



FELICITY HEATON
IN HEAT

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Felicity Heaton

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Chapter 1

“Don’t fight it.” A deep, silken male voice echoed around her. The feel of his fingers ghosting over her arms, across her back, tickling her shoulder blades, made her shiver with delight. How did he think she’d have the will to fight him?

She never did.

She turned, desperate to catch a glimpse of his face in the low-lit room. She never managed to see it. He was always a mystery to her, always eluding her.

His nails scraped down her arms as he came up behind her, his breath hot against her neck. It turned her skin sticky, adding to the already stifling heat of the room. Her stomach tightened, clenching with arousal as his hands glided over her torso. His fingers raised the hem of her camisole, bunching the material as he explored her bare skin at an achingly slow pace.

She arched into him, rubbing her backside against his groin and feeling his desire. He was hard for her, pressed firmly into the crack of her ass. One hand came down to her hips, pulling her back as he ground into her, showing her just what was to come and making moisture pool in her panties. She groaned, tilted her head to one side and tried to look over her shoulder at him.

A low rumble reverberated through her. It was a liquid purr that she felt in every inch of her body. She shifted her backside against his length, eliciting a deeper rumble from him, and smiled to herself over the effect she had on him. The hand on her stomach snaked up to her

breasts, slipping under the camisole. She closed her eyes as his fingers teased and tortured her right nipple. He ghosted his other hand back up her arm, light enough that goosebumps followed in the wake of his touch. He swept his fingers over her shoulder and slipped the strap of her camisole down over it, caressing her as he went.

His mouth was warm and satiny against her skin as he kissed her shoulder. He licked and tasted her, teasing her neck with blunt teeth, and turning the tightness in her belly into an inferno. She brought her hand around, holding his hip as he ground against her backside.

The only sound in her ears was their combined breathing, hot and heavy, panting as they moved against each other.

Her heart thundered, racing away with her, and she gave herself over to the tempo of it.

His tongue swept along her earlobe as hers wet her lips. Her brows furrowed and she moaned, rolling her head to one side and bringing her other arm up. She reached over behind her and ran it through his short thick hair. It was like velvet beneath her touch and she buried her fingers into it, feeling the softness and losing herself in the sensations flooding her.

He purred again.

She opened her eyes and looked down at his hand as he slid it into the waist of her panties. How had she got so naked?

The thought fled her mind when his hand edged lower.

She bit her lip in anticipation of his touch, willing him to move faster before she exploded with need.

He nipped at her ear and she groaned.

Her eyes almost shut.

They flew wide when she saw the black fur erupt on his arm.

“Don’t fight me,” he whispered. “We were meant to be.”

Kim shot up in bed, the buzzing alarm jarring her senses and the sound of the city streets below telling her that morning had come. She breathed heavily, struggling to level her heartbeat and steady herself. She pressed her hand against her chest. It was sticky with sweat. Her camisole top was soaked.

Taking deep breaths, she kept one hand pressed against her chest and propped herself up on the bed with the other. The thin summer sheets stuck to her damp skin. She looked at the big sash window, welcoming the cool morning breeze that was coming in through it and silently thankful that she’d opened it last night before dozing off.

She stared distantly at the red brick building opposite and remembered the dream.

They were coming more frequently now. She didn’t know whether it was some kind of sign or not. If it were a sign, it was probably just her body telling her that she really needed to get a boyfriend.

Flopping back onto the bed, she turned the alarm off and stretched her arms out by her sides.

The dreams weren't just getting more frequent; they were getting hotter.

She sighed out her breath and closed her eyes, letting the lingering pleasure from her dream wash through her. She just wished for once that she'd see his face, or at least find some sort of completion. It was always achingly slow, so slow that nothing really ever happened. He'd touch her like no other man had, stir feelings in her that made her dizzy with desire, and then she'd wake up.

The man on the radio announced that today was going to be the hottest day of the year. She groaned. London in the heat was horrible.

Slipping out of bed, she padded across to the bathroom. She stared at herself in the mirror. The white tiles of the bathroom made her look deathly pale. Dream guy was probably way out of her league anyway. With a sexy deep rumble of a voice like he had, and those painfully skilful hands, he was definitely not going to be real. Even if he was, she wasn't pretty enough to catch a guy like him.

Her whole life she'd been told she was plain.

She frowned at her reflection, pulling her sweat-soaked long dark brown hair back and tugging a couple of strands free. She smiled. Grinned. Frowned. Widened her eyes a little, until the white showed around her rich chocolate irises.

Dropping her hair, she wrinkled up her nose and pressed it. Pulled her bottom lip. Pouted.

Maybe she was plain. Sometimes she thought she was pretty. Her teeth were straight. So was her nose. Her brows were nicely arched and fine. She had an oval face and wasn't super-slim, but not fat either. She prodded her sides and swallowed hard when she remembered dream guy's hands all over her.

Sighing at herself, she stripped off and looked at the digital clock stuck to the mirror. There wasn't time for a bath this morning. She sighed and looked over at the shower. Her parents had tried to convince her to go with one or the other, but the bathroom was big enough for both, and sometimes she needed a bath. She got into the shower and turned it on. She didn't know why she was worrying so much. Dream guy was just that, a dream. The chances of him existing were about as slim as the chance of her getting a promotion.

At her company, that would be nothing short of a miracle. She'd been working at the law firm for nearly three years now and they still didn't show any sign of taking her seriously.

Pushing away her thoughts of work and dream guy, she focused on washing her hair and the excruciating journey to work by the tube. In this heat, it was going to be nothing short of Hell.

She'd arrive at work as sweaty as she'd woken up this morning. There was a new client coming in today whose case was meant to be very hush hush and damn near impossible. And her sister had dumped her, meaning she was stuck having dinner alone with her parents tonight.

This day was going to be just perfect.

* * * *

Kim shoved her way onto the packed tube train, squeezing in by the door and frowning when someone elbowed her in the back as they got on behind her. She tiptoed to see if there was any space further along and sunk back onto her heels when she saw it was packed tighter than a tin of sardines. She leaned her head against the glass panel beside her and stared at the newspaper the man in the seat on the other side was reading.

Someone in front of her moved and she wrinkled her nose up when she smelt sweat.

Just great.

What a way to start the day.

It was already up to boiling point outside and it was barely eight in the morning. Global warming. That's what it was. All this pollution and stuff. She sighed again and closed her eyes, trying to whisk herself away from the daily grind by remembering her dream.

She told herself it wasn't a dream.

It was more of a fantasy.

But it was him every time, the same man, that same touch and those same lips against her overheated flesh.

He always said the same thing to her, close to her ear, sometimes in front of her, to her side or behind. She didn't care. She just wanted to melt into a puddle whenever he spoke. He could say anything, do anything, and she'd be his for the taking.

The train jerked around a corner, brakes squealing as it went downhill. She frowned at the rude interruption and then realised that her stop was next.

Getting off, she jostled along with the rest of the commuters and then breathed a sigh of relief when she hit the street. Her sense of calm was short lived when she turned to find her boss, Laura Townsend, walking towards her, her arms full with a box that was overflowing with files.

"Kay!" Laura shouted.

Kim cringed. Too late to escape now.

"It's Kim," she said flatly, not caring about correcting her boss because she knew that Laura wouldn't even notice she'd spoken.

"Can you carry this?" Laura dumped the box into Kim's arms.

Kim scowled at her as she straightened out her Armani power suit and beamed brightly. She could never understand how Laura had managed to become her boss. They'd gone through university together and had even taken the bar at the same time. How come Laura was head of the department, and she was stuck spending half her time running errands? Laura had also managed to conveniently forget her name, and forget they'd ever known each other. Kim mused that a position of power could do that to someone. No time for the little people when you're busy brown-nosing the big bosses.

She adjusted the box in her arms and trudged towards the office. It was a cream Georgian building with tall

sash windows and black double doors for the entrance. She'd always thought it was pretty. It was half the reason she'd decided to join this company. That and her friend worked here. But recently he'd been changing and she wasn't sure that she liked the butterfly he'd turned into. It was more of a moth.

The files shifted side to side in the box as she mounted the steps and she tried to get them back into a better position as she followed Laura across the entrance hall. It was cool inside the building, the heavy stone work keeping the heat of the sun out. She looked up at the big twin staircases in front of her, wishing she were up in the offices on that floor with the rest of the partners.

She paid for her momentary lapse in concentration.

The box slipped as a file fell off the top and before she could recover herself, all of them had scattered across the floor. She bent immediately, getting down on all fours and scrabbling to pick them up. She could hear the impatient click of Laura's shoes on the floor. Her heart beat sickeningly fast as she panicked.

Someone touched her shoulder.

"It's fine, I've got it," she muttered, dying of embarrassment as more people gathered.

She scurried across to the rest of the files, dumping them back into the box. Someone touched her again. She jerked her shoulder backwards.

"I said it was fine. Get off me," she almost growled the words.

A pair of shiny black shoes appeared in view along with a file.

They weren't girl shoes.

It wasn't Laura.

"Don't fight me," a deep, lush male voice said. "I'm just trying to help."

She froze, her heart dancing in her throat as she stared at his shoes. It couldn't be. It just couldn't be. Her palms sweated and her breathing hitched as she followed his trousers upwards, taking in the strong, long legs and the breadth of his shoulders, all emphasised by a sharp, black tailored suit. Her eyes reached his face and she flushed under the intensity of his gaze.

He knelt beside her, bringing his head almost level with hers, and held the file out.

She stared into his honey brown eyes, lost in the force of them, and unable to say anything. All sense of embarrassment disappeared for a moment, but returned full force when he smiled, his soft lips curving into it.

"Are you all right?" he said, his voice making her melt inside so much that she was glad she was already on the floor and couldn't fall over.

