the best location to have sex in a public place?”

Chapter Four

“How about we try the traditional missionary position before we get to the advanced stuff?”

Zoë smiled against his chest but took care to keep her amusement concealed. She was willing to try almost anything with Matt. “That’s a little boring don’t you think? Lie back and think of England. Not much excitement there. Ooh, I’ve just had a thought!” His theatrical wince belonged on the stage. Laughing, she pulled away to punch him in the arm. “Will you take me to a strip joint? Please?”

Definitely shock and disbelief in that stare, she decided.

“We’ll see. There’s plenty of time. Lie back and let me look at you.” He leaned over her to cup one breast in his hand. Although his hand was large, the plump globe overflowed his hand. “You never used to be so big.”

Surprise made her brows rise. “You looked?”

“Yeah. And felt as guilty as hell about it. I didn’t believe I should think about my stepsister and lust in the same thought.”

“You can look and touch as much as you want.”

“Just what I wanted to hear. Show me how you pleased yourself last night,” he said. “I want to watch.”

Her mouth opened in surprise. A faint tide of color traveled down to her lush breasts, and she grinned. “Your wish is my command, but you should know I fibbed. I went to sleep.” Her eyes fluttered closed as she thought about touching herself in front of him.

“Show me. Open your eyes. I want to see them when you come. If you’re a good girl, I might help you along.” He punctuated his remark by tweaking one nipple. They both watched the tip tighten to a taut peak.

“Do that again. Take me in your mouth. I like that.”

“As soon as you show me how you’d make yourself come. Show me what you like.” He removed his hand from her breast and stared down at her with acute expectation.

She sat up in the bed and propped a pillow up behind her. After spreading her legs, she ran her hands across her breasts.

“Skip the breasts,” he said. “I’ll handle that department.”

“I thought you wanted the whole process. I like touching my breasts and having them touched. I was just being thorough.” Matt shook his head before pinching the nipple of one breast. Lowering his head, he took the other nipple into his mouth. Using his lips, tongue and teeth, he played with her breast until he heard a hitch in her breathing. He sucked hard before letting her nipple pop free from his mouth. It glistened, wet and tight. Her chest rose and fell with each breath. After shifting, getting comfortable, he watched her skim her hand across her stomach and delve between her legs. She sighed as she strummed her fingers across her clitoris, teasing the tiny bud until it swelled. Her hips lifted, arching upward. A soft gasp escaped as she strained for release. White teeth bit down on her bottom lip until he longed to soothe it with his touch. Her face was flushed, her dark hair a tangled mass fanned across the pillows. She belonged here, he thought in wonder. Zoë made his plain, masculine bedroom seem like a home.

Her fingers dipped again, stroking the length of her cleft. Unable to resist, he nibbled at the curve of a breast, lifting the globe before suckling her again. He pulled away abruptly, grabbed another condom and ripped the foil wrapping. After rolling it onto his erection, he met her gaze. “You look so sexy. I want to watch, but I want to participate. I want to make you come.”

“Come join the party,” she said huskily.

He crawled across the mattress until he was positioned between her legs. Cupping his hands beneath her butt, he lifted her and sealed his mouth over her swollen bud. Using his tongue and teeth, he nibbled and sucked, teasing enough to drive her higher but not enough for her to come. Her musky scent, her taste, made his body tight with need.

“Please,” she whispered, struggling against his tight grip on her lower body.

After one final sweep of his tongue, he released her hips and positioned his cock before pushing inside. This time was slower. Leisurely. They didn’t have anything to prove. He stroked slowly while her hands crawled across his back, testing the flesh of his butt. His mouth covered hers. Tongues tangled, surging and retreating in a facsimile of his cock pushing into her pussy. Their kiss was languid and lazy until increasingly urgent hunger quickened his thrusts. Together they strove for completion. Matt felt a tightening sensation deep in her womb. He pounded into her, suddenly desperate. A dark sound came from deep in his chest as he exploded. Their unified gasp of pleasure cut through the bedroom. Finally,

he stilled. He rolled over, pulling her with him so she rested on his chest.

"I gotta sleep." She crawled off him over to the far side of the bed. "Feel free to wake me up later with a sexy kiss."

Smiling gently, he reached across the mattress and stroked the silky skin of her shoulder before dealing with the condom. "Go to sleep."

"Sleep. Good idea," she murmured. "Need to keep my strength up to keep up with you."

Matt snorted, moving closer to curl around her relaxed body. Soon her breathing slowed, and Matt relaxed into sleep, too.

* * * *

Two Weeks Later

The phone rang, and Matt leaned over Zoë's naked body to grab the portable from the bedside cabinet where he'd left it the previous evening. He grinned at the tiny snuffling sound she made as she continued to sleep. He'd tired her out.

"Yeah."

"Did I wake you?" Marisa's arch tone wiped the grin from his face. He turned away from Zoë.

"I had a late night." Hopefully Zoë wouldn't wake while he got rid of Marisa. Matt had thought they were over. It was obvious from the flirtatious voice that Marisa thought differently.

"Joey and Kate are having a party to celebrate April Fool's Day."

"And?"

"Pick me up at eight," Marisa said.

