

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

ELLORA'S CAVE

Quickies

Naughty Nuptials

Bridesmaid and the Beast

Marianne LaCroix

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Bridesmaid and the Beast

ISBN 9781419911057

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Edited by Kelli Kwiatkowski.

Cover art by Syneca.

Electronic book Publication: May 2007

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BRIDESMAID AND THE BEAST

Marianne LaCroix

For Layne Blacque and Lea Rashard
Thank you for giving this author a few laughs.
~The Oracle

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Chapter One

"Why do bridesmaid dresses always have to be hideous?" I stood at my closet mirror, looking at myself wearing a tangerine taffeta nightmare.

I was an official bridesmaid in Celia Thompson's wedding *extravaganza* next weekend. Celia was a work colleague, and not exactly a good friend. However, she asked me to be in her wedding and being the sappy idiot that I am, I said yes. Little did I know she planned to use the occasion to embarrass every woman in the wedding party by picking out something in the color of a bright sorbet cocktail, complete with a froufrou poof skirt.

"It's not that ugly," Greg, my British hunk of burning love, said from the bed in his signature clipped accent. God, I *love* his accent.

"It is *very* ugly," I retorted. "I hate tangerine. A black woman wearing electric tangerine is not a pretty sight. Let's not even get into the white sparkly pantyhose or tangerine-dyed shoes I'm supposed to wear with it."

"Well, if it makes you feel any better, I have to wear a tangerine cummerbund and tie. Celia insisted the groomsmen matched the bridesmaids."

I groaned. "She should let you guys wear black ties and cummerbunds, and the bridesmaids black velvet."

He shrugged. "I'm not saying anything. Randy already said he hated the color and Celia broke down in tears, crying something about bridesmaids wearing black."

Why couldn't bridesmaids wear black again?

Oh yeah, bad luck. *Pfft*. As if Celia has bad luck. She is, after all, marrying Douglas Rhimes, Jr., attorney-at-law, a partner at Underwood, Brooks and Rhimes. *He's* rich and *she* knows how to spend money. It was a match made in heaven.

Celia was a receptionist at the firm and I was a legal research technician—or glorified gopher—along with one of my best friends, Cameron Knightly. I’ve worked at the firm for about three years and I helped Cameron get a position there a year ago when she earned her paralegal certificate.

Oddly enough, I found out at the company Christmas party last year that my beloved Greg was an old friend of Doug, Randy Underwood and Nigel Brooks. In fact, Doug was a former company attorney for Greg’s animal pharmaceutical company before he left to join the firm as a full partner. Small world. Anyway, that’s how Greg, Cameron and I all ended up in the wedding party.

So now I’m out two hundred dollars on a dress I will wear only once. After the wedding I intend to burn it in sacrifice to all bridesmaids who’d ever suffered through the Ugly Bridesmaid Dress Syndrome.

“I personally don’t mind. I think tangerine makes your skin look dark and sexy.” Greg seemed determined to try to cheer me up.

I glanced at his reflection in the mirror. He was a god awaiting me in bed. I hit it good when I landed Greg last Halloween night, eight months ago. I didn’t know it at the time but the British hunk was much more than he seemed when I first spied him across the bar. I fell into his arms like an unsuspecting lamb to the big bad wolf.

Only he truly *was* a wolf—a *were*wolf.

Needless to say it scared the fucking living daylights out of me. But I fell in love with him regardless, and I was willing to try to live with the fact my boyfriend was not entirely human. Of course, he claimed I was the one woman who could calm his beast, but I admit—I like it when the beast comes out to play.

“I still don’t like this dress. The designer should be shot on sight. Tangerine should be an illegal fashion color.”

“Don’t blame the designer. Celia picked it out.”

I sighed and ran my fingers across the bodice. "You can see every little roll of extra flesh on my body in this. Nothing accentuates the fact that you're...cushioned...like bright tangerine taffeta and a tulle-enhanced skirt."

Greg growled low behind me. "I like those fleshy parts on you, Sophia. They are so feminine...and sexy. Your body drives me so crazy I want to fuck you over and over."

"Even dressed in this?" I asked, turning to him.

My breath caught as he pulled back the sheet to reveal his perfect, naked body – and huge, throbbing erection. "Oh yeah."

Did I mention he was *perfect*?

"You know, I kind of like the idea that you look like a sweet, delicious cocktail. I'm wondering if you taste as good as you look. Tell me, do you have panties on, naughty little bridesmaid?" he asked with a devilish smile.

I didn't and he knew it.

And I wasn't going to actually admit it – at least not vocally.

I moved over to the bed and looked down on his toned body, all muscle and sinew...and all mine.

"I think maybe you should find out."

"Come here and fuck me."

Oh man...I wanted to climb on up on top of that sexy cock and suck its pulsing length up inside me. Oh God yeah, that's what I wanted. But I hesitated. I had on the dress I needed to wear next weekend. Ugly as it was, I needed it to be in one piece for the wedding.

"I should take off the dress –"

I moved to step away but Greg grabbed my hand with gentle power. "No, wear it," he said in a low, husky voice.

He was turned on and seeing the look of sexual hunger in his eyes, along with a hint of the beast beneath the surface, I couldn't deny him. *I couldn't*. He needed me and I loved him for it.

I climbed into bed, splaying the skirt of taffeta and tulle about his hips as I straddled him. His cock lay against the apex of my thighs and I felt a rush of excitement flow through my veins as my labia opened and creamy honey began to coat my sheath. The heat radiating from him called to me on a primal level.

He growled as I rubbed his length through my wet folds.

"You may have to tie me down before the night is over," he said in a strained voice.

"Why?" I slid the head of his cock along the entrance of my vagina, my juices flowing over his bulbous tip.

"Because as the full moon approaches, I find my drive gets more...intense."

As if I didn't know. "Mmm...I like the sound of that." I continued to tease his cock and he groaned in frustration.

"No...I can't...I don't want...to hurt you," he said, panting his words.

I stopped and looked him in the eyes. "You won't hurt me. I trust you."

"Baby..." Then he quickly leaned up and grasped my face, drawing me down to his lips for a forceful kiss. His tongue danced along mine, building a heat between us sparked by animalistic desire.

His hands were in my hair, pulling me deeper into his kiss. I was lost, floating on a sea of passion.

He rolled his hips and his cock rubbed sinuously into my sensitive folds that were aching to embrace him. Our kiss deepened, frenzied and hungry. He tasted like heady wine, intoxicating to the senses. His tongue caressed along mine as he plunged his cock into my sheath. I felt consumed, possessed, as he moved slowly inside me. I thought I would pass out from the blissful rapture.

I leaned back as I took him in, filling me to the point of no return. My muscles stretched, accommodating his size.

He bucked beneath me and I gazed down at his face. He strained for control as the beast clawed to take possession.

Digging under the tulle, he cupped my buttocks with his hands and guided my pace as I rode him. I clamped my legs tightly as he thrust into me deeper and deeper. I kissed him again as his size seemed to surge through my entire body. I felt him within every cell of my being. I was possessed by him, controlled by his whim.

I broke the kiss and, tossing my head back, tried to get a better feel of him within me as I arched backward.

His hands guided me to increase my pace. I wanted to come. I desperately wanted to come. It built inside me at the place where our bodies connected and threatened to sear us with flaming passion.