She nodded dumbly.

He placed the file into the box and picked up the others for her as she stared at him, trying to figure out if he was real or whether she was just fantasising again. She'd never seen such a gorgeous man. His short black

hair looked as velvety as it had been in her dreams and his eyes were everything she'd imagined they would be.

Her eyes widened when she was suddenly standing and she glanced at the large hand that was holding her arm. She swallowed and blinked, her senses reeling as she remembered the feeling of his touch. She pushed her fantasies away as he said something and she looked up into his eyes.

She was lost again the moment they met hers. They were just like the colour of honey, with dark flecks in their depths. She'd never realised that people could have eyes that colour.

"Are you sure you're all right?" he said with an amused smile but there was the tiniest hint of concern in his eyes.

"I'm fine, thank you," she said with a smile. Her cheeks flushed when he grinned.

"Don't concern yourself with Kay. She's always been a little clumsy." Laura stepped between her and the man.

"Kim," she whispered, correcting her.

The man smiled.

"We weren't expecting you for another half an hour, Mr. Blackwell," Laura said.

Kim tried not to stare at him but her eyes seemed to ignore every command she sent to them. He was breathtaking. It wasn't just his looks; it was his whole air. There was something about him that spoke of

danger and passion, of heat and seduction. He positively oozed masculinity and sensuality.

Or maybe it was just her dreams making her feel like this.

The cool room suddenly felt very hot when his eyes came back to meet hers. He was speaking to Laura but Kim didn't hear a word he said. Her heart pounded in her ears. She averted her gaze for a split second but it roamed back to him, as though he'd called it and she was powerless to resist him.

Laura turned to her. "They need those files in room two."

Kim looked at her, feeling a little dazed and definitely confused. Files? She looked down when Laura did and saw the box there. Files. She'd completely forgotten about them.

"I do hope Kim will be working on my case," the man said.

Her heart skipped a beat when he said her name. He'd heard her. He'd heard her correct Laura. Is that why he'd smiled? He'd smiled at her?

"Kim? She doesn't work on cases like yours," Laura said with a broad smile.

Kim frowned. She did work on cases like his and Laura knew it. If this were the man they were supposed to be meeting this morning, then it was a case she was supposed to be working on. She specialised in contract negotiations.

Laura began walking and he followed her. Kim watched him heading towards the stairs, taking in the strength of his build and how tall he was.

Tearing her eyes away, she bent over and picked up the box of files.

She smiled when she heard him speak.

"I think Kim should work on this case. I think I need her."

Chapter 2

Kim leaned against the railings on the balcony of the meeting room and stared at the small garden below. It wasn't much, but it was more than most city offices had. It was her favourite space in the building and she savoured every rare moment she got to spend there. She was only there now because Laura had sent a call up to the office and asked her to come and sit in on the second half of the meeting. She needed this moment of calm to prepare herself if she was going to have to sit opposite that man all afternoon. How was she supposed to work with him without imagining every single fantasy she'd had about him? How had he, a walking, talking real-life version of her dream guy walked into her life? They were just dreams, weren't they?

The sun was beating down on the garden where it nestled in the courtyard of the building, turning it into a little suntrap. It was sweltering. She took off her neat black jacket and undid the top two buttons of her white blouse. Placing the jacket over the dark green railings, she leaned her elbows against them again and heaved a sigh.

It was so peaceful out here.

She closed her eyes and raised her face to the sun. It warmed her through instantly.

"It's nice out here."

So did his voice.

Her heart sped a little and she brought her gaze over to him. He was leaning with his back to the garden, eyes closed and head tilted back. The sun washed over his tanned skin, playing softly on his beautiful features. Her eyes traced his profile, taking in his dark eyebrows, jet black hair and square jaw.

She smiled when he opened his eyes and turned his head to face her.

It was strange to feel so comfortable with a client, a man she'd only just met.

He straightened up and smiled back at her. It sent her heart racing and made her mouth dry.

"Erik Blackwell," he said, extending a hand. "But you can call me Erik."

She looked at it and then took it when she'd got her senses into order. His fingers closed around hers, holding her tightly, and her eyes shot up to meet his. He was staring at her intently, his honey eyes locked on hers in a way that made her want to blush again. His fingers shifted against hers, sending a shiver through her, and he frowned when she took her hand back.

She fiddled with the cuff of her left sleeve, pretending it was undone as she tried to piece herself back together. It was ridiculous that one simple brush of his thumb against hers meant anything. She was stupid to let it affect her the way it had.

A furtive glance up at him showed he was still watching her.

"I'm Kim," she said.

“Not Kay.” He smiled.

She blushed.

“I’m not normally like this...clumsy I mean...or talking back to my boss.” She lowered her gaze again and stared at the vivid green plants in the garden.

“I’d like to know what you’re normally like then, Kim.”

She swallowed but it did nothing to shift the dry lump in her throat. He wanted to know what she was normally like? And why did he have to keep saying her name? She could barely stand as it was when he was around her. Whenever he said her name, rolling it off his tongue in such a silken voice, it made her want to throw herself at him.

“More professional,” she said flatly, getting the better of herself.

He looked disappointed.

He was a client, and she was just imagining that disappointment. There was no way a man like him would ever really look at a girl like her. He’d want Laura—blonde, bouncing, perfect Laura.

She was beautiful enough for him.

The door to the meeting room opened and Kim turned to see the woman in question entering with her friend, Simon.

Laura shot her a dark look. Kim knew what it meant. It was a warning not to slip up and embarrass the firm, but

it was more than that too. She got the impression that Laura was interested in Erik as more than just a client.

"We should go in. It's far too hot out here anyway." Kim looked at him. He showed no sign of moving.

Instead, he leaned his head back again, raising his face to the sun.

"I like the heat," he whispered. "I can feel it in every inch of me, feel it warming me through."

She was enthralled. Her gaze lingered on his face and the sublime smile he was giving to the sun. He looked positively content. Like a cat lying in the sun. Almost ready to purr.

She frowned at her thoughts and told herself that only men in dreams could purr.

"Don't you like the heat, Kim?" he said and brought his gaze down to hers.

She swore for a moment his eyes were more yellow than honey. She dropped her attention to his hands, staring at them, waiting for the fur to erupt.

Nothing.

She told herself that this was real, and in the real world men didn't purr when you touched them, and they didn't suddenly sprout velvet-black fur.

"Well, Kim?" he said. He was closer now, so close that she could feel the heat coming off him. His voice remained a whisper, teasing her senses and sending her thoughts back to her dreams. "Do you like the heat?"

She stared at his chest, watching the rise and fall of it, mesmerised by his nearness.

She nodded.

He was gone.

She blinked and turned to face the garden, breathing hard as she tried to steady herself. He was a client, and he really wasn't interested in her. It was just harmless conversation. This attraction was one sided. Nothing was going to happen.

She jumped when someone touched her shoulder.

"Kim?" Simon smiled at her. "Little jumpy today."

She nodded, smiling back at her friend. She was glad that he was sitting in on this meeting. Hopefully he'd ground her and she'd make it through without messing up.

"Just a bit nervous," she said.

Simon looked over her shoulder. She turned her head to see what he was looking at and found Erik watching them.

"Looks like Mr. Blackwell doesn't like to be kept waiting," Simon said with another smile. "I hear all kinds of things about him. It's hard to know what to believe."

Before she could ask what Simon had heard about him, he'd gone into the room, leaving her alone on the balcony. Her eyes were drawn to Erik again and she found he was still watching her while he spoke to Laura.

Walking into the room, she placed her jacket down over the back of the chair and opened her notebook. She wrote the date in the corner and Erik's name. She stared at it, getting the feeling there was more to its owner than met the eye.

Just who was Erik Blackwell?

* * * *

Erik leaned back in his chair, fascinated with the woman across the table from him. She was writing furiously, scribbling down note after note of what was being discussed. He wondered if she could feel him watching her in the same way that he could sense when she was looking at him.

He gave Ms. Townsend half of his attention, answering her questions about the contract as much as he could and keeping his girl writing so he could observe her. There was a pause in discussion as the man who had introduced himself as Simon stood, offering to order coffee or tea. He declined both and asked for some water, his eyes still fixed on Kim. He didn't like the easy manner she'd had with Simon when he'd gone out onto the balcony. There was something wrong about him. Whatever Kim thought their relationship was, Simon clearly thought it could be different.

A glass of water appeared in front of him and he licked his lips as he looked at its crystal depths that promised cool relief. The heat wasn't abating and the air in the room was so hot now it was stifling. He'd taken his jacket off and loosened his tie, but it hadn't helped. The hair at the nape of his neck was damp with sweat.

Simon placed a glass down in front of Kim and Erik's attention was with her again. She pressed her bare wrist against the condensation on the ice cold glass. Her tongue swept across her lower lip, wetting it, and her eyes closed briefly. He could almost feel her relief as the coldness of the glass lowered her temperature. It only made him hotter.

His eyes followed her every move as she took hold of the glass and brought it to her lips. He watched the movement of her throat as she drank, her eyes closed in pleasure, and then stared at her mouth when she lowered the glass and licked her lips again, capturing every drop of moisture on them.

He grabbed his glass and downed it in one go, trying to cool himself down but failing dismally.

Putting his glass down, he continued his observance of Kim.

She thoughtfully bit the end of her pen, her fine brows knitting as she scrunched up her nose and stared at the piece of paper.

There was no doubt it was her.

The attraction he felt, the way she reacted to him, and the shape of her. Even the smell. It was her. He'd been dreaming about her for so long now, desperate for her touch and dying to know who she was.

And now he'd found her.

She was younger than he'd expected and seemed a little wary of him. It wasn't at all like he'd been told it would be. She was supposed to know. But then, he was

supposed to know her face in the visions too, but she'd always remained a mystery until today.