"No, I have Zoë staying with me."

"Oh, your kid sister. Bring her, too. Joey has several younger brothers. I'm sure they'll be around."

"But--"

"Eight o'clock." The phone clicked down.

Matt glanced over at Zoë and saw she was still asleep. He wished Marisa had never seen the photos of Zoë that his mother had sent. Hell. Damn. Fuck. Marisa thought Zoë was his sister, and Zoë would expect introductions as something else. Matt cursed a blue streak under his breath. The hell of it was he didn't know what Zoë was to him. They hadn't talked about the future. They came home from their jobs and burned up the sheets long into the night. They'd left the house to swim a couple of times and grab food from the local supermarket. That was all. The rest of the time they

spent having dynamite sex. He remembered telling Marisa about Zoë. At the time he'd thought that Marisa might be the one since they had so much in common. But she'd shown her true colors, expecting him to put his career plans on hold and run after her whenever she clicked her elegant fingers in his direction. Then, Zoë had walked into his life.

"Matt, was that the phone? I thought it was in my dream."

"Yeah, it was Marisa." Did he and Zoë even have a future?

She seemed to wake up immediately on hearing the other woman's name. "What did she want? I thought you were over?"

He sighed, wrenching his gaze off her naked shoulders and breasts.

"We are, but Marisa didn't give me a chance to refuse."

"Refuse what?" Her voice was even, but he knew her well enough to be wary.

"She asked me to a party. I said you were here, and she told me to bring you, too."

Zoë visibly relaxed. "That's okay, then. It might be nice to have a night out."

"She knows you're my stepsister."

"Oh." She frowned before a bright smile replaced the grimace. "Ring her back and tell it like it is." She propped up on her elbow and checked the alarm clock. "Right after we have a morning quickie. My shift starts at ten." She jumped him, moving with a speed that took him by surprise. Her shriek of laughter when she wound her arms around his neck was contagious. His lips quirked into a smile as he allowed her to pull him back onto the bed. Their lips clung together, nibbled, tasted. But at the back of his mind, he worried. No matter what Zoë thought, Matt sensed Marisa would prove difficult.

"Are you thinking about Marisa?"

"I wouldn't dare," he deadpanned.

"Humph." Zoë flung herself back on the pillows. "You will be my slave. Your punishment." She clicked her fingers in an imperious manner. "Slave, I desire a glass of juice, some freshly sliced pineapple and papaya, and once you have prepared my repast, come back and pleasure me. I wish an orgasm."

He stood and bowed from the waist. "Will her majesty return the favor?"

"You'll have your turn to call the shots tomorrow, Matt. Whatever you want."

“Anything?” He stared at her lips. Luscious. Plump. And very talented. His cock hardened into prominence.

“I promise.” Her brown eyes danced with mischief. She reclined against the pillows again and made a shooing motion with her right hand. “Slave. Please hurry. I find myself eager to taste some sensual delights.”

He shook his head and strode across the bedroom floor, picking his way around the clothes they’d discarded the previous night.

A few minutes later he returned with two glasses of orange juice and a plate of fresh fruit cut into chunks. She was making snuffling noises again, her sprawled, naked body taking up more than her share of the bed. She’d kicked the pastel blue sheet off and he had an unimpaired view of her physical delights. He set the tray aside, deciding he’d tease a little and wake her at the same time.

He plucked several cubes of pineapple from the plate and carefully balanced them on her body--one in the indentation of her belly button and another between her breasts. When she didn’t stir, he decided to get adventurous and placed chunks of pineapple on her mound and pieces of papaya between her sprawled legs. When all but one piece of the fruit from the plate decorated her body, he stood back to study his handiwork. One last touch required. He picked up the last piece of pineapple up from the plate and squeezed it so the juice trickled over her breasts. After discarding the piece of fruit, a grin spread across his face.

Breakfast was served.

Matt leaned over her body and licked the slope of one breast, following the trail of juice as it trickled into her cleavage. She stirred. He glanced up to see her eyelids flickering.

“Are you awake?” he whispered.

“No,” she said.

“But breakfast is ready.”

Her eyes flew open fully. As he watched, they widened, then glinted with amusement. “Not quite what I had in mind, slave.” She pulled a rueful face. “I feel sticky. And...what have you done? There’s fruit in my--”

“Arranged breakfast to my satisfaction.”

“This is my fantasy,” she complained, but he saw the gleam in her eyes. Her acceptance humbled him.

“Since you fell asleep, I decided a takeover bid was in order.” He tapped the side of his nose in a superior manner. “I didn’t go to accountancy school to eat my lunch, you know.”

A snort emerged. "I know there are lots of extracurricular activities at university. Eating lunch isn't one of them."

"Ah, you're speaking of sex."

"Yeah."

"You realize if I hadn't practiced a little beforehand, you wouldn't be enjoying yourself as much as you are now."

"Humph. All I feel is sticky. Nothing pleasurable about that."

"Patience is a virtue." He smirked at the cross little frown between her brown eyes. He licked the dried juice from the base of a breast and worked his way up to the areola. Her nipple drew to a tight peak as he watched, but he didn't linger. Instead, he swiped his tongue across her rib cage, paused to nibble at a piece of ripe papaya.