He snarled and I gazed down with hazy eyes. I saw him fighting to contain his animal. I don't know why but it totally excited me. So consumed by the moment, he was on the brink of losing control. *That is sexy.*

Colors exploded behind my eyelids as I was swept away by my first climax. Only Greg could take me to such a glorious sexual high. I loved having him inside me—I loved *him*. He was my beast.

Each thrust completed me as the spasms danced through my body, zeroing in on his cock growing inside. He came as my muscles squeezed his length and the heat was a heavenly inferno.

As he climaxed he began the change. During the euphoric height of orgasm, Greg had little control over his wolf. He howled and the sound turned from human to something out of a Thirties horror film. But I knew that sound. It was something I had learned to expect.

I clutched at his shoulders, digging my nails into his flesh. He bucked beneath me and his breathing became erratic.

Dazed by my orgasm that only now began to ease in intensity, I attempted to call him back. "Greg," I said in a soft, breathy voice. "Greg."

He thrashed on the bed but I clamped my thighs to him and rode his body's movements.

"Greg, come back."

He stilled and opened his eyes. I saw the darkness there begin to lighten. His breathing began to even out and his body calmed as he slowly became aware of his surroundings. And me still atop him with his cock inside me.

"I love you, babe," he said breathlessly.

I smiled. I could see myself loving him for the rest of my life.

But did he?

We were living together...but why hasn't he even mentioned marriage?

And since when did I *care* about marriage?

After Greg calmed I slipped out of bed, took off my dress and checked it for tears. Yep, there was one. Greg must have pulled on the tulle a bit too hard. Looks like I'll have to fix it before next weekend in addition to getting it pressed. Damn it. I was *not* the homemaker-wife-type who sews holes in socks or works over a dress with a steamer. I liked to live, party and have sex...and lots of it.

Hmm. Was *that* why Greg hadn't mentioned marriage?

I had become obsessed over this. Little Miss "I'm wearing no panties to the mall just for a cheap thrill" was suddenly wanting to get married. It had to be the stress of Celia's wedding coming up that had me a little wired. I hoped that after the wedding, I could go back to being myself and not just another bride wannabe.

Naked, I slid into bed next to Greg's sleeping figure. He slept naked too, which was a habit I liked about him. There was something glorious about nestling into the nude body of a sexy man that made going to bed welcoming.

"I wondered when you'd get back in here," he said with a sleepy laugh as he wrapped his arms about me and snuggled up to my back.

Oh dear God, the heat pouring from his skin seemed to engulf me.

And that cock nestled up against my ass was oh-so tempting.

I sighed and tried to cuddle in closer. He began to run his hands over my body. Warmth moved across my skin as he touched and caressed my hip.

"I love you," he whispered into my ear.

I couldn't help but smile. My heart leapt at his confession. It was like I'd never heard those words before. Butterflies fluttered in my stomach.

"I love you too," I said softly.

He turned me around in his arms and kissed me. His kiss was possessive, hungry...dominating. I succumbed to his strength and opened fully to him. My response only urged him further. His mouth crushed mine with a need only I could fulfill. I knew that. I was his one true mate.

I wrapped my arms about his neck, fingering his thick black hair. My breasts brushed along his lightly haired chest and I moaned into our kiss. He pulled me closer with his hands and bent his leg around mine, securing me within his embrace.

My body was on fire at every point of contact with his. I flexed my hips up against his erection and he deepened his kiss.

His tongue was demanding and I was more than willing to answer to its command. My lips tingled and I was sure they'd be swollen by morning. It was a small price to pay for the passion we shared.

I nudged my hips against him again but he denied my need—for the moment. Sliding down my body slowly, he kissed a trail along my skin. My hard, sensitive nipples grazed his chest and I whimpered. When he took one into his mouth I gasped. He caressed my breasts with his fingertips. He lavished one nipple and teased the other with his thumb and forefinger.

Grasping his head, I held him to my breast as he licked and sucked my nipple into his mouth. I cried out in delight at each pass of his tongue across the puckered point.

My fingertips traced down his neck and over his shoulders. My body worshipped his during our intimate play. This was not just a melding of flesh—it was a union of destined souls.

He lifted his body from mine and nudged my legs farther apart. “Sophia,” he whispered as he drove his cock deep into my cunt. He leaned down and kissed me, urging me to let go of my inhibitions and give in to my deepest desires.

I couldn’t get enough of his passionate loving.

He began to move in then out and back again in slow thrusts. It wasn’t urgent but gentle, heartfelt...loving. With each motion, he grew larger within me as my inner muscles caressed his hot shaft.

I held on to his shoulders with all my strength as he rode me, his pace gaining speed and strength with each thrust. Then he gripped my hips and lifted them off the bed. I bent my knees and clutched the bed sheet beneath me. With the fabric gathered in my hands, I steadied myself as he began to pump faster into me.

His cock stretched my inner walls to an extremely snug fit. I felt every inch of his length pulse with heated desire at every thrust. My body hummed with growing excitement and my pussy creamed, lubricating his every move.

Then he pulled out and moved away. I groaned, but he said, “Turn over, babe, and put your ass in the air. I want to get a good look at that sweet pussy all wet for me.”

I turned over, crouching on my knees and lifting my rear.

“Sweet ass.” He ran his hands over my buttocks, squeezing my flesh.

I closed my eyes and lent myself over to the incredible warmth of his hands across my skin.

Then he ran a finger through my sensitive folds and caressed my clit. “Sweet, sweet pussy.”

Oh God.

He reached around my hips and continued to stroke my clit as he nestled his cock against my center. I felt his squeeze some lube over my anus. With a finger, he spread the cool gel across the puckered entrance and I shivered.

He entered me and slowly pushed his way through the tight ring of muscle at my anus. I held still as my body adjusted to his size. It hurt at first but then the pleasure began to build.

He moved slowly in and out and with each push of his cock, I felt him join his body to mine in an erotic dance. He caressed my clit and filled my body—I was coming to the edge of control, losing myself in his skilled loving.

My eyes rolled back and I saw a glimpse of heaven as Greg cried out when he climaxed. I joined him in a shattering orgasm, allowing passions fueled by love to course through me like the heated cream now spurting into my body.

His cry turned into a harrowing howl as his body shifted at the peak of his orgasm. I was too lost in my own euphoria to try to stop his transformation. My body convulsed with each wave of climax and Greg rammed harder into me as he spilled his seed deep within me.

His grip on my hips tightened as his hands changed, growing large claws. His body grew and his voice altered, his cries of ecstasy turning into a triumphant howl of completion.

Thirty minutes later I lay next to Greg, now human again, in bed. The room was quiet and still, and I wondered why my heart ached. What was missing in my life? I had a good job in a prominent law office here in New York City. I lived in a penthouse with my boyfriend...

Boyfriend. At thirty-two, I was starting to dislike the term. Well, at least in reference to the man I was living with. What would I call him when I finally got around to introducing him to Mom?

No, Mom has not met Greg yet. Why? Because...because I'm lame and haven't told her much about Greg. I *did* tell her he was white, which didn't seem to upset her too much. I just hadn't gotten the courage up to tell her how serious the relationship had become between us. In other words, she knew I was *dating* a white man, she just didn't know I was *living* with him. When I finally get around to telling her, she was going to be hurt that I would shack up with my boyfriend rather than waiting for marriage.

And that was the real question – did I want to marry Greg?

I closed my eyes and thought about myself with Greg ten years from now. Yes, I could see that. I could even dream up two little girls climbing into bed with us for a Sunday morning in as a family. I smiled to myself.