Was something wrong?

It worried him that she wasn't reacting as he'd been told she would. She recognised him, of that he was sure. Her manner towards him and how open she was around him told him that.

Wasn't she attracted to him? Didn't she feel the connection?

He was burning for her, hungry and desperate for her touch, unable to tear his eyes away from her for more than a second. He wanted to see if she felt the way that she did in his dreams, if she tasted and smelt as sweet as she did in them. He was anxious to see if she'd react to him the way she did there.

He wanted to know she wanted him.

He growled quietly; a call only she would hear.

She gasped and raised her head, her pupils dilating as she stared across the table at him.

He could hear her heart racing, feel her blood thundering through his own veins as it sung to him. He vividly remembered the slide of her legs against his, the way her fingernails dug into his arms as she writhed against him. He remembered the smell of their bodies, their sweat, as they moved against each other. He could still feel the electric sweep of her fingers over his bare flesh, teasing him into a hardness so painful he'd felt he would explode if she only breathed on his length. He held her gaze as he thought about her; the rough glide of her

tongue over his neck; the whispered words in his ears; the way her fingers always buried themselves in his hair, holding his mouth against her body. She blinked at him. He sniffed, inhaling deeply as he continued to hold her gaze, not letting her go. He could smell her. She wanted him. She wanted him as badly as he wanted her.

It was destiny.

Twenty-seven years of dreaming of her, of searching for her, and now he'd finally found her.

Long hot nights spent tantalisingly close to her in his visions. Countless hours of touching and torturing her body as she explored his own. It had all been worth it because now he'd found her.

She swallowed hard.

He smiled.

He'd found her, now he just had to show her how good they could be together.

From where he was sitting, she looked as though she was going to take a lot of convincing.

But he could do it.

He'd make her realise that the dreams they'd shared were just the beginning.

The best was yet to come.

Chapter 3

Kim dumped her bag down just inside the door and turned to shut it. She put the safety chain on and flicked the latches. Heaving a sigh, she plodded into the lounge of her apartment. Dinner had been dreadful. She tried to erase the sound of her parents bickering about anything and everything from her mind, and found it wasn't that difficult this time.

It was probably because she hadn't really paid attention to them at all throughout the evening.

All night she'd been thinking about Erik.

There was no doubt in her mind now that he was the man she'd been fantasising about for the past God knows how long, but she still couldn't bring herself to believe that he was real, or comprehend how he got into her dreams.

How could he perfectly match her dream guy? The voice, the hair, his build and the way he made her tremble inside with passion. How?

She rubbed her temples, feeling a headache coming on. It was too insane to think about. She'd never been one to believe in premonitions and crazy things like that. There had to be a simple, sane explanation for it. Maybe she'd seen him once and the image of him had become lodged in her mind? It was reasonable. If she had seen him before, she would never have forgotten him. He was one of those beautiful men who stayed with you and it was easy to recall how they looked, even after years of not seeing them.

She shook her head and decided not to dwell on it too much. Instead, she tried to focus on work as she opened the window in her bedroom and began to undress.

The case was slow going. There were so many things to go through and they were supposed to meeting with the other party tomorrow. She didn't know anything about them. The only thing she knew was it was going to be a long day, and the temperature showed no sign of dropping.

Sitting in that room when it was sweltering outside was bad enough, but sitting there today with Erik watching her like a hawk, the heat had been unbearable.

She pulled the thin curtains across her window and removed her underwear, tossing it onto the chair with the rest of her clothes.

Sliding into bed, she sighed as she savoured the coldness of the sheets and then closed her eyes.

She wondered if she'd dream again tonight. If she did, would she see his face now?

Would she dream of Erik?

* * * *

Erik lay on his back, watching Kim as she moved about the room. He licked his lips, waiting for her to come to him, even hungrier for her touch tonight than last night. He could see her face now, her soft chocolate eyes and dark brown hair. It was her.

She turned to look at him with a smile that spoke volumes about the things she was going to do with him,

and showed not one hint of fear. He stretched out on the bed, looking down the length of his body at her.

His shirt was undone, and he wasn't surprised to see that he was wearing what he had been at their meeting today. The tailored black trousers hugged his hips, his aching erection visible through the material.

She ran a hand through her hair, humming quietly to herself as she walked towards him. She was wearing the little white blouse she had been in today, and the short skirt. He was mesmerised by her fingers as she slowly undid each button of her blouse, revealing herself to him little by little.

He wanted to get up and rip the shirt from her, but he couldn't move, knew that it was her turn to be in control. She didn't need to say a word to keep him still, waiting for her. All she had to do was give him one look, one smile, and he knew what she wanted of him.

He sighed when she slipped the shirt down off her shoulders, turning away from him and hiding herself as she looked over her shoulder at him. Her hips swayed enticingly, making his cock ache for her. He held his breath as she removed the shirt, the soft fabric sliding over her smooth skin.

She wasn't wearing a bra.

A low groan escaped him when she moved back to face him, her arms crossed over her chest, her hands holding her breasts. She stepped closer, still humming a sweet melody. Candlelight flickered around her, bathing her in warm, golden light. His gaze dropped to her skirt and he licked his lips when her hands appeared in view, her fingers skimming along the waistband.

“You think I should take this off?”

He nodded eagerly, desperate to see her in all her glory, dying to be inside of her.

She smiled sweetly and began to undo the skirt.

His eyes roamed over her taut stomach to her full, round breasts. His whole body tensed on seeing them and he could think only of touching them, caressing them and teasing her nipples. He wanted to suck them into his mouth and spend countless hours playing with them.

Her skirt hit the floor with a soft swish and his gaze lowered. He frowned and groaned at the sight of her completely naked. She was all delicious curves and sensuality. He had to have her. It was torture having her so close but so far away.

He reached out, straining to get to her.

She gave him another smile, this one full of sympathy, as though she could feel his pain, and then to his sweet relief she moved towards him again.

He swallowed as she mounted the bed, crawling slowly up the length of him. Her hands brushed over his legs, dipping inside his thighs and then out when she reached his crotch. He closed his eyes and growled when her fingers teased his aching cock through the material of his trousers.

She ran her hands over his length, rubbing him until he was on the verge of begging her to set him free.

Then she stopped.

He looked at her, his temperature rising when he saw the hunger in her eyes. They were dark in the low light, filled with a fiery passion. His gaze dropped to her mouth. The sinfully tempting curve of her lips as she smiled made his heart flutter. He wanted to kiss her, to taste her and crush her lips under a forceful kiss. He wanted to feel her mouth against him, laving him, biting him.

The tug on his belt and the sound of her unzipping him made his hips jerk hungrily towards her.

He moaned out his relief at the ceiling as her hand slid inside his trousers, running along the length of him. She was mercifully cool against him, her fingers lightly tracing patterns over his hard cock. He arched his back, his eyes screwed shut as she pulled his trousers down over his backside, leaving them around his hips.

She sat down on his legs, and he could feel her knees either side of his hips. He focused on the feeling of her touching him. The soft stroke of her fingertips down his length, from tip to root, and the way they teased his balls, made him delirious. He moaned her name, begged her not to stop, to keep touching him, stroking him.

Her hair tickled his stomach and he reached up above him, tightly grabbing the headboard in an effort to anchor himself as she blew on the head of his cock.

He roared.

* * * *

Kim sat back, still astride his legs and stunned at what she'd done. She looked at his face, watching him panting, desperately trying to catch his breath. The fine

sheen of sweat on his skin caught the light, making his muscles shimmer as he breathed.

Her gaze dropped to his stomach and the sticky mess on it.

She couldn't believe what she'd done.

She'd only breathed on him, blowing cool air against his hot flesh to tease him, and she'd made him cum.

He opened his eyes, their honeyed depths calling to her, making her want to stare into them for eternity.

The muscles of his throat worked hard as he tried to swallow several times.

She didn't even know why she'd done it. Part of her had known that it would be his undoing. Somehow, she'd known it, as though he'd said it or it had happened before.

Grabbing her skirt where it was dangling over the edge of the bed, she wiped the semen off his stomach. He frowned at her, took the skirt and finished the job. She didn't know what to do now. She'd never had a lull in her dream like this. It seemed so real.

She gently stroked his softening cock. He wriggled beneath her. Ticklish.

It didn't stop her. She continued to run her fingers over it, and then shifted forwards until she was tracing patterns on his stomach. She could feel the sticky residue still, and the silkiness of his skin where it hadn't touched. She dipped her head, conscious that her breasts were brushing against his skin while her lips

explored his flesh. Her nipples ached as she moved upwards, teasing both herself and him as she rubbed her body against his.

He purred. There was no mistaking the low rumbling sound coming from him. She looked up to see he had his eyes closed, a sublime smile on his face like the one he'd been wearing earlier that day at the office. She lightly raked her nails over his chest. He sighed. His muscles tensed beneath her, his whole body going taut and hard.

She leaned back, her slick pussy pressing against his hardening cock. She ground it a little, feeling it stir beneath her and moaning when the head of it rubbed against her clit.

She stared into his eyes as he opened them again, his hands coming down to skim up her thighs. Heat exploded inside of her, sweeping through her body in a shiver as his hands dipped in towards her crotch, and his thumbs brushed her pussy lips.

He smiled, holding her gaze, trapping her in his. She couldn't look away, couldn't focus on anything but his eyes and the exquisite feel of his thumbs dipping into her slick pussy. He brushed one over her pert clit, circling it and slowly driving her crazy with need. She ground against him again, using his hard cock to satisfy her hunger as his thumb tortured her.

Spreading her legs a little further, she silently begged him to keep touching her, give her the release she so rarely found in her dreams of him.