"Yummy." He smacked his lips.

"What about me? I'm hungry."

He grinned and picked up a piece of pineapple. He held it above her mouth and squeezed lightly, enough that a little juice dripped onto her lips. Her pink tongue darted out to collect the juice. He watched it avidly, his cock pulling tight as desire increased. He pushed the pineapple between her pursed lips before nuzzling the soft skin beneath her ear. As she chewed on the pineapple, he kissed a path toward her breasts. Bypassing her breasts, he lingered at her belly button, nibbling at the pineapple cube he'd left there. She shivered. Moving lower still, he parted her legs and sat back on his haunches to survey his handiwork.

"You look like a fruit bowl."

Zoë suppressed a grin. "Humph!" The look in his eyes made her heart leap into a gallop. She watched his eyes darken until they resembled the color of the sky just before darkness falls--a deep bluish black.

He pressed his lips to her inner thigh, the dark stubble at his jaw abrading her skin. Her breath caught. A flame licked through her body when she imagined his mouth moving higher. The wretch had stuffed fruit in places that didn't normally house food. His fingers traced across the soft, delicate skin of both inner thighs. She waited in a frenzy of body-tingling apprehension. What was he going to do?

The tick-tock of the alarm clock seemed suddenly loud when she hadn't noticed it before. The scent of ripe fruit filled the air. She could practically feel the blood rushing through her veins. The fire he'd kindled with his touch flamed higher when his fingers slid between her folds. He tugged on her legs so that she shot down the bed and ended up with her legs

dangling over the edge. He knelt between her legs and nibbled at a piece of fruit. Her hips jerked at the quick flicks of his tongue. Desire, liquid and molten, held her in thrall. Long, luscious strokes of his tongue went dangerously close to her swollen nub. She swallowed, wondering how he could drive her so high so quickly. One long finger pumped into her pussy, deliberate, probing strokes in counterpoint to the lashes from his tongue.

"Matt," she protested, her hips jerking while her pulse raced like a crazy thing.

"Hungry? Have some more fruit." He shifted to pluck a piece of papaya from her belly with his mouth, teasing with tiny bites. When he pressed his mouth to hers, the sweetness of the fruit contrasted with the faint taste of her cream. Juices spurted from the ripe papaya when she bit down. Delicious.

He collected the juices from her chin, the wet rasp of his tongue bringing a shudder of awareness. Their gazes held. A rough growl vibrated in his chest as she chewed and swallowed. He feasted on her mouth, crushing lumps of pineapple and papaya between them before lifting his head. "Still hungry?"

"For you," she murmured, wondering what he would do next. The anticipation was part of the fun.

"Good. Time to satisfy those hunger pangs." He swept the remaining fruit on her belly aside and grabbed a condom. Seconds later, he thrust into her moist sheath. He pistoned his hips--thrusting hard and deep into her pussy. She gripped his shoulders, a haze of pleasure rushing through her body with each thrust. Raw need grew. Her hips jerked, then her climax broke over her in long, pleasurable waves. He groaned, a dark sound, before he stilled.

Finally, he moved, slipping from her body and discarding the condom. Squashed bits of fruit clung to her chest and littered the rumpled bedcovers. He grinned down at her. "Maybe we should take a shower?"

"Together?" she asked, her heart taking off in a racy beat.

"Yeah."

"Sounds like fun."

"We can get into lots of mischief or we can shower. Your choice."

"Hmm," she said, pretending to ponder. "I always did enjoy multi-choice."

Chapter Five

The atmosphere inside the interior of the car was tense. Partly his fault, Matt acknowledged grimly while he navigated the streets leading to Marisa's apartment block.

"I don't understand why you haven't told her yet," Zoë said, an expression of hurt shining in her brown eyes. "I'm starting to feel you're ashamed of me. Of us."

"You have to admit the situation is a little weird."

"From where I sit, it seems perfectly normal. I want to go out with my boyfriend and be treated as a couple."

"Zoë, I'm sorry. I've tried to reach Marisa all week. Her flatmate said she had to go on a buying trip for her boutique."

She snorted. "She's dodging calls on purpose."

Matt glanced across the dim interior of the car. He could see her sullen pout in the light shed by the street lamps. He knew he'd handled the situation badly. Everything had happened so quickly--the tumble from stepbrother and stepsister to lovers. Hell, his brain was having trouble keeping up. Or maybe that was the problem. He hadn't thought this through properly. Telling Marisa was going to be bad enough, but telling his mother and John...

"This is Marisa's apartment. I'll go and tell her we're here, and tell her the news."

"You can even say it. We're lovers. L. O. V. E. R. S. We share a bed. I refuse to be pushed aside at your convenience," she snapped. "Either we're together or we're not." Her chest heaved beneath the skimpy red dress. She had assured him she wouldn't burst out at an inappropriate moment, but after eyeing her cleavage he wasn't so sure.

"We'll discuss this later," he said, climbing from the car and slamming the door before she had time to comment.

For once, Marisa appeared immediately, meeting him before he reached the ostentatious entranceway to the modern apartment building.

"Oh, good," she said, throwing herself into his arms and pressing her lips to his before he could say a word.