I realized I had changed when I wasn't looking. I wanted *the dream*. I wanted the husband, the kids, the happy family life. But what about Greg? Did he want the dream? The dream with *me* by his side?

"Greg?" I said in a low voice.

"Hmm?" he groaned sleepily.

"I need to ask you something."

"Can't it wait until the morning?"

"No."

He turned over and faced me. His face was handsome in the dim moonlight filtering through the curtains of our bedroom. His eyes searched my face and I took a deep breath.

"Do you want to marry me?"

Silence.

Oh crap.

"What brought this up?" he asked softly.

"I don't know, maybe the wedding next week, the shower tomorrow. Lots of things."

He traced my face with a fingertip and asked, "And what do you think?"

"I don't know. We've never talked about it."

"I love you, Sophia. You're just going to have to trust me." He yawned then said in a sleepy voice, "Can we hold this conversation until later? Like when we are more awake and clear-minded?"

"I guess so." I sighed when he leaned into me and kissed my forehead.

"Good night," he said as he turned over in bed.

"Good night, Greg." I stared at the clock upon my nightstand, watching the numbers change with each minute. After ten minutes, I heard Greg's faint snore.

That's when I began to question our relationship. Why couldn't he just answer me with a direct "yes" or "no"? Was that too difficult?

Men. Can't live with them, can't live without them.

Chapter Two

The next day was Celia's bridal shower. As part of the bridal party, I was required to help organize the event. Since it was June, we opted to have the shower at Celia's mother's New Jersey Shore house at Point Pleasant Beach.

There was a beautiful view of the ocean from the lavish backyard, complete with in-ground pool. We decorated the entire backyard in white streamers, balloons and flowers. If only the weather would cooperate with the outdoor event. More clouds seemed to gather and darken with every passing moment. The wind had already picked up.

I have a bad feeling about this.

"I still don't have a date yet for the wedding next week," my friend and fellow Ugly Bridesmaid Dress Syndrome sufferer Cameron said, as we sat watching the line of women fill their plates with potato salad, barbecue buffalo wings and Swedish meatballs. Some took a celery stick or two to even out all the fatty things they were about to eat. I couldn't help but laugh to myself.

"I'm sure you'll get a date by next Saturday," I said, contemplating a taste of some of the sweets artfully arranged at the end of the buffet table. Then I thought about my fleshy parts protruding even more in that ugly tangerine nightmare. Greg may like those fleshy parts but I didn't...at least not when they poked out in a taffeta silk dress. No celery stick would even out a chocolate cream puff. Damn it.

"I thought I'd have a date by now." She was starting to sound whiny. This was very unlike Cameron.

I certainly didn't understand why the blonde goddess didn't have a date. She was so beautiful and sexy, she usually had a line of men waiting their turn. "You don't *have* to bring a date, you know. Maybe you'll get lucky with one of the groomsmen."

She snorted her disapproval. "You don't have to worry about anything, Greg *is* a groomsman. The only eligible men left are Doug's partners in the firm, Randy and Nigel. They're so connected to their cell phones and handheld computers I'll be surprised if they take the few minutes out of their schedules to see Doug and Celia get married."

"Didn't you date Randy at one point?" I asked in a whisper.

Cameron nodded. "Yeah, a true thrill a minute," she said in a sarcastic voice. "Believe me—I needed a different type of handheld after having sex with Randy. He doesn't exactly live up to his name in bed."

"Well, he's the nicest of the partners. I know Greg and Randy have been friends since they were kids."

"He *is* a nice guy, don't get me wrong—"

"He's just not the man for you."

"Right."

"What about Nigel? British accent, blond hair, blue eyes, brilliant mind, promising career...not married." *Hmmm...*

"He's totally gay."

I gasped. "I wondered about that! How do you know?"

"I saw him with some guy a few weeks ago at the movies. It was dark, so I couldn't make out who was with him. But they were totally into each other."

The image of Nigel getting cozy with some other good-looking man actually sounded yummy. Nigel was sexy and I'd always admired his ass in a nice pair of trousers that pulled across his butt when he reached for something. Okay, I admit, I purposely placed each new coffee can on an upper shelf in the office kitchen. I made sure to get a front-row seat to see that firm rear end. Oh, and then he'd use the manual can opener and his butt would shimmy with each turn. It was my ten-second thrill for the week.

"So, Sophia," Celia cooed as she walked up behind us. "How's your live-in lover? What was his name again?" She lifted a glass of wine to her lips so her three-carat diamond engagement ring was center stage. I swear you could direct a 747 jet for a landing with that high beam on her hand.

"Greg," I said in a flat voice. "He's one of the *groomsmen*." As if she didn't know.

"Oh yes, Greg. How is he?"

"He's fine."

She nodded and took another sip of her wine. It was the second hint to ask about her ring. I wasn't falling for it. Who felt like hearing the specs and history of a diamond over and over and over? Not me. I'd heard it about ten times already.

"What does Greg do for a living again?" Celia asked.

"He owns an animal pharmaceutical company." And no, I was not surprised about that. Seemed to make sense since he was part wolf himself. As a highly secret sideline, the company created specialty medications for other half-human shifters as well.

"And how long have you two been dating?"

I lifted an eyebrow. "Since last Halloween, just over seven months."

"Doug asked me to marry him after dating *three* months. We just knew we were destined to be together forever."

What was Celia trying to say, that Greg will never ask me to get married?

Cameron sensed my growing irritation so she jumped in. "And next weekend, you'll be married. A whirlwind romance. You are *so* lucky, Celia."

I could hear the fake enthusiasm in her voice.

Why the hell did I agree to be in the wedding party again? I knew Celia well enough from work, but she wasn't a bud I'd go drinking with. However, I did get the impression a time or two that she'd wanted an invite to go out to The Penthouse with Cameron and me. When she asked me to be in her wedding, I felt bad for her. Who asks

their coworkers to be bridesmaids? Lonely people without friends outside of work, that's who. So I said yes.

Little did I realize, Celia was a complete snob outside work. Or maybe it was the concept of marrying a rich, successful lawyer with his own firm that changed her into a true Bridezilla.

"You know, Sophia, Greg should pop the question soon. If you live with him too long...well, why buy the cow when you can get the milk for free?"

Or maybe Celia was a bitch, pure and simple.

Cameron began coughing, diverting the moment.

"I'll get you some water," I said then rose and stomped into the house. I was so angry I was ready to wish horror upon the lovely bride. Turns out I didn't have to.

The shower became a storm.

The sky opened up and fat drops began to fall. The party guests ran inside to escape the rain. You never saw so many women running at once, all complaining about their hair or clothes.

By the time I got through the crowd to Cameron, the rain was coming down in torrents outside. The decorations were blowing all over, white roses were airborne and streamers were pasted in mushy lumps to the concrete lanai. Not even the buffet table was immune to the sudden storm as the caterers struggled to save the food and race it inside. The canopy over the table saved most of it from getting wet but the wind was so strong, some of the shrimp puff appetizers blew right off the serving platters.

"Sometimes I wonder why I ever agreed to be in this wedding," Cameron said as she patted her skin dry with a few napkins.

"I was wondering the same thing," I said as we moved off to the side, away from the crowd of damp shower guests.

"She had no right to do that to you," Cameron added. "How fast or slow a relationship takes to progress depends on the people involved."