He jerked his hips up, grinding the length of his cock against her while spreading her pussy lips with one

hand. She moaned and writhed on him as he brought two fingers against her clit, slowly rubbing it.

Her teeth teased her lip and she wanted to close her eyes but couldn't. She could do nothing but stare into his, letting him see how he made her feel with just a touch, and knowing that he could make her feel so much more if he was inside her.

She frowned when he raised her up, making her kneel astride him, and then groaned low in her throat when he slid one finger up inside her. He withdrew it and then easily slid two fingers into her, making her eyes widen. She was so wet and hungry for him that she was sure he could easily fit more in her. He thrust his fingers up inside of her, pumping her slowly at first but building into a fast, hard rhythm that had her panting for him when he brought his other hand into play. He circled and squeezed her clit, thrusting his fingers up inside her.

She closed her eyes and threw her head back, rocking her hips against his hand and not caring if she looked wild with abandon. She had to feel it, had to feel just what he could do to her.

Opening her eyes a crack and looking down at him, she breathed faster and faster, her heart thundering in her ears until she was sure she was going to pass out. She desperately rode his fingers, his name falling from her lips over and over until it all became too much. Her stomach clenched, muscles tightened, and she convulsed forwards against him, her cheek pressed hard against his chest as her orgasm carried her away. His tempo slowed to a steady slide in and out of her, drawing out the last spasms of her orgasm.

Lifting her head, she stared into his eyes, only half aware of his fingers leaving her and his hands coming to settle on her backside.

“That was...” she breathed, not quite able to speak, but wanting to tell him.

He shook his head.

“This is just a dream,” he said.

She frowned when one of his hands left her and his other pushed her backwards. His cock pressed against her entrance.

He smiled.

“The best is yet to come.”

Chapter 4

Kim couldn't bring herself to look up when she walked into the meeting room the next day. She couldn't see Erik, not after fantasising about him like that last night, and certainly not after waking up to find herself soaked with desire and tingling as though she'd just had an orgasm.

Still, it was the hottest dream yet and at least she'd had some kind of completion in it. She gave a furtive glance to the room and raised her head when she saw Erik wasn't there.

The only occupants of the room with her were two men she didn't recognise, and Laura and Simon. She figured that the two men were the other party on the contract. One was definitely a lawyer. The sharp suit and preened back dark hair weren't the only dead giveaways. It was the way he kept shiftily looking at her and Laura, and the way he insisted on whispering everything to the other man in a voice loud enough that they could easily hear.

Her cheeks flushed the instant the doors opened and Erik walked in. She tried to hold his gaze but failed dismally when he smiled. Her eyes shot to the floor, her blush making her whole body burn.

He drew the chair beside her out and she inwardly cringed as he sat down in it. Her gaze was drawn to his legs as he stretched them out under the table. She remembered the lithe, strong feel of them beneath her. She shut her eyes and told herself to get a grip.

Plastering on a smile and hoping she wasn't going to spend the whole day blushing, she opened her eyes and looked at Erik.

He was watching her, his intense honey eyes making her want to melt into them.

"Could I get you a coffee or tea, Mr. Blackwell?" she said with a bright, cheery air. The tremble in her voice rattled it though.

He grinned. "I could use a coffee. One hell of a night last night. Almost too hot for me."

She felt the blush but couldn't stop it from happening. She died a little inside, knowing she was probably now the colour of beetroot. He didn't seem to notice. If anything, his smile broadened.

Shuffling off to get him a coffee from the urns that had been laid out at the side of the room, she took deep breaths and tried to calm herself. She forced a smile when Simon appeared next to her, his grin just a little too perky for this time in the morning. She poured him a coffee too, seeing straight through his false smile to the tiredness underneath. He'd probably been out clubbing all night or whatever it was that he did to keep him up to such unholy hours. He'd told her about it once, and had tried to get her to go along with him, but she'd excused herself by saying that clubs weren't her scene.

She handed him his coffee and then looked at the other one she'd poured. She'd forgotten to ask Erik how he took it. She glanced over at him and was struck by the look he was giving the man opposite him. There was so much anger in it, so much hatred, that it caught her off

guard. Why was he entering into a contract with someone he clearly despised?

She grabbed a couple of the little wrapped sugar cubes and put them onto the saucer along with a spoon. Carrying it across the room, she cursed the way the spoon rattled against the china cup, betraying her nerves.

She set it down in front of Erik and then sat in her seat, managing a real smile when he looked across at her.

"I forgot to ask how you took it. I'm terribly sorry. My mind is all over the place today. Hope you like it black." She silently berated herself for being so casual with him, and reminded herself that just because he'd given her a mind numbing orgasm in her dream last night, it didn't mean she knew him well enough to be so informal.

"I like it black," he almost purred the words at her and her heart leapt into her throat. He leaned closer, resting an elbow on the arm of his chair, and bringing his mouth to her ear. He whispered, "Black is such a sensual colour, don't you think?"

She swallowed and nodded dumbly as he withdrew back into his seat. She stared at the table and then at his hands as he stirred the coffee. It was mesmerising to watch the spoon going around and around. Before she knew it, her thoughts had slipped to the way his fingers had teased her like that, circling and squeezing.

He placed the spoon back on the saucer and she squeaked when he touched her arm.

"Kim?" he said in a low, intimate voice.

She nodded again, lost in his eyes.

"I think you're wanted."

Her eyes widened. She was wanted? Her temperature rose to that of the sun and her mouth went dry. His fingers slipped from her arm, brushing it lightly and making her even hotter.

He looked past her.

She turned and found Laura standing at the end of the table with her hands on her hips.

"Maybe you should get yourself a coffee, Kim," Laura said in a sharp tone. "I've been trying to get your attention for five minutes."

Kim blinked several times and then left her seat. She went to the coffee urn, pouring herself as much as would safely fit into the cup and loading it with sugar. She thought about adding milk but Erik's voice echoed in her head, telling her how sensual black was. She closed her eyes and squeezed her thighs together when a delicious ache settled there.

No milk.

Black was sensual.

She'd always liked black.

Sitting back down, she opened the file in front of her and tried to concentrate on her notes. It was impossible when she could smell Erik's aftershave, and could feel the heat of him so temptingly close to her.

"Shall we begin?" Laura said, her voice shattering the daydream Kim had been slipping into.

The lawyer opposite her stood and cleared his throat.

"My name is Lyle McConnaughy. I'm here to represent my client, Alistair Blackwell, in these proceedings."

Her gaze moved immediately to the man sitting next to him. Alistair Blackwell? She turned to Erik.

"My brother," he said casually, answering her unspoken question.

She frowned and looked back at the man. She could see the resemblance now. He had the same honey-coloured eyes, and same jaw line, but his lips were thinner and his hair was a warm sandy colour, almost strawberry blond.

He nodded at her, his eyes narrowing the tiniest amount and the corner of his mouth tugging into a smile that she swore was meant to be seductive. She dropped her gaze to her notes, frowned at them and then took a sip of her coffee. Her heart thundered.

It seemed Erik wasn't the only man who could fluster her with just a smile.

A thick wad of paper appeared in front of her. She stared at the first few lines, seeing Erik's name and that of his brother. Drawing it towards her, she wondered why he was entering into a contract with his brother and just what it was for.

The room hushed as everyone read through the contract. She noticed that the only people not reading

their copy were Erik and his brother. They were staring at each other and she could feel the tension radiating off them.

She shifted her attention to the contract and scanned the first page, flicked through to the next, and then looked at it as a whole. There were at least forty pages, all jam-packed with what seemed to be paragraphs about asset sharing.

She was halfway through when lunch was announced. It passed by quickly, nothing more than a short break in which everyone milled around passing niceties. She excused herself and went to the toilet, desperate to freshen up. The temperature of the room was rising as the sun moved around to hit the courtyard. Everyone returned to reading the contract after lunch and before she knew it, she was almost three quarters of the way through it. The door opened and someone came in, announced that more food was on its way, and then disappeared again. She frowned at her watch. It was late afternoon.

Her gaze shifted back to the contract and stopped on the last paragraph she'd read.

It was about blood.

What kind of contract had a clause about blood in it?

She looked at Erik, torn between asking and not asking. She knew that this was meant to flow smoothly, no questions asked, just read the contract and let them sign it, but there was something very wrong about a contract between two parties that so evidently hated each other and a contract that mentioned blood.

Erik turned to look at her and then at the contract. She knew her finger was resting on the paragraph. She watched him read it, frown and then look at his brother and sigh.

"Finally...food," Alistair said as the door opened. She looked across at him. He grinned at her. "I'm starved."

Erik stood sharply. She stared at his right hand. It was clenched into a fist and shaking. She raised her eyes to his face and saw he was staring across the table at his brother. Her eyes moved to him. His brother was staring at her. There was a hunger in his eyes that unnerved her. She got the impression he wasn't starving for food.

Standing, she smiled when Erik looked at her, his eyes dark and saying things that she didn't dare believe. His reaction had nothing to do with the fact his brother had clearly come on to her. She was thankful for the distraction when Laura came over, nudging her out of the way so she could talk to Erik. The food was laid out on the table and she went to the coffee urn, desperate for another caffeine fix. Simon opened the doors onto the small garden and she took a deep breath when cooler air washed over her, waking her up and lifting the oppressively muggy air of the room.

She went to the balcony and sipped her coffee, grateful for a break from reading the contract and from sitting next to Erik. Being so close to him was too distracting. She just couldn't focus on her work when he was near her.

"There seemed to be something you didn't like in the contract," an amused voice said and she felt someone step up close beside her.

Really close.

She looked up into the eyes of Alistair. He smiled broadly and devoured a small neat triangular sandwich in one bite.

“Paragraph 157,” she said, watching his expression closely.