Matt was uneasily aware of the silent time bomb ticking in his waiting car. "I have to talk to you," he said, grasping her upper arms and forcing Marisa away from him. Marisa struggled to move closer, but he was determined. "We have to talk."

"We can talk in the car," she said gaily, and hurried around to the front passenger door. Marisa wrenched open the door before coming to an abrupt halt. "Oh. I thought you'd sit in the back."

"Think again," Zoë said sweetly.

"It's not far to Joey and Kate's." He rounded the rear of the car and opened the door for Marisa.

A scowl marred her forehead, and she slid inside the vehicle with clear temper. Matt's gut churned as he strode back around the car to the driver's side. He opened the door and slipped behind the wheel. The tension inside made his gut lurch even more. *Hell.*

Marisa spoke first. "I'm so glad we could go to the party tonight. I have a buying trip next week. I've booked a room for the weekend at the Malamba Resort. I thought we could make a long weekend of it."

"A long weekend," Zoë mocked. "Sounds like fun."

"Not you," Marisa declared. "This is for couples."

"Marisa." Matt heard the warning note in his voice, and he knew Zoë heard too, because she straightened in the passenger seat.

"Yes, I know. You want to talk, but surely you don't want to discuss our private affairs in front of Zoë?"

"Matt's been trying to talk to you all week," Zoë said.

"Zoë," Matt said sharply. "Be quiet."

Marisa leaned forward and caressed his shoulder. "This has nothing to do with you, Zoë."

Zoë cast him an arch look before turning a smug expression on Marisa. "Oh, no?"

"Zoë." Matt's stomach cramped as he calculated the damage two women could cause to each other in five minutes. He pressed down on the accelerator. The wheels screeched as he took the corner onto the road where the party was being held. He pulled up behind a SUV. "Zoë and I are living together," he said.

Zoë winced, and he realized he'd need to do a bit more explaining.

"Of course you are. It makes sense. You're brother and sister." Marisa opened the door and climbed out. She poked her head back in for an instant. "Come along, Matt. Zoë, everyone is very friendly. You won't have any

trouble making friends with the youngsters.”

Matt cut through Zoë’s incredulous muttering. “We’re lovers.”

“I don’t think she heard,” Zoë muttered, jerking her head toward Marisa who was striding toward the open front door. “Why didn’t you just tell her instead of skirting the truth?” She shoved open the door and climbed out.

“Where are you going?” Matt demanded, guiltily acknowledging she had a right to her anger. He should have told Marisa straight away. He cursed, hating being at odds with Zoë. She meant more to him than Marisa ever had. Shit, a fine mess he’d made of this.

“I’m going to introduce myself around, just like Marisa instructed. I might even meet a man with a spine.” Anger and disappointment warred inside Zoë as she stomped up the path edged with a knee-high box hedge. She stormed into the crowded party and detoured around Marisa and the couple she presumed were their hosts. No point speaking to Marisa at the moment since Zoë couldn’t be sure she could control her tongue. Not with temper simmering through her body. And Matt. Zoë’s mouth firmed. He’d treated her as someone he was ashamed of. She sniffed and forced her thoughts to happier ones, refusing to break down in public.

Zoë caught sight of a group of men and women in her age group. She threaded her way through the guests intending to introduce herself, determined to pretend enjoyment, even if it killed her. Inside pain tore at her—pain of rejection and at being used. She’d really thought Matt was different. Wrong!

She forced a bright smile. “Hi,” she said into a conversation lull. “I’m Zoë Underwood.” *Matt’s stepsister*, she thought with irritation.

“Are you Matt’s sister?” a young girl asked.

“I’m staying with Matt for a while,” she said, thought of the word sister almost choking her. They weren’t related, dammit, but obviously Matt was worried about what people might say. No, blast it! “I’m his stepsister by marriage. We’re not related.”

The girl nodded.

“I’m Michael. Would you like to dance?”

“Sounds great.” Anything to keep her busy.

Zoë walked over to the impromptu dance floor at Michael’s side. Matt was looking at her. She sensed his gaze drilling into her back. Zoë sent a wide smile to Michael and tossed her head, pretending she didn’t care—she was an unattached female intent on enjoying herself. The music turned slow,

and she slid into Michael's arms. It was going to be a long night. The singer crooned of broken hearts, and tears burned the back of her eyes.

Two hours passed. Lots of banal social chatter and dances with different men. Zoë couldn't have said what their names were or what she talked about. She managed to avoid both Matt and Marisa, but couldn't drive them from her mind. Like a magnet, her gaze kept drifting to them and each time a jab of pain stabbed her in the heart. Twenty-two was considered young but she was old enough to know her mind. She loved Matt. They had so much in common, thought the same way, and had the same beliefs.

She swallowed the sudden helplessness. At least she'd found out he didn't feel the same way now, rather than later. She'd have to find somewhere else to live. Of course, returning home was another option, but her stepmother would sense something was wrong. No, it was best to keep away from Auckland. Maybe she'd move into the flat with the other girls from work and continue on her business research mission. Zoë stared unhappily at his broad back. She could ring tonight and ask if she could crash on their couch but didn't want to face a load of questions. Tomorrow would have to do.