I sighed. Since the night before when I had asked Greg about marriage, a small voice in the back of my head echoed Celia's very words. *Why buy the cow when you can get the milk for free?* Cliché? Yes. But it did apply. Or at least, I was worried it was exactly what was happening. "She may be right, though. Greg isn't very willing to talk about marriage." I hated to admit Celia might be right, especially since she had been a total bitch when she said it.

"Sophia, I've seen you with Greg many times. He's completely in love with you." Cameron paused before adding, "I'm a bit jealous of what you two have."

"I had no idea, honey." I hugged her.

"I think it's why I'm so much more picky these days. I want someone to love me—the *real* me. Not my face or my hair or my boobs, but the person beyond the appearance."

"I never thought it was hard for you being so...gorgeous." I looked at her standing there with her skin damp and her dress clinging to her toned body. She was sexy, and I could suddenly understand her trouble with men seeing her beauty first over anything else.

Just then my cell phone rang. It was Greg.

"Hi, babe, how's the shower?" he asked.

"A total washout. And we haven't even gotten to the gifts yet."

"I'm sorry."

"No big."

"Look, I'm calling to let you know my brother Mark is flying in today for a meeting on Monday. He decided to come early to visit with us. I figured he could sleep in the spare room."

I glanced at Cameron. "How long is he staying?"

"The week I guess, maybe longer."

Mark, Greg's younger brother, was the overseas manager of the drug company. I had met him last year when we flew to London for the Christmas holiday. He was handsome, intelligent, rich, single, straight—and a werewolf. Oh well, we all have our little eccentricities. Still, he was a good catch. More than good, he was one of England's top ten most eligible bachelors, according to *People* magazine.

Then I had a scathingly brilliant idea. Okay, maybe not brilliant, but it was damn *good* at least.

I was about to play matchmaker.

* * * * *

"Hello, ladies," Greg said as he stood up from the table when Cameron and I walked into the upstairs dining area of The Penthouse. Mark and Greg had arrived earlier, reserving a table while waiting for us to drive back from New Jersey to join them for dinner. But only Greg was at the table. I assumed Mark was getting us drinks at the bar.

The Penthouse was an upscale New York nightclub. Downstairs the dance floor was already starting to fill up with dancers. The Penthouse was exclusive, and on any given night you were sure to hobnob with the prestigious and wealthy.

"Hey, isn't that Britney and Paris?" Cameron asked as she sat down at our table on the balcony.

"Those two ought to be bitch-slapped on a constant basis," I said as I squinted into the darkness toward the dance floor.

Cameron laughed with a little snort.

"Hi, Sophia...and Cameron." Mark walked up to the table from the bar with four glasses of Chardonnay.

"Hi." Cameron sounded dreamy.

I turned to her and saw her smile at him with stars in her eyes.

Yep, she was smitten instantly.

"Hi, Mark. Nice to see you again," I said as I reached for one of the glasses.

Mark sat next to Cameron and placed the remaining glasses on the table. "Thanks for letting me stay with you guys for the next couple weeks. I have a few meetings to attend and the last thing I felt like doing was sleeping in another hotel," Mark said to me.

"Oh, it's fine," I replied, but he had already turned back to Cameron and handed her a glass of wine.

"Sorry the shower turned into a storm." Greg reached for his glass and took a sip.

I shrugged. "The day was pretty much ruined. Luckily the presents were all inside the house or they would have been ruined too."

"What did you get her again?"

"Six Lenox crystal wine goblets."

"Nice."

Silence.

I took a sip of my wine. I was starting to worry. I mentioned marriage last night and now he seemed closed up tighter than a clam protecting a pearl.

We ordered our dinner and I sat quietly watching the people below on the dance floor move to the beat of the music pumping through the club. I tried to pick out the worst dancers to occupy my mind until Greg asked, "Care to dance?"

I was surprised. He hadn't asked me to dance since...since we met on Halloween last October. So I quickly agreed and he led me to the floor downstairs.

He took me into his arms as the disc jockey began to play, as if on cue, a slow song.

"I'm sorry, babe," he started.

I didn't know what to say. I was still questioned how this relationship was going to pan out.

"You wanted to talk and I just wanted to go to sleep. I'm sorry." His arms held me tighter and he nuzzled my ear, sniffing my hair. Warm tingles skittered down my back at his voice, low and soft in my ear.

"Forgiven," I sighed as I leaned into him.

"I can't take anything coming between us—like heavy silences and the dark shadows of unspoken worries. So if you need to say something, tell me."

I lifted my face to his as best as I could. He towered over me in height, something I found utterly sexy and irresistible. "I'm a little upset you haven't even broached the subject of marriage."

He caressed my cheek with his fingers. "I ask for just a little more time. Okay? Just a little."

Tears burned in my eyes. "Are you saying you're unsure about us?"

"No, I'm saying I am in the middle of a merger at work, which is why Mark is here. Now is just not a good time for me."

I nodded as a tear fell and ran down my cheek. "Okay," I agreed sadly.

"Can we go home and make love?" He kissed my cheek to wipe away my tear.

"Yes. I think Mark can take care of Cameron just fine."

"I'm pretty sure they won't need us for the rest of the night. I'll get our dinner to go and then I have a special night planned for us. Call it my way of making up to you for my idiocy from last night."

I cocked a brow at him and smiled. "What are you up to?"

"It's a surprise," he said with a devilish smile.

Chapter Three

I don't know what I expected, but it certainly wasn't a room at the Waldorf=Astoria, let alone a luxury suite overlooking Park Avenue. I was speechless as I walked through the door to our suite. We passed through a large foyer into a richly decorated living room where a bottle of champagne awaited. It was the most beautiful suite I'd ever seen. Decorated with calm pastel green and tan fabrics and elegant Queen Anne furniture, it was like walking into a living room in heaven.

"Greg, why did you do this?" I asked.

"Because I wanted to make up to you for last night."

"But a room at the Waldorf for the night?"

He took me into his arms and my heart felt lighter. "I know today was hectic for you with the shower and all. Not to mention the drive back and forth to the Shore. I felt like such an ass...I thought a night of exquisite romance was in store."

He kissed me lightly on the forehead then released me. He took my hand and led me to the bedroom. Inside I was met by a scene set for seduction. The covers to the bed were turned down to reveal shimmering silk sheets in the deepest red, and red rose petals were scattered across the soft surface.

On the bed were two pairs of black faux-fur-covered handcuffs, a black blindfold, a black velvet bag, a large red rose and a bottle of cherry-flavored warming lotion.

Oh boy, oh boy. I was going to have a fun night tonight. I cocked a brow. "What's in the bag?"

"You'll see. Now," he started, his voice becoming commanding and forceful. "You will strip for me."

He dimmed the light and moved to a chair on the far side of the bed. I watched him sit down and position himself to watch me undress.

“Don’t make me tell you twice,” he commanded.

I had played this game before with Greg. He wanted submission and was prepared to demand it from me.

I turned my back on him and let him see me unzip my dress that I’d worn to the shower. I started slow but he interrupted.

“I said strip, not perform a striptease. I want to see the honey gleaming on your cunt.”

I turned my head to look at him from the corner of my eye. “More demanding than usual, don’t you think?”

“Don’t question, just take off your clothes — *now*.”

I disliked the overly dominant role he was playing but I complied. He’d gone through a lot of planning for me tonight. And how could I deny my excitement when my body hummed to life from the heated look in his eyes?