He cocked a brow, the smile remaining fixed on his face, and then leaned closer to her. He smelt like sin—dark and enticing.

“Wouldn’t you like to know about that one,” he whispered, his breath cool against her face.

She frowned. There was definitely something not right about this contract. Alistair grinned and licked his teeth. There was definitely something not right about him either.

“You’re not supposed to talk to the opposing lawyer.” Erik’s deep voice stirred her senses.

She turned to look at him at the same time as his brother did. His face was darker than midnight.

“Oh...I didn’t know,” Alistair said innocently and took hold of her hand. He shook it, running his other hand over the back of it and covering it completely. He held onto it. She frowned again. “It’s been nice meeting you. I’m sure we’ll be seeing more of each other soon.”

He walked away and she stared at his back, confused and trying to figure out what he’d meant. She was going to be sitting across from him for the rest of the day and Tuesday too. Of course they’d be seeing each other. Or

did he mean something else. He'd said they'd be seeing more of each other. Just how much more of her did he want to see?

She looked over at Erik. He was leaning against the railings, his eyes fixed on the garden below.

"What's paragraph 157 about?" she said, nervous about asking him. She had to know.

"You read it," he said.

"But I don't understand it."

He straightened, turned and frowned into the room. She presumed it was directed at his brother. She was surprised when he walked in, leaving her on the balcony. It made her feel cold, as though he was angry with her for some reason, rather than his brother.

She followed him in and placed her cup down on the side.

"Do you have somewhere I can smoke?" Erik said, close by her elbow.

"There's the roof." She pointed upwards and felt a bit stupid when he smiled. It wasn't as though he wouldn't know where the roof was. They were generally on top of buildings.

"I can take you there," Laura said with a sweet smile.

He shook his head. "Kim looks hot."

Kim raised her brows when he turned to look at her.

He smiled and she blushed.

“I think she could use the air, and maybe we could discuss that paragraph.”

Chapter 5

Kim toyed with the cuff of her jacket and then removed it. She folded it neatly and slung it over her arm. The lift was taking forever to come.

Erik shifted foot to foot beside her. Her gaze crept across to his shoes. If she had to guess, she'd say Armani. He was wearing black again. At least now she knew why he liked the colour. It was sensual.

She swallowed at that thought. What kind of client was so open with his lawyers? All the clients she'd ever met were formal, high-power businessmen who wouldn't have given her the time of day if they'd met on the street. But not Erik. From the contract, she could see he had money, and not just a little of it. Why was he so different?

"Sorry it's taking so long," she said, filling the silence.

He shrugged and smiled. His expression could easily have been taken for saying that he didn't care, but she didn't let herself believe what her heart was saying to her. He'd just seen how warm she'd been in the stifling heat of the meeting room and that's why he'd asked her to go with him.

The lift pinged.

The doors clunked open.

She swallowed hard again and waited for him to step in before following him.

Turning, she pressed the button for the top floor and breathed deep as the doors closed. She was all right. She took deep breaths, telling herself that everything was going to be fine. Closing her eyes, she tried to imagine herself in a larger space than the tiny cramped metal box that was now raising her up floors while leaving a perilously large empty shaft below for them to fall into when the cables snapped.

Her heart began to race.

It didn't help that she could feel Erik close behind her, just a little off to her right.

Her hands shook.

This was stupid. She shouldn't have mentioned the lift. She should have told him they'd have to take the stairs.

She looked up and swore she could hear the cables rattling as the lift eased jerkily past a floor.

Then her worst nightmare happened.

It stopped.

She stared wide-eyed at the walls of the lift, trying to sense if it was still moving, desperate to convince herself it was.

She smiled shakily over her shoulder at Erik.

He frowned.

"It does this a lot," she squeaked and then cleared her throat, trying not to let him see her fear.

He stepped towards her, cool and collected and seemingly not at all bothered by the fact that they were trapped in a oppressively hot metal box about to plummet to their untimely deaths.

And all she could think about was kissing him, because if she was going to die, she wanted to know for real what it felt like before she went. She'd die happy then.

He brushed against her, pressing the alarm button, and then stepped back. A small squeaking noise escaped her throat again. He smiled reassuringly, as though he'd seen how scared she was.

"It'll move again soon. You'll see," he said in a deep, calm voice.

She nodded and latched onto those words and the sound of his voice. It soothed her for a moment.

And then the lift moved.

It wasn't so much movement as a shudder. Metal rattled above her. Her heart sped into overdrive.

Her chest felt tight as she struggled to breathe normally. She gasped at air, but it only dried her throat out, making it impossible to breathe. She looked at Erik, her eyes wide, and her whole body trembling as she panicked.

Any moment now, they were going to die.

"Are you all right?" he said, cocking his head to one side, looking concerned.

She nodded but then it turned into a shake of her head.

"I don't like lifts." She managed to squeeze the words out. Her voice sounded impossibly tiny and tight in her ears.

"You should have said." He pressed the alarm button again. Several times. "We could have taken the stairs."

Too late now, she thought. She grabbed onto the wall when the lift shuddered again.

"It gets stuck all the time," she said, more to calm herself than inform him. "All the time. They're always getting engineers out to fix it. It's so old see...probably as old as the bloody building. Fuck." Her grip on the wall tightened and she squeezed her eyes shut, trying not to think about the long drop and the fact she was going to die without ever kissing the man in the stupid metal coffin with her. "Oh my God...oh my God...I should have said something. It's always getting stuck. Always. Oh God."

Warm hands were on her shoulders and she jumped. His fingers tightened around her, holding her, making her heart beat quicker and her breathing worsen.

"Look at me, Kim." A bass melodic voice called out to her, its tones telling her to let go of her fear and anchor herself on them, to believe in the calm they made her feel. "Open your eyes and look at me."

She opened them a fraction, unable to do anything but obey him. He was leaning over, hunched down so his face was level with hers. She looked deep into his eyes, begging them to make it all go away, to let her get lost in them and forget the world around her. She swallowed again. Her throat was so dry. Parched. She felt his thumbs press into her shoulders.

"Hey," he breathed and she opened her eyes a little more. He smiled. "There you are. Keep looking at me. Understood?"

She nodded, wishing the adrenaline flooding her veins was the only reason she was shaking. His grip on her tightened and she trembled over the feeling of it. She closed her eyes a little, focusing on the feeling of his hands on her. She could slip into her fantasy world. None of this would exist there. There was only ever him, in that room.

"Look at me," he said and she opened her eyes fully again. "Everything will be fine. We'll be okay. Nothing bad is going to happen. It'll move again in a minute. Okay?"

She nodded again.

"I won't let anything happen to you. Just breathe."

She was surprised when he moved away from her, his hands slipping off her shoulders. She tried to turn to face him, panicking that he was somehow going to disappear, but he caught her shoulders again and stepped up behind her.

"Focus on your breathing," he whispered close to her ear.

Her vision swam out of focus as his fingers pressed into her shoulders, applying soothing pressure to her tense body. She closed her eyes, her mouth falling open as she lost herself in the feel of him kneading her shoulders. She couldn't believe it was happening. Maybe she'd slipped into her fantasy world after all. Somewhere the real Kim and Erik were screaming as the lift fell and

slammed into the floor of the shaft, crushing their bodies. But here, fantasy Kim was getting a shoulder massage from dream Erik, and it felt divine.

His thumbs pressed hard against her spine, loosening it and making her want to melt into him. She wanted to lean back and feel his body against hers. The temperature in the lift seemed to rise, becoming almost unbearable.

She kept her focus locked on him, shutting out panicked thoughts and pretending that they were back in that room.

"That's right, just relax," he said behind her.

It was so easy to when he was doing that, fingers expertly working out all her knots and leaving her liquid beneath his touch.

It felt so good. Too good.

She told herself that he was a client and this was wrong on so many levels, but deep in her heart, she didn't care.

"Feeling any better?" he breathed close to her ear.

"Mmmhmm." She smiled lazily, her heart thumping hard against her chest. She leaned back a little to get closer to him. She'd died and gone to heaven.

"Keep breathing like that. You're doing great."

A bead of sweat trickled down her spine. She blew up at her face, trying to cool herself down. It was impossibly

hot. Her fingers shifted to the buttons of her crisp white shirt and she undid a couple, desperate for a little relief.

She gasped quietly when his hands moved, fingers grazing bare skin as he pulled her shirt off her shoulders as much as he could. She bit her lip and frowned at the feeling of his hands on her, palming and kneading, tempting and teasing her. Her stomach tightened, fluttering with desire, hungry for him. She pressed her thighs together, felt the slip-slide of arousal in her panties.

Too hot.

She opened her eyes and saw the lift. Panic loomed up inside her again, crushing her calm and making her even hotter as the walls seemed to close in.

"Can't breathe," she whispered, bringing her hand up to her throat. "Too hot...can't breathe."

"Close your eyes, Kim," he said, his voice still cool and collected. "Focus."

She did, she shut her eyes tight and willed herself to focus on his hands. The way his fingertips pressed into her flesh made her ache inside, and the way his thumbs brushed against her bare back made her knees want to buckle.

A shiver ran through her when he swept the hair from her neck with one hand, his fingers barely brushing against it as his other hand continued to loosen her shoulders. Another wave of tingles spread over her when he blew against her neck, cooling her. Goosebumps raised her hairs and her nipples became pert. She could feel him close behind her, almost touching her. He blew

on her neck again and she sighed. It was so cooling but made her burn inside.

She'd definitely died and gone to heaven.

The lift jolted and hummed as it began to move again.

Erik stared down at Kim and slowly took his hands away when she turned to face him.

Her wide-eyed stunned expression did nothing to alleviate the guilt he felt over his actions. He'd been so giddy with touching her, lost in their stolen intimate moment, that he'd forgotten himself and where they were. This wasn't their dreams. This was the real world and if he screwed up here, he could lose her forever.