* * * *

Matt watched Zoë closely throughout the evening and hoped like hell she didn't do anything stupid. Like confront Marisa. A pissed Marisa was a vindictive one.

Marisa slipped her arm through his and bent close. "This weekend will be wonderful. The resort is very luxurious. We'll have a chance to relax and enjoy ourselves."

"I have plans for this weekend." And because he knew Marisa wouldn't take no for an answer, he decided it was way past time to speak bluntly. And then somehow, he'd make things up with Zoë. Hopefully, she'd forgive him for a moment of sheer stupidity. "Zoë and I are lovers."

Marisa waved a dismissive hand. "Don't be ridiculous. You're brother and sister." She chuckled without warning. "Ah, I get it. It's April fool's day. Don't you know you're only supposed to play tricks before midday?"

"It's not a joke." His stomach cramped as he waited for her reaction. "We're not related. Zoë and I are a couple."

"But you're brother and sister," she repeated in bewilderment. "Matt, you and I are going out together. I thought we'd get married."

"Zoe and I are not brother and sister. How many times do I have to tell you?" He shook his head. "And what's this about marriage? Marisa, the last

time you spoke to me you told me you never wanted to see me again.”

She laughed lightly but didn't quite pull it off. “I was angry because you were working. I didn't mean it.”

“I'm sorry. It's over between us.”

“You're sick,” she blurted into the resulting silence, totally ignoring his declaration. “Unnatural.”

“Zoë and I aren't related,” he stated in a tight voice. Hell, he could just imagine what she was going to tell their friends. The gossip...

“Sick!” She spun on her heels and stalked off, her attitude one of a woman wronged.

“Hell.” How to piss off women in two easy steps. He was two for two. Matt glanced around the crowded room. Zoë was on the dance floor. If the way she was plastered against her dance partner could be called dancing. A tide of emotion flooded him. Anger. Irritation. Jealousy. He didn't like other men touching her. She was his. He stalked over to exert his claim.

“Zoë, I'm going home. Marisa is staying. Would you like to come home now or catch a cab?”

“Marisa is going home by herself?” Zoë's expression tore at his heart. “I'm ready to leave.” Her voice came out low and breathless. Uncertain.

“Let's go,” he said. “I'll just say goodnight to Joey and Kate.”

Wordlessly, she followed.

When they found Joey and Kate, Marisa was with them.

“Zoë and I are heading home,” Matt said. “Thanks for inviting us.”

“Sick,” Marisa stated in a cold voice, before stalking off.

“Thanks for coming,” Joey said.

His wife smiled. “Nice to meet you, Zoë.” Avid curiosity filled their gazes, but politeness stopped them from asking nosy questions.

Matt nodded at his friends and escorted Zoë out to his car.

“Marisa isn't impressed with our relationship,” Zoë said once they were headed for home.

“I don't want to talk about Marisa. I told her. She reacted the way I thought she would. That's all I want to say on the matter.”

“Oh.” She nibbled on her bottom lip while she digested his words. He wanted to soothe her worry away and start making up for being such an ass. “What about us?” she asked.

He turned down his street and pulled up in his driveway. “I'm sorry. I didn't handle tonight very well. I should have made a point of going to see Marisa and explaining to her beforehand.”

She sighed. "This isn't going to be easy. I know that. Don't think I haven't thought things through. Future repercussions. Mum and Dad..." She shrugged. "We don't need to tell them at the moment."

He heard everything she didn't say. Their parents would freak because they considered the two of them brother and sister, and it was better not to worry them needlessly at this stage when the relationship was so new. What would happen if they broke up? They could hardly slip into a casual relationship again. For not the first time, he wondered if they'd done the right thing. Once Marisa finished spreading vicious gossip, their names would be on everyone's lips.

"Matt." She placed her hand on his where he gripped the steering wheel. "I'll leave if you want."

Matt thought about it for a scant second before rejecting her suggestion. He didn't want her to leave. He wanted to explore what they had together. Being with her was comfortable yet challenging. He'd never been happier.

"I don't want you to leave. Would you like to go for a walk along the beach?"

She smiled, tossing her wild mane of dark curls. "Yeah, I'd like that."

The phone rang when they walked in. "I'll get it." She picked it up. "Hi, Mum. Matt and I were at a party. Sure, I met lots of people. No. Just friends."

Matt grimaced and went to find a few supplies. He yanked the stainless steel fridge open, not wanting to think about Zoë with another man. It made his stomach ache.

"I didn't think Mum would ever stop talking," she said when they let themselves out the French doors.

"She worries."

"She needs to find new hobbies."

"True, then maybe she wouldn't agonize over the lack of grandchildren."

"Oh." She stopped walking. "Does she talk about that with you?"

"About every second call. Her best friends have grandchildren," he said dryly.

Zoë chuckled. It was sultry, sexy and full of promise. The sound pulled his cock tight with anticipation. He definitely didn't want to argue.

"Let's go. I thought we might have a late-night picnic."

They walked out onto the cool sand. The surge of the waves and the

faint notes of a jazz song coming from a nearby home were the only sounds. A bright moon lit their way.