I quickly disposed of my dress and then my bra and panties. I stood in the room naked except for my black strappy high heels. I began to bend to take them off but his voice stopped me.

“Leave them on.”

I stood before him nude in the cool air-conditioned room, and I was on fire. My skin burned to have him touch its smooth surface. I wanted desperately to touch my clit and answer the ache growing there.

“Spread your legs a little.”

I did and I moaned. I was wet and willing.

“Close your eyes,” he commanded gently.

I followed his order and stood motionless. My breathing quickened as I thought of Greg touching my body, giving me pleasure like only he could.

I heard him move from the chair and walk about the room—then he stopped behind me. He leaned forward and I felt the heat from his body close to mine.

“Tonight is about you, only for your pleasure,” he said in a low voice, his lips right next to my ear. “Do you trust me?”

I shivered when I nodded. When had this night turned into a lesson in trust? I *did* trust him, how could he even question that?

Just then a whisper of silk was placed over my eyes.

“You will learn to trust me *completely*. You will give your body to me tonight to do with as I wish. Do you trust that I will not hurt you?”

“Yes.”

“Do you trust me to give you pleasure?”

I shivered again. “Yes.”

“And if the beast within me emerges, do you trust him to never hurt you?”

I hesitated. I took a split second to think.

He let the question go unanswered. He took my hand to lead me. “Come,” he said. I felt the bed against my legs and stopped. “Lay down on your back on the bed.”

He helped me lie down and then I waited.

Silence.

Then he touched my wrist and wrapped something soft about it.

Click.

The handcuffs. I gasped. He positioned my arm to stretch over my head.

Click.

I began to panic.

“Relax,” he said softly.

He secured my other wrist to the headboard with the other set of faux-fur cuffs. My breathing was rapid as my fear built. Blind and bound, I had never been in such a helpless position before. I wasn't sure I liked it. I like to keep *some* control.

"The point is to give control to me," he said as if reading my mind. Or maybe he read my body language as I fought to remain calm.

"I'm not sure about this," I admitted in a shaky voice as I tested the handcuffs' hold about my wrists.

"You are going to have to trust me. Now just relax."

Sightless and secured, I had little choice but to trust Greg. I *did* trust him. I love him.

Soft music began to play, one of my favorite New Age instrumentals I like to listen to at night when reading a book. He knew what music relaxed me.

"I bought something special for tonight."

I waited in silence but my body raged with growing need. My pussy was wet and ready and my skin tingled, anxious to be touched.

"Spread your legs. I have a gift for that pretty pussy."

Okay, now I was wondering what he was up to. However, I opened my legs and let my labia gape open. I could smell the feminine scent of my honey.

"I'm about to put a bullet into your sweet cunt. I will control how fast it will vibrate within you. If I sense you are getting too excited too quickly, I will turn down the speed or turn it off."

I groaned. I have vibrators, but I was the only one who'd ever used them on me. My heart skipped at the thought of Greg controlling one for me.

"It may be cool at first because of the lube but your body will warm it, and when I turn it on—you are going to *soar*."

Oh man.

His fingers spread my folds and then I felt Greg slide the bullet into my channel. I gasped at the cool feel of it against my inner walls but just as he'd promised, it quickly warmed.

And then he turned it on.

Boo-ya!

"This is speed one," I heard him say through the mist of euphoric pleasure. That little bullet packed a punch. "Just imagine what high is like."

The little bullet pulsed within me and I swear my lungs stopped working for a moment as I was swept away in the sensation.

"Like it, babe?" he asked.

"Oh yeah." I was breathless.

It continued to pulse at a slow rate as Greg moved on to his next phase of seduction.

I lay in silence with only the sound of the bullet vibrating...waiting.

Then I smelled the fragrant scent of a fresh rose. I felt the silken petals trace my face, down my nose to my nostrils and over my lips. Then I felt the rose continue to map my skin by trailing down my neck to my chest. There the rose skittered over the curve of my breasts and then teased one nipple to a hard point. I gasped as the skin reacted instinctually to the delicate touch.

I thought Greg would tease my other nipple with the rose but instead felt him lie down next to me in the bed. Then his mouth covered the neglected nipple and he suckled. I groaned as he drew the pebble-hard flesh into his mouth.

When he released the now-sensitive nub, I whimpered at the loss. I arched my back for more but he denied me.

That bullet helped me build toward climax but it just wasn't fast enough. I wanted more, faster, harder. I wanted to come. But he wouldn't let me. He chuckled as though sensing my thoughts.

Once again the rose was traced over my skin, down between the valley of my breasts to my abdomen before encircling my navel.

“I love your body,” he said in a husky voice. “I love how dark your skin is, like fresh-brewed cappuccino. Creamy, smooth...delicious.”

I decided to not respond. I was holding on to my thread of control, but only barely. He was in control and if he wanted me to talk, he’d say so. I’d played this master-submissive game with Greg enough to know the rules, even though sometimes I’d break them. Of course, “punishment” for such little mistakes was fun.

Mmm...

The rose tickled my abdomen in the most seductive way while that bullet—oh God! He turned it up to the next speed setting. A bit faster in the rolling pulsation but not quite fast enough for my liking. At least, not fast enough to give me quick relief. He was going to prolong that...damn it. I was starting to feel tortured.

Greg stroked the rose down to the apex of my thighs then back up my body. It caressed my skin, everywhere but the exact point of pleasure that ached for a touch—my clit. I was greedy. I wanted it all to be caressed and touched.

“Greg...” I sighed as I began to approach my climax.

Then it stopped.

Everything—the bullet, the rose. *Fuck.*

I lay in frustration as I felt Greg rise from the bed. I heard him walk about around me, his shoes scuffing across the carpeting from one side of the room to the other. Then I heard him unzip his pants. He was undressing. My pussy wept in anticipation around the still-embedded bullet.

Hot sex honey.

I couldn’t help my reactions, my back arched and my hips rolled from side to side. I wanted that bullet to be turned on again. I wanted *him*. And the evening was only beginning. My clit throbbed and I bit my lip to try to suppress my needy cries.

He moved across the room to the bed. I sensed him standing there, examining me, helpless. "Tonight I want to hear you beg me to relieve your needs."

I was confused. "I do that almost *every* night."

"Not how *I* want to hear it. I want to tease your body, make you burn through the night on the edge of ecstasy until you feel like you will die unless I fuck you."

Dear Lord, what have I gotten myself into? "I'm not so sure I like the sound of this, Greg."

"As my submissive lover tonight, you have no say in the matter. At any point, you can end the entire game by just asking me to stop."

"Is that all?"

"Yes. Trust me."

A night of pleasure from passionate torture. I still wasn't sure I'd like it but I was naked and handcuffed and humming—what could I do? I wanted to prove to him that I *did* trust him. And this was a test of that trust. I had to answer his fantasy—and probably create a few for myself.

The mattress sagged by my feet as he climbed onto the bed. I wondered what he'd do but didn't have to wait long. I heard him open and close what sounded like the cap to a bottle, then the brisk sounds of his palms rubbing together. Then he placed his palms upon my lower legs and began to massage them.

The lotion was warm at first but as he rubbed it into my skin, it increased in temperature. A sizzling heat glided across my skin with each pass of his hands upon my body. He rubbed my lower legs and feet carefully, lifting each into his hands, one at a time. When the lotion was applied to my toes, he lifted my foot to his mouth and blew across the surface. I didn't realize the toes were an erogenous zone—until now.