He stepped back, giving her a little room as she buttoned her shirt again and looked everywhere but at him. He wanted to say something, but didn't have the right words. She toyed with her jacket, smoothing it in the same way she'd toyed with her shirt cuff yesterday. He wished he knew what she was thinking. All he wanted was a sign that he hadn't cocked things up.

The trouble was, she was so tempting right now, and his instincts were making him act rashly.

That and his brother.

He wanted to growl when he thought about the way Alistair had openly flirted with her. Alistair knew. If he tried, he'd be able to sense it as clearly as himself. Kim was his.

His and only his.

The lift stopped and the doors jerked open.

He watched Kim walk out and then sighed as he followed her. He had to think of a way to make things right between them again. Cursing his brother for making him act the way he had, he followed Kim up a narrow flight of stairs and then out onto the roof.

Cool air bathed him, carrying away some of his tension. He closed his eyes to make the most of the feeling. It was such relief after the closeness of the lift. He gave a brief glance at Kim and then paced along the length of the roof. The whole of London was laid out before him, shimmering in the heat. The sun beat down, warming his back as he walked. He didn't know why he'd asked for a place to smoke.

He didn't smoke.

His brother had driven him crazy by daring to talk to Kim and he'd felt compelled to get her away from him. Smoking seemed like the most sensible excuse. He didn't think that turning to the room and announcing that he'd like to spend some time alone with his mate would have been well received.

He looked across the roof at her. She was standing still with her back to him, the breeze blowing her hair around and making her clothes dance. He wondered what she was looking at and walked towards her. Keeping his distance, he stared at the spot she was. It was the BT Tower.

She looked over her shoulder at him, her expression still a little shocked and confused. Her mouth opened a few times, but she said nothing. Maybe she didn't know what to say either.

Giving her a little space, he paced along the length of the roof again, trying to clear his head and find a way of apologising to her and fixing things.

He drew a deep breath and sighed it out as he walked back towards her. She'd moved closer to the edge and was looking down at the street below. He glanced there, seeing the red buses and black taxis fighting for dominance. The people looked tiny. A police car sped by, its sirens cutting the stifling heat and rising up to them.

"Come away from the edge, Kim," he said and she looked over at him. "It unnerves me."

She moved away and then frowned. She looked back at the edge and then down at her feet. He knew her thoughts now. She'd obeyed without even thinking about it. Everything was probably so confusing for her right now.

"I'm sorry about how I acted. I overstepped the mark," he started and then ran his hand over his hair. The hair at the nape of his neck was soaked again. She wasn't the only one who had been getting too hot in the lift. She gave him a look that said he had her attention. "I'm not normally like that with women."

Her attention returned to the city.

"I'd like to know what you're normally like then, Erik." She perfectly echoed his words to her yesterday. He was surprised that she'd remembered them.

"More professional," he said with a smile.

She looked over at him again, right into his eyes, her warm browns searching for an explanation.

“What is paragraph 157?” she said out of the blue.

It caught him off guard and he frowned. He’d forgotten about the damn contract and the clause that had gotten her too interested in something she wouldn’t understand.

He stared at the city. The sun was already beginning to set. In a few hours, it would be getting dark.

“Come to dinner with me,” he said without looking at her. He felt her move closer and his gaze shifted to where she was standing. “Would you allow that? So I could apologise to you properly?”

She shook her head. “That really isn’t necessary.”

He raised a brow, wondering if dinner wasn’t necessary or the apology. Didn’t he have something to apologise for? Sure, he’d smelt how aroused she’d been and felt the hunger in her was as primal as his own, but he’d still taken advantage of her panicking.

“I insist,” he said, moving closer to her.

She didn’t move away. She just stared into his eyes. Damn she was beautiful. The warm sunlight bathed her skin, turning it golden and bright. Her lips were rosy and her cheeks were flushed from the heat. Her pupils dilated as she looked at him. He could feel the desire in her, knew she wanted to surrender to him and say yes.

“I really can’t,” she said in a tight voice. “You’re a client.”

“We can talk about work and nothing else—just this paragraph.” He took another step towards her.

She drew in a deep breath. He could see the indecision in her eyes. He felt like the Devil, tempting her to commit sin, rather than just making her come out to dinner with him.

"What does it mean?" she said, the uncertainty in her eyes becoming curiosity. "I know this contract is meant to be no questions asked, but I can feel there's something wrong about it."

"Come to dinner and I'll explain it."

She opened her mouth.

The door to the roof creaked open and Simon appeared. He walked briskly towards them. Kim's attention was stolen by him, but Erik noticed that she didn't look relieved to be rescued by her friend.

"Thank God you're okay. I heard about the lift. Were you all right?" Simon said as she turned to face him.

She nodded and Erik noticed her gaze shifted across to him. "Mr. Blackwell was wonderful. He really took care of me."

"Good to hear. Alistair Blackwell's called it quits for the day. Said something about a meeting shortly after he was on a call to what sounded like one hot woman." Simon grinned.

Erik frowned. Just like his brother not to take anything but women seriously.

"Drive you home? You don't want to be going on the tube today. It would be hellishly hot." Simon held his

arm out, gesturing towards the door while his eyes raked over Kim.

Erik's heart sunk when Kim turned away, letting Simon escort her back towards the door. She glanced back at him as she reached it, giving him a small smile. He knew what it meant. If they'd had a little more time alone together, he could have got her to agree to dinner with him.

The door closed.

He stared at it a moment.

A whole weekend away from her, and now Alistair was sniffing around.

Closing his eyes, he flung his head back and roared at the sky.

Chapter 6

The shiver that danced down Kim's spine made her stop in the stairwell. She looked back up at the door above her, the one that led to the floor below the roof. She swore she'd felt something, or heard something coming from up there. Something had made her stomach turn and her heart ache. Shaking it off, she told herself not to be so ridiculous. It was just guilt over leaving Erik standing on the roof like that. She hadn't known what else to do. A few more seconds alone with him and she would have agreed to his dinner proposal.

She wished she had.

Her sense battled with her heart, telling her that she'd done the right thing. He was a client. She couldn't get involved with him, no matter how interested in her he seemed.

Her heart asked her what was the worst that could come of being caught with him. She'd lose her job for sure, but it would be worth it for just one, slow kiss.

"Something wrong?" Simon's voice shook her out of her thoughts.

She smiled and began walking down the stairs again, still not quite able to get over the lift or even the rooftop. She hadn't believed it when Erik started apologising to her. If they'd been stuck in the lift much longer, she would have been the one having to apologise. She'd been a split-second away from turning and kissing him. He'd asked her if she liked the heat. There was so much heat coming off him, and off her

when he touched her, that together they could burn hotter than the sun. She liked the heat. His heat.

Not listening to Simon as she walked down the stairs, her thoughts remained firmly with Erik. Why hadn't she accepted his offer? They could have kept it strictly business and she wouldn't have been stuck in her apartment watching television alone tonight. Sitting opposite him all night would have been nothing short of a dream.

She knew there was no chance of accepting now. Even if she saw him in the meeting room when she was getting her things, there would be other people around. She couldn't just walk up to him and tell him she'd love to have dinner and would he mind terribly if it was served off her naked body and all he was allowed to use was his mouth?

Simon held the door open for her when they reached the first floor. She smiled as she walked past him and then blinked when she found herself face to face with Erik as the lift door opened.

He smiled, but it didn't show in his eyes. They were dark and empty.

She watched him walk down the hall, taking in his build and how hot he looked even from the back. He disappeared into the meeting room and she sighed, her shoulders heaving with it.

"You're definitely out of spirits," Simon said as he walked past. He turned to look at her, a smile still plastered on his face.

She shrugged and lied without flinching. "Dinner last night with the folks. You know it always drains me."

It sounded like a perfectly good excuse for her current miserable mood. Why hadn't she just said yes? He'd practically begged her to have dinner with him. No other man on the planet had even asked her to dinner, let alone begged her.

She went straight to the meeting room and grabbed her bag, not daring to look at Erik. He was close to her as he packed his things away in his briefcase. It would be so easy for her to just whisper 'yes' at him.

Her heart beat sickeningly fast in her throat and before she managed to find her voice, he'd walked out the door.

She closed her eyes a moment and gathered herself. It was probably for the best. She really did need this job. The voice at the back of her head said she needed him more.

"Shall we?" Simon said, slinging his bag over his shoulder.

He was still smiling. What the hell did he find to smile about all the bloody time?

She nodded and followed him, glad of the fresh air as she stepped out onto the pavement in front of the building. It lifted her spirits a little, making the world seem a bit brighter. She told herself that she'd see Erik on Monday, and Tuesday.

And then he'd be out of her life.

She frowned at the pavement, staring at the cracks as she walked beside Simon towards his car. She couldn't let Erik just walk in her life like that and then disappear.

A door opened in front of her and she realised that they'd reached Simon's car. She glanced at it. It was nothing short of a status symbol—a shiny red Jaguar XK. It was always so highly polished too, enough that she could see herself in it.

She stared at herself.

What did Erik see in that?

Lank hair hung around her shoulders, dull eyes staring back at her.

But he must see something in her. The way he'd touched her in the lift. The gentle caress of his fingers against her neck and his cool breath teasing her skin. The reassuring words. The fact he'd told her that he wouldn't let anything happen to her. All of it made her believe that he liked her, that he saw something other than a plain nearly-thirty woman when he looked at her.

The car horn sounded and she smiled at Simon. Slipping into the passenger seat beside him, she buckled up and put her bag on her lap. She wondered what kind of car Erik drove.

It was probably black.

Black was sensual.