With anticipation thrumming through his body, he directed her further along the beach to where sand dunes and trees blocked the lights from the street lamps and houses. Damned if there wasn't something compelling about the idea of fulfilling her fantasies. About five minutes later, he stopped and spread a blanket out on the sand. They sat and stared out to sea.

"A turtle came ashore here last week. That's very rare."

"Cool."

"And from July to October the humpback whales arrive."

"Can we go to see them?" she asked.

Something close to pleasure assailed him. He liked the idea of whale watching with her. And the idea they'd still be together in four months didn't fill him with panic or make him feel smothered as he'd felt when Marisa spoke of the future. Hell, even twenty years didn't scare him. "I'd like that."

He leaned over to kiss her, and she tugged him over her body. Her soft breasts and pliant form sent a surge of need through him.

"Why don't you take off your dress?" he suggested.

"Here? What if someone walks along the beach?"

The intrigue in her voice brought a smile. "Chicken? I thought you wanted to make love in a public place?"

"I was trying to shock you."

"Aw, Zoë. Does that mean anal sex is out, too?"

"We could do that?" Fascination shaded her words.

"We can do anything you want."

"I want to experience everything with you, Matt." The earnest tone squeezed his heart, and he had to swallow to get rid of the lump in his throat.

He reached behind her to tug her zipper down and peeled the red fabric away from her luscious breasts. He stroked her satin-soft skin and traced a circle around a nipple.

"Take me in your mouth," she whispered.

"Always trying to direct operations."

"You never let me take charge."

"Complaints from the stalls?" He wanted to laugh. Making love with Zoë was fun. She made everything new. He even enjoyed living with her when he'd always chafed at being in close quarters with a lover before. He stripped the clingy red dress off to reveal her lush body and slid his fingers beneath the elastic of her panties. She sucked in her breath and trembled

when his fingers branded her flesh. *His*, he thought. He drew her matching red panties down her sleek thighs and stood to rapidly remove his clothes.

Zoë smiled. A cool breeze skittered over her bare skin as she lay back and gazed up at the stars. It felt decadent, stretched out naked where anyone could see--if they carried night vision goggles. A giggle erupted. "What if someone comes along?"

"They won't see much, but if they come too close, we'll roll up in the blanket."

A tight pressure in the region of her heart told the truth. *She loved him*. She wanted to shout it out so everyone could hear, but it was too early. He was having problems adjusting to the change in their relationship. And it would get worse once Marisa spread gossip. Zoë had no doubts that she would tell everyone. Marisa seemed that sort of woman. She shoved the thought aside. "Kiss me."

"Did I tell you I brought some toys along?"

"Really? What?"

"Close your eyes."

She squeezed her eyes shut.

"Turn over on your stomach and spread your legs for me. Up on all fours."

Arousal ripped through her body immediately, making her moist and ready for him. "What are you going to do to me?"

"I'd never hurt you, Zoë."

And she knew it. She trusted him implicitly. "I know." To prove it, she rolled over on her stomach and rose up on hands and knees, her pulse hammering while she waited for his next move.

"So you're okay?"

"Bring it on."

The woven basket he'd carried rustled as he dug around inside. He settled between her spread legs while she waited in a fever of anticipation, her fingers digging into the fine sand. The sound of the waves breaking and the soft breeze caressing her bare skin drove her arousal higher. She'd known sex outdoors would be fun, but she wished he'd hurry.

He ran his fingers down her backbone before stopping to massage her butt, digging his fingers into the muscle tissue. It felt so good. She groaned, relaxing beneath his ministrations. His fingers dipped into the valley between her buttocks, then lower to part her slick folds. He cruised his finger across her clitoris, and she sucked back a mew of pleasure. He was so good

at making her hot, making her want him. She panted, tensing while she waited for more. It didn't come. Instead, she heard the wheeze of a plastic bottle. Then he touched her again, smearing her hot flesh with a cool liquid. She jerked in surprise.

"What's that?"

"Lube." He spread the lube the length of her cleft. He trailed a finger higher and teased the rosette of her anus. An arrow of heat speared the length of her body. The bottle wheezed again. A dollop of cool lube landed near the finger that massaged her rosette. She quivered. Raw need made her shift, and all she was aware of was his finger. It teased and dipped and pushed slowly into her anus.

Her heart pounded as a spear of pleasure darted the length of her body. "Matt, I like that."

"There's more." He removed his finger and a whimper of protest whispered past her lips. "Patience, sweetheart. I'll lube the plug and insert it," he said, tapping her backside. A groan escaped.

"Do that again."

"What? This?" He slapped her buttocks again.

"Yeah."

He tapped her ass again. Her cheeks stung in a good way, blood pooling where his hand had struck, but she felt empty. As if he read her mind, she heard him squeeze out more lube. Then he shifted. A soft object nudged at her anus. It slipped slowly inside, the coolness of the lube bringing a shudder of exquisite pleasure. The enjoyment gave way to an intense pressure that bordered on pain. She breathed slowly, frightened to move a muscle. It felt very different from the way she'd imagined. She bit her bottom lip and tried to stay relaxed as the feeling of fullness intensified.