He kissed my toes and I was lost in the simple pleasure of his attention to detail. When he sucked my little toe into his mouth, I groaned. I was beginning to realize why

some people had foot fetishes. Throughout my body I experienced each pass of his tongue over my toes.

He eventually moved from my feet and continued his erotic massage up my legs to my hips. I felt the heat of his body over mine and I wanted to reach up and pull his weight down upon me.

“Open your legs for me,” he whispered.

I complied and was anxious to have him pay attention to my pussy like he had to my toes. He slowly poured more lotion over my labia and gently rubbed it into my skin and over the trimmed thatch of my sex.

He spread my nether lips with his fingers and dabbed the lotion onto the straining head of my clit. His touch was so gentle it barely touched my skin, yet his fingers danced across me like I was his cherished sexual instrument. He could strum my body into heights of pleasure and he knew just how to bring about my best performance.

My sex now coated with the warming lotion, he leaned over my center and blew across the moist skin, heating the surface further. I thrashed my head, wishing I could see him drive me wild. I pulled at the cuffs in a vain attempt to free myself so I could urge him to lick my throbbing clit.

“Greg, please,” I begged.

“Much too early,” he replied in a stern voice.

He then lowered his mouth to my clit and teased the tip with his tongue. *Demon*. I was going to be insane by midnight at this rate.

I climbed to the edge of control, and as if sensing the approach of my climax again, he backed away. He then continued his massage of my body—my arms, fingers, shoulders, breasts.

My breasts seemed to be his preferred piece of anatomy. He spent a long time rubbing the lotion into my skin. Across my nipples he blew warm air, and their tips hardened further. I was in agony.

Then he turned that bullet on to pulsate inside my channel.

Oh God!

Again and again he touched me, caressing my body, seducing my senses. Hours seemed to pass as my body climbed to the precipice only to be denied again and again. I pulled at the handcuffs so much my wrists began to hurt. I didn't care. I wanted to end the torture.

I needed to come. I wanted to feel ecstasy as he fucked me. I had to. I *needed* to.

When he positioned himself between my legs I thought my wish was about to come true. But he only used my juices to coat his cock as he slid himself through my folds.

Torture.

I was coming to the end of my patience. The very end of my tolerance.

No, correction—I am *there*.

"Greg, stop! Please stop. I can't take this anymore. Every time I'm close to coming, you ease off. Please, I beg you...fuck me. Fuck me *now*. Hard. Fast. However you want to do it, just *do it* and stop torturing me!" My voice edged on the pathetic, I knew, but after hours of this, I couldn't take it anymore. My body was on fire, I had to come. Now.

"I was waiting for you to say stop about an hour ago."

"What?"

"I told you that you could ask me to stop."

I groaned. "Uncuff me, turn me over and fuck me."

"Very well."

He released my wrists and my arms ached from being unable to move for so long. I didn't care. Damn it, I didn't want to wait any longer, my clit was throbbing for a conclusion.

I turned onto my stomach, bent my knees and raised my ass into the air. I still had the blindfold on. No time to remove it, I needed cock. "Fuck me *now*."

I didn't have to wait beyond that. He moved behind me and I felt him pour cool lubricant over my rear. My eyes welled up behind that blindfold as I realized he was about to butt-fuck me into orgasm. Oh yeah...baby like that.

The bullet's speed was turned up again and I was approaching my threshold when he slowly pushed his cock into my anus.

"Oh God!" I cried out as I grasped the pillow and braced myself.

"Babe, I won't take long. You're so tight!" He began to push farther into me and I was quickly rising to another height of intense pleasure.

He held my ass steady as he moved in and out of me. We were fueled by raw passion. I needed *him*, he needed *me*. It was a simple equation that had only one answer.

Orgasm.

I reached for my climax but I wanted to come with him. He was getting ready, so I tried to hold off a few seconds longer. The room filled with the smell of cherry lotion and sexual desire. The only sounds heard were heavy breathing and the wet friction of skin against skin as Greg's pace became faster as he approached his climax.

At his yell I let go, floating in orgasmic euphoria. My body shuttered and quaked while I rode my climax in unison with my lover, my Greg.

Colored splashed behind my eyes with the intense power of my orgasm. I screamed out his name in abandon and he howled – then began the change.

He pulled his cock out of me as the beast gained dominance over Greg's body. I had seen it a number of times but I was still amazed by the process.

I scooted toward the headboard and pulled off my blindfold, pulling the bullet out as well. There before me was Greg's wolfen side, bursting to the surface. His face transformed and his body gained mass. Hair began to cover his body and his hands mutated into large claws.

Greg was a hybrid werewolf, and sex brought the beast to the surface. Usually I could coax him from fully transforming, but this time there was no chance to intervene.

Once the transformation was complete, he stood at the foot of the bed staring at me. His breath was quick and erratic. I needed to calm him.

“Come to bed and lie down with me,” I said, offering a hand to him, my breath still catching up with the rapid beat of my heart.

He stood, unsure of his next move. The beast’s blood demanded the hunt but the human side—Greg’s soul—needed to reclaim his body.

“Greg, I know you can hear me, understand me. Come to me and sleep with me.”

He snarled but reached out his claw to my hand. I grasped his claw and urged him to recline on the bed.

When he relented and lay down, I curled up to his massive body and stroked the soft hair upon his chest. “I love you,” I whispered to him.

He wrapped his arms about me and sighed. And as I felt him begin to relax, I smiled.

There was nothing more satisfying than the love of a good man—or werewolf.

Chapter Four

A week had passed since my romantic bondage night at the Waldorf=Astoria. In fact, if I could be anywhere else right now, I'd be lying in that bed with Greg torturing me with licks and kisses again. However, today I had to play another part other than werewolf lover. I was a bridesmaid.

It was the day of the wedding and I wished it was over. I'd had enough of the whole thing. Last night we had a rehearsal and Greg didn't come. He said he was busy. Busy on a Friday night? He never worked beyond five o'clock on a Friday, so what was so important to miss the rehearsal and subsequent dinner? Luckily Cameron was there. Apparently Mark was busy too, so Cameron and I pretty much paired off and had a bit too much wine. We had a lot of fun though.

At nine in the morning, I woke up to one heck of a hangover. I think my head hurt more from all the laughing than the wine.

I was slow to get going, but then Cameron was slower. I spent the night over at Cameron's so we could get ready for the ceremony together. We were set for a hair and nail appointment at eleven and the salon was closer to Cameron's apartment.

Besides, I was still a little angry with Greg for skipping the rehearsal.

After our appointment, we headed back to Cameron's apartment and got ready to leave for a luncheon at Celia's parents' place. We opted to carry our bridesmaid dresses with us and change after lunch.

A limo pulled up to the building shortly before one and we were off.

When we arrived, we were joyfully greeted by Celia's mother and two of her cousins—Karen, another bridesmaid, and Joan, the maid of honor. In only minutes, I realized why everyone was so joyous. The punch was spiked. Celia was feeling no pain.

"Mrs. Thompson, this juice is spiked," I whispered to Celia's mother.

"I know, dear. Celia was having an attack of the nerves this morning and I had to do something to calm her down."

Great.

We ate a nice buffet lunch but kept away from the punch. Cameron at one point whispered to me, "This is going to be an unforgettable wedding."

It was two o'clock and half the bridal party – including the bride, the bride's mother and the bride's father – was inebriated.