Judging by the way he acted and looked, the car was bound to be sleek, black and sexy, and have one hell of a purr.

Simon started the car.

“Man, you’re miles away today.” He laughed across at her and turned the radio on.

She turned it down a little so she could hear herself think and then stared out of the window.

“Simon,” she said as they pulled out into the main flow of traffic.

“Hmm?”

They stopped at a set of traffic lights. A taxi tried to squeeze up the inside, using the bus lane to hop the queue. She hoped the traffic cameras would catch it.

“What is it you’ve heard about Erik Blackwell?” She didn’t dare look at him, but she knew he was looking at her.

The light changed to green and he put his foot down on the accelerator.

“Just rumours, nasty idle speculation, that kind of dirty gossip.” He was grinning when she looked at him. Sometimes she didn’t know why they were friends. He was always slipping between acting like some lad, annoyingly snide and definitely conceited, and being just a nice guy.

She wished he’d be more of a nice guy and less of a lad. Since last summer, he’d been acting stranger and stranger around her, as though he thought she’d be impressed by the new car and the new look, and his new irritating attitude.

"Like what?" she said nonchalantly, acting as though it was nothing more than a passing interest.

"Like women he's been going out with mysteriously getting hurt for one thing. There's always some kind of accident. Mountaineering, hiking or riding...always...and it's not just your average statistics here. It seems like every girl who has visited the family home has been injured in some way or another. One of them was even mauled."

She didn't like the glee with which Simon said that last sentence. She frowned at the dashboard.

"Are you sure it's him?" Her heart was threatening to jump into her throat if Simon said he was definitely sure all the stories were pinned to Erik.

"Well," Simon said, holding the word so long that she got the feeling before he even finished his sentence that he couldn't prove any of what he'd heard. "It could be his brother I suppose. I hadn't realised he had one. Everyone just refers to the person as Blackwell."

Erik didn't strike her as the kind of man who would want to be referred to as just his last name. It sounded rakish. Definitely the kind of thing Alistair would call himself.

"Erik seems nice enough," she said with a shrug, casual as anything.

Simon laughed. "Erik now is it?"

She blushed and watched the little green arrow on the dashboard in front of Simon blinking as he indicated and then turned right.

"He told me to call him it."

"Did he now?" Simon turned the car again and then stopped at another set of traffic lights. He leaned towards her. "Listen, Kim, don't get involved. You'll only end up hurt too."

"I'm not so sure," she said and the car moved off again. She was glad Simon wasn't close to her any more. She'd had quite enough of men invading her personal space uninvited today. She watched the car in front of them. "He asked me to dinner."

"He did what?"

The car jerked to a halt. Simon was suddenly very close to her. He looked mortified.

"I hope you said no. He's a client."

"I said no. I'm not a child. I know the rules, Simon." She looked out the passenger window and saw they were only a few doors down from her apartment. She undid the seatbelt. "Thanks for the lift."

His hand on her arm stopped her from getting out. She looked at it, and then up into his eyes, frowning.

"I'm sorry...just a little concerned that this guy is out to seduce you or something. I don't want to see you get hurt," he whispered, a smile teasing the corners of his mouth. His brows rose and he released her arm. "Can I come in?"

She rubbed her temples.

“Not tonight. I’ve got such a stinking headache. I just want a soak and some decent sleep.” She smiled and got out of the car.

He managed a polite wave when she held her hand up, but he didn’t look at all happy. She hoped he wasn’t going to go and tell Laura about what she’d said. She didn’t need Laura getting on her case.

Slipping the strap of her bag over her shoulder, she took her keys out and walked up the steps to her apartment. She opened the door and went in, hurrying up the stairs as fast as she could manage.

A glass of wine, some good food, a little television and a long hot soak. That would make everything better.

She remembered the feeling of Erik’s fingers as he massaged her shoulders. Maybe she should soak and drink first, have dinner and a movie alone later. She could use some thinking time.

There was a lot to think about.

Walking into her apartment, she dumped her bag down and closed the door. She accidentally kicked her bag and gritted her teeth in frustration when it fell over, scattering some of its contents across the hall. She crouched and put them back in, stopping when she saw the contract. She pulled it out and stared at it. Absently flicking the latches on the door, she thought about the way that both Alistair and Erik had acted when she’d mentioned the paragraph. She walked into her kitchen, flicking through the pages until she found it, and read it while she opened the refrigerator.

Taking out a bottle of rosé wine, she put it on the side and then took a glass out of the cupboard. She placed the contract down beside the bottle and read the paragraph again as she uncorked the wine.

What kind of contract mentioned blood donations in it?

Especially blood donations for children. Did Alistair have children? If he did, she pitied them and their mother. She got the impression he only cared about himself.

She poured a large glass of wine and carried it with her through the lounge and into the bedroom. Staring at the word 'blood', she wondered why both men had been so jumpy about it.

Alistair had hidden it better than Erik, but the vibe had still been there. Neither of them wanted anyone asking about it.

Would Erik have really talked about it if she'd gone out to dinner with him?

She placed the glass of wine down beside the bath and put the plug into the hole. Running the water, she stripped off and sat on the edge of the bath. She held her hand under the water, letting it run over her fingers and shifting them so it created a soothing patter against her skin. She stared at the contract.

He'd said that he'd tell her all about it and she believed him. He'd looked so desperate to make things up to her and that look he'd given her when she'd walked away with Simon, it was as though she'd broken his heart by refusing his offer.

And that feeling in the stairwell.

What was that? It wasn't just the usual involuntary shudder. She'd felt something, sensed something. She'd been drawn to looking up at the door. She'd wanted to go back to the roof and to Erik.

She shut the taps off when the bath was full and threw some bath salts in. Placing the contract down on the closed toilet seat, she gave it one last look and then turned away. She slid into the hot water, moaning as it instantly eased her muscles. It felt so good, almost as good as Erik's hands had felt in the lift. It had been no harmless massage. The way he'd touched her had been so sensual, electrifying. When he'd pulled her shirt open and smoothed it, caressing her bare flesh, she'd felt as though they had plummeted to their deaths at the bottom of the lift shaft and been whisked off to heaven.

She sighed and closed her eyes, focusing on the echo of his fingers against her skin and wishing he was here with her, naked in the tub. What she wouldn't give to have that happen.

Picking her wine up, she took a long sip and leaned her head back into the bath pillow behind her. She sighed and smiled as she thought about him.

What was he doing right now? Was he having dinner with someone else?

* * * *

Erik stared up at the sign above the restaurant. The Ivy. It was a perfect choice. An obvious one, too.

All the better for him though.

He walked in and ignored the woman at the front desk when he spotted his quarry. He headed straight for them. They looked up as he approached. A dark expression wiped the smile off their face.

A restaurant, and a busy one like The Ivy, was a perfect place for an altercation with his brother. Beautifully public. There was no way on Earth that Alistair would dare attack him in front of all these people.

He stormed towards him, ignoring the look the blonde woman sitting opposite his brother gave him. Stopping in front of Alistair, he stared hard into his eyes. His narrowed.

"Keep away from her." Erik's voice was a deadly whisper.

Alistair smirked.

His date looked a little upset.

"Dear brother, I don't understand what you mean. It was purely business talk." Alistair continued to smile. He leaned back into his chair, casually draping an arm over the back of it.

Erik could see in Alistair's eyes how flustered he was. They hid nothing. There was anger and violence in their yellowing depths. He told himself that Alistair wouldn't dare change in front of all these people. The anger wasn't about the accusation, or interruption, it was because he was dragging this into the public eye. The paparazzi were outside, lining the windows. There was no doubt that their argument would get a mention in tomorrow's papers.

"It's no use lying to me, Alistair. I can smell it all over you." Erik hardened his look.

Alistair stood, straightened and gave him a look of pure arrogance. The whole room was staring now. Hushed.

They were probably panting for a fight to break out, but Erik wasn't going to let it get that far. He was tired of his brother's attempts to rule him. It was time that Alistair realised that he wasn't just younger than himself, he was weaker too.

"You took the company from me," Alistair snarled.

"I didn't." Erik straightened to his full height. He was only a couple of inches taller than Alistair but it was enough to show dominance over him. "It was mother's to give on her death. I don't even want the bloody company, but I'm damned if you're going to take everything from me."

Alistair grinned. "Oh, but I will."

Erik didn't like the snide tone of Alistair's voice and the glint in his eyes. Erik stepped towards him, glaring down at him.

"You touch her," he whispered in a low, threatening tone. "You lay one finger on her...and I'll kill you."

Alistair still grinned. If anything, it got wider.

"Who said anything about laying *fingers* on her?" he said.

Erik growled quietly. He knew all about Alistair's sordid sexual deviancy. It was perverse, changing on women halfway through having sex with them.

"You're a sick bastard, Alistair. Keep away from her. I mean it." He steeled his jaw, frowning at his brother.

Alistair's grin became a sly smile, his head cocking slightly to one side.

"Give me the company," he said, his sweetly spoken words not covering the contempt in his eyes.

"Give me the house," Erik retorted.

"No," Alistair said flatly and then paused. His look turned thoughtful and then became dark. "You know she only gave it to you because she wanted to spite father. It's your fault she hated him so much."

Erik growled, louder this time. Alistair flinched slightly under the threat, but recovered quickly. If Alistair wanted to air the family's dirty laundry in public, then Erik was going to make sure that he came out on top. He was tired of bowing to Alistair, choosing the easy way out. It was time his brother knew the truth.

"No, Alistair," he said and took a step away from him. His whole body tensed. His voice lowered, trembling with his anger as he thought about what their mother had gone through. "It was you. It was always you. It was because you were so much like him and she saw him in you. The whole ugly truth. The sex, the lies and the violence. She saw it and it made her see it in father when she'd been blinded by love before. You made her hate him. You're the reason they're both dead!"