He cupped her buttock with his hand, caressing her tingling cheek. "Okay?"

"Yeah." Her womb pulsed insistently as he slowly pushed the plug fully into her anus.

"Good girl." He grabbed a condom and rolled it on. He slipped between her legs, guiding his cock slowly into her wet pussy. He bit and nibbled the flesh of her neck, moving with measured strokes that made her womb clench tight. She melted at the tenderness in him. A surge of wetness met his next plunge. They rocked together in a slow dance. She felt impossibly full, yet treasured with his careful, seductive thrusts. His hands cupped her breasts, tugging at her nipples in the way he knew she liked. He

slipped his tongue into her ear, teasing the whorls and making her shudder.

“You make me feel so good,” he whispered. “Your cunt grips my cock so tightly. We’re made for each other. Perfect.”

His words brought a secret smile of satisfaction. The pleasure built, spiraling from tingles to waves. Her nerve endings vibrated until sensation ruled, and her climax crashed through her sensitized body, pulling him along with her into the maelstrom of fiery pleasure. When the contractions of her womb ceased, her body sagged, his strength the only thing keeping her upright.

Long minutes later, he pulled from her sheath and slid the plug from her anus. Rubber snapped. He turned her into his arms and kissed her gently on the lips. “You okay?”

And how. She didn’t think she’d ever be the same. “Yeah. Again?”

“I’ve created a monster.”

“An addict,” she corrected, hugging him tightly, trying to express everything she felt inside with her touch. “But only for you.” Matt was important to her. Their lips met and the fire licked her veins.

Very important.

Chapter Six

Happiness flowed through Zoë as she went about her work, serving customers, clearing tables and helping out in the kitchens whenever they needed her. The two weeks since the party had been pure bliss.

“You’ve got customers at table six,” the manager sang out.

“I’m on my way.” Zoë pulled her order pad from her black apron pocket and strode outside. Her steps faltered when she saw who it was. Marisa. Zoë inhaled deeply and continued. She had to face the woman some time.

“You,” Marisa said. Something in her face told Zoë that Marisa had known she worked here. She’d brought her friends to see the fallen woman. Like an exhibit in the zoo. Zoë bared her teeth in something resembling a smile.

“Hi, Marisa.” She shared her smile round. “Are you ready to order?”

“This is Zoë, Matt’s sister,” Marisa said in a loud voice. “They sleep together.”

It seemed to Zoë that everyone fell silent in a collective held breath. Color stained her cheeks even though she wasn’t a big blusher. Then someone knocked a teaspoon against the side of their cup, breaking the spell.

“Marisa, would you like to order?” Zoë smiled so hard her cheek muscles ached.

“I’ll have a trim latte,” one of Marisa’s friends said.

Zoë nodded and made note on her order pad, clutching the pen so hard the color bleached from her fingers. She wondered if Matt was being treated like this. Zoë’s stomach roiled. It would explain the bad moods when he arrived home from work.

“Is your brother good in bed?” the woman sitting next to Marisa asked. The women all tittered.

Zoë wanted to put them in their place but instinctively held her tongue, knowing she’d only make things worse if she reacted to the provocation. “Anyone else ready to order?”

Ten excruciating minutes later, Zoë left to deliver the order to the barista and kitchen. Part of her wanted to run, but she forced herself to

saunter off with a hip-swinging step. She did good because a group of young men at another table whistled, nudging one another when she passed.

"I heard that woman," one of the other waitresses said. "Is it true?"

"Of course not," Zoë said, but her upbeat mood had fled, replaced by distinct worry. What were she and Matt going to do?

* * * *

The front door opened and closed. "Zoë, I'm home."

"I'm out on the deck," she called.

Matt looked at the broom and pile of dust on the tiled floor and the innards of the fridge sitting on the kitchen bench and scowled. He dropped his briefcase on the floor with everything else and strode out to the deck. Zoë was sitting on a padded chair, her face upturned to the sun. She wore a brief black bikini top and jean shorts, her hair pulled back in a lopsided ponytail. The rough edges of his anger softened on seeing her smile.

"I heard you drive up," she said. "Here's a beer. I'm taking a break from cleaning."

His brows rose.

"I know the main room is a mess, but the bedroom and bathroom are spotless. I thought you'd be working late."

She lifted her face for a kiss, and his anger softened. Despite having a bitch of a time at work, he had her to come home to. He tugged at his shirt buttons and kicked off his shoes. He shrugged out of his shirt, yanked off his socks, then sank into one of the patio chairs beside her.

He'd thought the gossip would die a natural death, but if anything it was getting worse.

"My boss called me into his office today. He wanted to know about you."

Her face paled. "I didn't realize things had become so bad."

Bad. Shit, that was an understatement. "Several of my biggest clients have asked for someone else to take over their work. I told him we weren't related in any way, but he said it didn't make a difference. Gossip said different and it was hurting the company."

"But it's none of his business. It's your private life. Our private business."

"Yeah. I know. Told him that, too."

She set down her glass of wine, her brown eyes full of trepidation.

"What do you want to do? Do you want me to leave?"