I was afraid the unforgettable wedding was going to turn into a three-ring circus, with me in clown alley. At least I had the dress for it.

We got dressed and ended up helping Celia with her gown. Cameron and I were the only ones sober enough to button up the bodice.

Alone with the bride, we got a clear picture that this was *not* just a case of wedding-day nerves.

"I can't believe it..." Celia sniffed then blew her nose. "I planned this for months and *now* he says...says..." She broke into a crying jag as she sagged onto a chair.

Okay, so she found out something about her fiancé...another woman?

"Celia, are you sure you want to go through with the wedding?" I asked her calmly while laying a reassuring hand on her arm.

"Mother says I have to, it's too late now."

"It is *not* too late." What the hell happened? I wanted to pry but I didn't want to seem insensitive.

"He told me last night he's been having an affair for the past six months."

Cameron gasped from behind Celia. My mouth shot open.

Celia continued. "He says he loves him."

"Wait, excuse me? *Him*? Are you saying...?"

Celia dried her eyes and looked up at me. "Doug is having an affair with Nigel."

Oh. My. God.

"He says he's discovered that he is bi, and that he loves Nigel. He said he was confused and needed time to sort things out before marrying me."

I just stared at Celia and her reddened eyes. Meanwhile, behind Celia, Cameron was trying to control her urge for hysterical laughter.

"Why does your mother want you to go through with this?" I asked.

"I couldn't tell her exactly *why* I wanted to stop it. It's too embarrassing! I don't care if he prefers men, it's just...he prefers a man over *me*."

"So she *does* think it's just nerves," I mused aloud.

Celia nodded.

"It sounds like Doug isn't even going to show up at the wedding, Celia. You have to tell them...tell everyone at the church and cancel everything."

"No, I don't want to do that." She was becoming emotional again.

I sat and thought about it. "I'll do it for you."

"No, that isn't it."

"Then what?"

"I'm in love with Randy. He wants to marry me. Today."

Oh, this just keeps getting better and better.

"Does your mother know how you feel about Randy?" I asked.

She shook her head.

"Okay, so let me get this straight. You're set to marry Doug today. However, he told you last night he's in love with another man and is confused—but that's not *your* problem. You have a secret amour with Doug's law partner, Randy, and now you love *him* and *he* wants to marry you." My head was beginning to throb.

Celia nodded. "He asked me to marry him when I went to him after Doug told me about his affair."

"All we have to do is swap a groomsman for the groom," Cameron said as she crouched down next to Celia. "Don't worry. Sophia and I will take care of everything."

The girl brightened. "You will?"

"Yes." Cameron looked up at me. "Right?"

I smiled. "Right. But first, I want you to start drinking some black coffee and sober up. You don't want Randy to see you stumble down the aisle, do you?"

The next hour flew by quickly. Cameron and I went to work sobering up everyone with coffee before having a chat about the groom and the latest developments. Surprisingly, Celia's mother was pretty understanding, apparently having suspected something between Randy and her daughter. That helped ease the blow.

Of course, the fact Randy was the senior partner at the firm was a special bonus on his part.

Then I called Greg and told him what was going on.

"She's marrying Randy instead of Doug?" Greg asked incredulously.

"Long story. Ask Randy to fill you in."

By three o'clock, Celia was a changed woman. She was happy, the true blushing bride. I thought I might actually be able to like her.

Why buy the cow when you can get the milk for free? Her words from the shower rang through my head.

Damn it, I couldn't think about that now.

We arrived at the church by quarter to four in the afternoon—fifteen minutes before Celia was supposed to walk down the aisle. Cameron and I walked in to face the families and guests gathered for the wedding.

"Doug show up?" I asked Greg quietly when I walked up the aisle to check on things.

"Nope. Neither has Nigel." Greg looked handsome in his tux. If only he could ditch that damn tangerine bow tie and cummerbund.

"Do they know there's been a change?" I asked, indicating the church audience.

"No. Randy has been a wreck since I got here. He thought Celia was going to marry Doug still."

"Lovely," Cameron said, appearing at my side.

"He's trying to bounce back quickly though. He's been calling his family to come to the church. Luckily, most of them are in the area."

"We've got to tell everyone what's going on," I said. Cameron and Greg both looked at me. I guess that means I'm volunteered. "I mean, *I* have to tell them what's going on."

I climbed up to the microphone at the pulpit and tapped the surface. An electric squeal and thumping over the speakers turned all eyes on me and the room fell silent. *Oh God.*

"Uh...hello everyone." I was immediately nervous and images of me passing out filled my mind. But I took a deep breath and went on. "Ladies and gentlemen, I have a little announcement to make before the ceremony gets started." *Little? Deep breaths.* "We *were* here today to witness the union of Celia Thompson and Doug Rhimes. But that will *not* be happening."

The crowd gasped in unison.

Another deep breath. "Instead, I welcome you all to stay and share in the celebration of the union of Celia Thompson and Randy Underwood."

Another gasp resounded through the church.

"Thank you and good afternoon." I quickly ended my speech and practically ran down the pulpit steps only to trip on the carpet in those hideous tangerine-dyed shoes.

"Smooth, Sophia," Cameron quipped as she caught me.

"I just wish this day was over. This has been above and beyond the call of a bridesmaid's duty."

By four o'clock half the church had emptied out, Doug's friends and family having awkwardly vacated. However, Randy's family mobilized and most of them made it to

the church on short notice. Thanks to the priest, who allowing them to delay for an hour to make the necessary changes and allow time for Randy's family to arrive, the ceremony was underway by five. Celia walked down the aisle to her waiting groom, Randy Underwood. Doug and Nigel were not in attendance. Randy had substituted the AWOL groomsman with one cousin, and passed off his own groomsman duties to another.

As I stood by and listened to the vows, I glanced over to Greg. The entire room of people disappeared about us and I felt sure there was something different about him. A lighter aura, somehow.

After Celia and Randy said their vows, there was a collective sigh of relief from the audience. I think Celia's mother and father were the most relieved.

Paired with Greg, I began to walk with him slowly down the long aisle to the receiving line.

"You look absolutely beautiful."

"Thank you for helping. I wasn't sure we'd make all the changes before everything was to begin."

"No problem." He leaned in and whispered, "Randy's like me."

I shot him a glare and he nodded. Randy was a shifter, a werewolf. "Does Celia know?"

He straightened and shrugged. "Possibly. It won't matter. They're in love. Just like us."

I stopped and the remaining wedding party members following closely behind nearly slammed into us. I didn't care. I needed to settle this. "Okay, Greg, I need to know, right here, right now..." My voice began to rise in decibels.

The music died and the entire church stood in silence as they watched the drama unfold. Nothing like a reality television episode being played out live and in person.

I couldn't help it. The wedding brought out every doubt in my mind about Greg's intentions. I was frustrated and I needed an answer!

"Sophia, don't—"

"Do you *ever* intend to ask me to marry you?"

"Uh, Sophia...I don't think this is the time or place to discuss this."

"It's *never* the right time or place. Answer me. Stop avoiding the question. Do you want to marry me?"

Greg scanned the crowd, now hanging on our every word. He suddenly seemed nervous. He breathed deeply and exhaled slowly.

"Sophia," he started. "I can't imagine spending my life with any other woman on this Earth. I found you and thank God every day that you want to be with me. Last night, Mark and I drove down to Philadelphia to visit your mom and dad. I wanted to ask them for permission to marry you."

"You went to see my parents?" I couldn't believe it. I stood stunned, staring at him.

"Yes. Call me old-fashioned but I was taught to ask the prospective bride's parents for their daughter's hand before proposing."

"And what did they say?"

He reached inside his coat and pulled out a small black velvet box. "They said they approved only if you said yes." He went down onto one knee and lifted the box before me. He flipped open the lid to reveal a beautiful diamond solitaire ring. "Sophia...will you marry me?"

Tears burned my eyes. He had intended to marry me all along.

"Well, babe? Will you have me as your husband?"

I began to cry as I nodded. "Yes! Yes, I will!"

The crowd burst into cheers as Greg pulled the ring from its velvet bed and slipped it onto my finger.

He stood then took me into his arms. When the crowd clapped for a kiss, he pressed his lips to mine and I relaxed into his arms.

Yes, this wedding was unforgettable.

* * * * *

We rode in a limo with the others members of the bridal party. Everyone was so excited for us. I could hardly believe it. Greg held me tightly to his side and didn't say much as Cameron, Karen and Joan all gushed over my ring.

"It's about time you asked her," Cameron joked to Greg.

When we arrived to the reception, the others got out of the limo but Greg kept hold of my hand to stay behind. He reached over and closed the door, locking it.

"What?" I asked, seeing the driver get out of the limo, leaving us behind—alone. A glance at Greg's small smile and I knew the driver been paid—and paid well—to give us some privacy.

He pulled me into his arms and kissed me, then said, "I wanted to ask you tonight after the reception. I hadn't planned on doing it in the church right after Randy and Celia's wedding."

"I'm sorry. I was upset."

"I want you to know I had intended to ask you for weeks, I just wanted to have the ring and then approach your parents. I thought about waiting, to suggest we meet your parents for dinner next weekend, but I sensed you were starting to think I didn't want to marry you. So I skipped the rehearsal to drive down to Philly. I wanted to be sure your mom and dad met me before I asked you."

"Thank you for that. It means a lot."

"Though I think your dad was surprised."

"Surprised by what?"

"That I would ask for permission to marry you. I guess it's something people don't do much anymore. He told me that he respected me for doing so."

I smiled. My heart felt like it would burst with love for Greg. I was a lucky woman.

I kissed him, slowly and deeply. Then I whispered, "Please, make love to me."

"Right now? Right here?"

"Yes. I need to feel you inside me. I need you."

He placed a hand upon my thigh and felt his way up to my hips then laughed. "No panties again, Sophia?"

"Well, in my defense, I had on pantyhose but then I got a runner and took them off. And you don't wear panties with pantyhose. So..."

He laughed as he hugged me. "I get so turned on when I find you being naughty." He began caressing my trimmed thatch.

"I wasn't being naughty intentionally." Oh God, Greg knew how to pet me into submission.

"It's those times when it's completely by accident that drive me wild the most." His thumb passed over my clit and I whimpered. "I love the little sounds you make when you get all excited." He circled my sensitive nubbin with his thumb and I leaned back against the leather seat in surrender.

"Sophia," he said huskily as he unzipped his pants.

This may have to be a quickie but damn—it felt so deliciously wonderful. He entered me and I cried out. His body covered mine, pressing into me, possessing me. I loved the feel of his body on mine. He kissed me, his tongue tasting and laving my mouth. I closed my eyes, absorbed by pure emotional and physical pleasure. I answered his urgency with a passion and a thirst that needed to be quenched. I was desperate for him to fill me with his seed, like a woman denied.

His thrusts were forceful yet controlled. His pace was fast as he gave himself over to the desire. He grunted with each thrust and I answered with moans. I loved it. I love *him*. He needed to have me and I wanted him to take me, hard and fast.

I opened my eyes to see his face was changing as he neared his climax. His loving became rougher but I didn't care.

Then he howled as his body joined mine in orgasm. The sound was the call of a wolf claiming his mate. Not much else broke through to my mind as I rode out the spasms of my muscles surrounding Greg's cock, squeezing every drop of his seed into me.

I clutched my arms about his neck and shoulders as he continued to pump into me. "Greg," I whispered.

His body's convulsing ebbed some as I stroked his back and told him softly how much I loved him.

His breathing evened and he lifted his body from mine. "You may not like this tangerine dress but I love it."

I made a face. "Why?"

"Because I've been able to make love to you several times in it."

"The style isn't too bad if you like tulle. But the color..."

"Maybe you should ask Celia to be your matron of honor and then *she'll* have to wear tangerine."

We laughed and adjusted our clothes then lay back on the limo seat to calm down.

"You know, I'm not so sure I want to do the big wedding thing," I said.

"No? I think your family would like it."

"I'm sure they would, but I'm not thrilled about it. Being in Celia's wedding...it's all the wedding chaos I can take for a lifetime."

"I'll tell you what, we'll make our wedding a small affair with just close family and friends."

"How small is *small*?"

"Less than two hundred people."

Two hundred? "That isn't small! That's huge."

He turned to me and smiled. "We can get a wedding planner to do everything. Besides, I promise to take you anywhere you want to go for our honeymoon afterward."

"That's blackmail."

He laughed. "Sort of."

I thought about it. Didn't take me long to figure out where I wanted to go. "I want to go on a cruise to Jamaica."

"Jamaican cruise it is."

Epilogue

It has been six months since Celia and Randy's wedding. Greg and I were married in October on the one-year anniversary of our meeting—Halloween. We had a beautiful wedding and I opted to spare my bridesmaids and matron of honor from the Ugly Bridesmaid Dress Syndrome. They wore classic black gowns and carried peach-colored roses. I wore a simple white silk gown and my bouquet held matching white roses.

The wedding proceeded smoothly and after the reception, we flew down to Florida to take our cruise to Jamaica.

Can you believe I still have that tangerine nightmare dress from Celia's wedding? I wanted to donate it to Goodwill but Greg refused. Apparently, it drives him crazy with want for me. How can I give away a dress that gets me lots of great sex? I can't, but then I won't wear it in public. I still think it's hideous.

Celia and Randy seem to be doing well. I did get a frantic phone call from Celia the day after her wedding night, babbling about Randy's *special abilities*. Apparently Randy told her that Greg was a shifter too. I immediately told her the definite benefits of having sex with a wolfie—it was very explosive, every time. She liked hearing that—then anxiously got off the phone to see if it was true. I didn't see her again until after her honeymoon and she had the biggest smile on her face. Yep, wolfies are great lovers.

Nigel and Doug broke up not too long after Celia's wedding. Apparently, Nigel was also having an affair with Doug's personal trainer. The soap opera never ends.

Cameron and Mark are still dating, though it's been hard since he lives in London. But from what I hear, they won't be dating much longer. Mark is planning to propose to Cameron on Christmas.

I have a special gift for Greg for Christmas too. I'm six weeks pregnant.

I've heard sex is even better when you're expecting. I'm anxious to find out. Bring on the handcuffs and warming lotion!

About the Author

Multi-published author Marianne LaCroix lives in the American south in the land of cotton and mint juleps. She's an active member of the RWA in the ESPAN, GothRom, Passionate Ink, and First Coast Romance Writers chapters. She's had several recognitions for her writing including a Romantic Times BOOKClub Reviewer Choice nomination. Her tastes run to the alpha male with a dark streak in the form of a vampire, shape-shifter or other tortured-soul type. When not writing, Mari can be found with her twin toddler girls and her husband of eleven and half years.

Marianne welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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