"No!" He had considered it, but Zoë was part of him. Just the thought

of her leaving filled him with panic, and he'd rejected the idea without another thought. He closed his eyes, trying to think past his confusion. His boss had laid down an ultimatum, but he didn't intend to tell Zoë. He pictured his boss and recalled the man's embarrassed stammering. "Don't usually comment on a man's personal life." But he had, and now Matt had no choice. He had to choose between the career he'd always wanted and Zoë. No contest there at all.

"Matt?"

"Come here." He patted his knee.

"Said the spider to the fly?"

"Yeah," he murmured. "Wanna shower with me?"

They finished their drinks and headed for the bedroom. Minutes later they were in the shower. She soaped his back. It felt as though they'd been together forever, yet it had only been weeks. He shivered as her small hands massaged his cock. She teased his balls until they drew tighter.

Zoë or his job. Matt turned to face her. He cupped her face in his hands and stared into her beautiful brown eyes. "I love you, sweetheart. Very much. I think we should get married. What do you think?"

For a moment, she looked as though she might cry. Her eyes turned misty and her lush bottom lip quivered. "Oh, Matt. Yes. Yes! I'd love to marry you. You have the best ideas, but are you sure?"

"Very sure. I can't imagine being with anyone else but you. I don't want anyone else." His arms wrapped tightly around her, and their lips met in a kiss that affirmed their love for each other. Lips slid together, tongues tangled, and all he could think was how lucky he was to have her in his life, to shake him up a little and show him what was important. Oh, no. He didn't have a single doubt. This woman, this minx, who drove him crazy was the only one for him.

A thump on the bedroom door made them both whirl about to stare. He flicked off the water.

"Matt, are you in there?"

"It's Mum," she muttered in an appalled tone. "Did you know she was coming over? Oh, boy. I can hear her panicked shrieks of horror now."

"No." He stepped out of the shower, grabbed a towel, and wrapped it around his waist. "I didn't know she was coming. But she'll just have to get used to us being together. I don't intend to change my mind."

"Me neither." She slapped her hand to her mouth in consternation. "My clothes are in the bedroom. I'd prefer to break this gently. I don't want

to shock her.”

“I doubt it will make much difference how we tell her.” He shrugged and headed for the door, ignoring the water dripping from his body. He opened it and stepped through before closing it again. “Mum. John. You should have called.”

“Sorry, Matt. We used our key. Do you have someone in there?” his mother asked, a tinge of pink highlighting her cheeks.

“The woman I’m going to marry,” he said.

“Oh, Matt!” His mother beamed. “John, did you hear that? Our son is finally getting married. We’ll have grandchildren.”

Matt glanced at Zoë’s father, his stepfather. He wondered if the small grin would disappear when he realized it was Zoë. The hard lump of apprehension in his belly dissolved as suddenly as it had appeared. The answer was so simple. He loved Zoë. He’d been running for a while, but no longer. Marriage would slow the gossip, and eventually everyone would find someone else to discuss. They had each other. What more did they need?

“Do we know her?” his mother asked.

The bathroom door opened, and Zoë came out dressed in his robe. Her dark hair lay in damp curls around her face. Her cheeks were pale, but her firm chin indicated determination. “It’s me. Matt is going to marry me.”

“John?” Matt’s mother sounded faint.

Zoë stared at Matt. He crossed the room to stand at her side, smiling in a reassuring manner. His arm slipped around her waist. She swallowed and leaned against him. He hadn’t walked away. He’d said he loved her and more importantly, he loved her enough to ask her to marry him.

“Hi, Mum. Dad.” Zoë tried to read them. Matt’s mother was easy. Her hands trembled and her face was pale. Shocked, because a relationship between them wasn’t what she’d expected. Her father remained impassive, but he wasn’t shouting. That had to be a good sign.

“But you’re brother and sister. You can’t get married,” their mother said.

“No, that’s not true. We’re not related. There’s no impediment to a marriage between the two of us,” Zoë said, concentrating entirely on Matt.

“That’s right.” Matt smiled, his blue eyes blazing with encouragement and a hundred other emotions. “Zoë has already said yes.”

Zoë swallowed again to disperse the knot in her throat. The need for verbal reassurance shimmered through her. “You really love me?”

“I’ve always loved you, wild child, and this time I’m done running.

You're right. We're meant to be together."

"John, do something," Matt's mother said, in clear panic. "They can't get married."

"They're not related," Zoë's father said. "They're quite right about that."

"I suppose you're right," their mother said, but it was clear she needed a little more time to become used to the idea. "I guess as long as you're not rushing into things."

"We're sure. We don't need to wait," Matt said.

"That's right." Relief soared through Zoë. Everything was going to be okay. Matt loved her and intended to let everyone know. "Oh, Matt. I love you so much!" And she jumped at him, trusting Matt to catch and keep her safe. Part of her heard her father reassuring Matt's mother and telling her he'd suspected all along. Matt and Zoë would be fine. They knew what they were doing. Although their mother didn't seem totally convinced, Zoë suspected it wouldn't be long until she was muttering about grandchildren again.

She looped her arms around Matt's neck and rubbed their noses together. Then their lips met, and wild child Zoë Underwood claimed her man in no uncertain terms. They were going to have some wonderful adventures together.

The End