He turned and walked out the door, not giving Alistair the opportunity to think of a comeback. His heart thundered with adrenaline, so much that he was shaking. He stared unseeingly at the pavement, ignoring the click of the paparazzi cameras. Trying to rein in his feelings, he fought the desire to give himself over to them. He couldn't change, not here and not when he was feeling like this. Surrendering to the anger was the start. It would bring him that one step closer to being like Alistair and his father, and he didn't want that.

He growled, letting it rumble through him and soothe him as it drew out all his pent up feelings of aggression and hatred.

Getting into his car, he turned the music on loud and started the engine. He revved it, listening to it roar and feeling the vibrations running through his body. Slamming his foot down on the accelerator, he wheel spun out of the parking space and shot down the road.

A long drive and he'd be back to his normal self again.

Tomorrow he'd go running. It always helped clear his head and gave him a better perspective on things.

Tonight, he'd dream of her.

Chapter 7

Kim breathed steadily as she jogged around Hyde Park. It was another gloriously sunny day. Not one cloud marred the sapphire sky. She smiled to herself and adjusted her headphones on her ears when they showed a hint of slipping off.

Last night had been just what she needed—a little alone time to think about everything that had happened over the past few days. She'd soaked in the tub for almost an hour before foraging in the refrigerator for something to eat and finding a cheesy romance movie to watch. Of course, she'd thought about Erik all the way through it, imagining he was the lead and she was the woman.

She couldn't get her mind off him. All night she'd dreamt of him. It was different this time. She'd just been laid beside him and he'd been softly stroking her skin, pressing gentle kisses against it and being close to her. It was a nice change, but she wouldn't have said no to something more passionate and frantic. After their moment in the lift, she'd been full the brim with desire and it was just waiting to overflow.

Catching her foot on a bump in the path, she almost fell but recovered herself at the last minute. She took it as a sign that running while not concentrating was probably going to end in disaster and stopped. Jogging on the spot in the shade of a huge oak tree, she looked around the park at all the people. The sun was certainly bringing them out. There were brightly coloured blankets spotting the grass, usually with a couple lying on them, or a group of friends having a drink and a laugh.

She stopped jogging and stretched.

The dappled sunlight shone off her water bottle as she brought it up and took a long drink. Removing her headphones and stowing them safely in the pocket of her shorts, she squeezed a little water over her face and then wiped it off with the bottom of her spaghetti-strap top.

Looking down at the shade of the tree she was standing under, she saw that not many people were using it as an umbrella and walked over to a wide open space. She sat down and brought her knees up to her chest, staring at the beautiful park and trying not to think about Erik.

She really wished she'd said yes to his offer of dinner.

Since she'd met him, her dreams had been getting hotter, much like the weather, but last night's one threw her. It was so different, as though she was being shown another side to dream Erik. She wondered if the real thing would be the same. Would he like to lay naked with her, just quietly exploring every inch of each other's body with light touches and soft kisses?

She sighed and lay back, staring at the sky where it peeked through the rich dark green canopy above her.

Closing her eyes, she stretched out and focused on how relaxed she felt.

She hadn't even realised she'd dozed off until she opened her eyes and found herself lying on the bed in that mystery room. She stared at the ceiling, feeling incredibly content and smiling to herself.

Someone touched her foot and she looked down the length of her body at Erik. He smiled, a little mischievous looking. She realised she was dressed in nothing but her underwear again.

She craned her neck to watch him as he began to plant long, wet kisses to her left leg, slowly easing himself up the length of her. Her eyes became hooded when he reached her thighs. His fingers ghosted over one while his mouth explored the other.

She gasped when his hand brushed against the front of her knickers. Liquid heat settled in her abdomen, warming her pussy. She writhed a little, feeling the slick arousal in her panties and groaning when his hand touched her again. Her pelvis arched off the bed, hungry for his fingers to come back. He did better.

Pleasure melted her as he kissed the front of her lacy shorts. His tongue laved her through the material, exquisitely close but painfully far away at the same time. She brought one knee up, letting it fall to the side and exposing herself to him. He took the hint and dipped his head again, licking up the length of her crotch through her panties. She mewled and reached down, running her fingers into his lush black locks and holding him against her.

A sigh of relief escaped her when he slipped his fingers into the waist of her underwear and slid them slowly down her legs. Her hands lost their grip on him and she reached out, desperate to touch him again, to feel the velvety softness of his hair beneath her fingers. She caught hold of him the moment he came back, tossing her underwear across the floor. She smiled at him when he looked at her, luring him to her. Fire and hunger darkened his eyes.

He growled.

Her stomach clenched and her heart leaped in her chest. She gasped, shocked by her reaction to his growl.

He growled again, trailing off in a deep rumbling purr as he lowered himself towards her.

She flung her head back, arching off the bed as his tongue parted her nether lips and darted inside. Her mouth opened, forming a wide 'o' as he licked up the length of her, his fingers assisting him. He circled her pert clit and flicked it with the tip of his tongue, and then delved lower. She groaned when he lapped at her entrance, purring and licking up all of her arousal. She wanted to tell him it was all for him. He was the one who made her so wet and hungry, dying to feel him inside of her.

Her other knee came up and she spread her legs, her eyes squeezed shut as he devoured her, his tongue laving her hard.

Her eyes shot open when he slid a finger inside her and she moaned.

"Oh, Erik."

"Kim."

She frowned when something touched her foot.

"Kim?"

Fluttering her eyes open, she wondered where the bedroom had gone. She stared at the sky above her and

heaved a sigh in an attempt to slow her heart rate and calm herself back down.

"Dreaming about me?" A deep familiar voice made her eyes shoot wide open.

She lowered her gaze and found Erik smiling at her. She was suddenly overly aware of the fact that her nipples were painfully aroused and probably showing through her top.

"Huh?"

"You said my name." He smiled and she died a little inside again as she blushed. If he hadn't known she was dreaming about him, he probably did now. "I thought it was you when I was running along the path. I had to come over and say hello. I hope that doesn't contravene your client-act."

Now that he'd mentioned it, she noticed what he was wearing. The black tank top was fitted achingly tight against his upper body, revealing his muscles with each breath he took. His shorts were black too. The way he wore it, black was definitely sensual.

She looked him over from head to toe, from the strong, defined muscles of his arms and torso, to his powerful looking long legs. Damn, he looked hot.

"Client-act?" she said, a little dazed from her perusal of him and her daydream.

"You said that I'm a client so you couldn't come out with me." There was the slightest hint of disappointment in his voice. "Would it be terrible if I sat down? My legs are killing me."

She didn't know what to say. She stared at the heavenly legs in question. It would be a crime to leave them killing him. If he wanted her to, she'd more than willingly return the favour he'd done for her and massage them. Damn she was dying to touch him. She looked at the spot of grass next to her and then back at him.

"Not here," he said. "Come out into the sunshine. It's far too good to waste."

She got up without thinking and followed him into the light. It warmed her through, relaxing her as she sat down on the grass. He lay down beside her, closed his eyes and stretched out, his hands resting behind his head like a pillow. Again she found herself thinking how content he looked, laying in the sun like a cat.

Seeing he wasn't about to open his eyes and catch her, her gaze ran over him again. He had a terrific body, lithe and toned, powerful.

He took a deep breath and held it, and then breathed it out slowly.

When he looked at her, she smiled awkwardly, trying to think of something to say to fill the silence. She was happy just sitting with him, but it felt so intimate, and somewhere deep inside, that made her panic a little. How could she be so comfortable sitting in silence with a man she'd only just met? Normally she was a non-stop talker around guys until they'd met each other and spoken at least a dozen times. With Erik, she was fine not saying anything. There was a pleasure in just being with him that she'd never found with anyone else.

"What is..." she hesitated and then continued when he raised a brow, interest sparkling in his eyes, "...paragraph 157?"

He rolled his eyes and smiled at her.

"You know the deal," he said in a husky barely-there voice, his gaze returning to the sky. "Dinner for an explanation."

She heated up a little inside at his words. He still wanted to go out with her. Hell, she was dying to say yes, but her conscience and the fear of discovery by someone at her company made her shake her head.

"I can't be seen with you," she said, her tone more than apologetic. She couldn't hide it from him. She hated the idea of saying no to him, but she had to. He looked at her. Disappointment shone in his honey eyes. She felt the need to add more to what she'd said to convince him. "I'd be shot."

His lips curved into a wicked smile. "Doesn't it just add to the excitement of being with me?"

She told herself that it did, but it wasn't necessary to make him exciting.

She shook her head again.

He frowned for a moment, looking thoughtful, and then propped himself up on one arm, leaning on his side.

"It doesn't have to be dinner then," he said, a smile gracing his lips again. There was an air about his expression that said he'd found a foolproof plan to get her to go out with him. If he pressed her a little more,

she'd agree to anything regardless of the risk it put her at. There was only so long that she could hold out before her heart won over her sense. "How about drinks? And before you say no, like I can feel you're going to, I know a place where no one at your work would know. You'd be safe there."

She doubted that. She'd be safe from the company but not from herself. If they went to a place where no one at work could possibly see her, she'd have no reason to control herself around him.

"Come on, Kim." He touched her hand and a jolt ran through her over the brief contact between them. "A couple of drinks and I'll tell you everything you want to know about me."

She nodded, not stopping to think because she knew if she did then she'd say no again. She wanted to go out with him, wanted to sit across a little table, or beside him at a bar, and listen to him talking all night long. Was that too much to ask? He'd practically promised that no one would see them. She trusted him.

"Give me your address," he said.

She froze, her sense battling her heart again.

"What for?" she said in a shaky voice.

He gave her an incredulous look. "So I can pick you up of course."

"Maybe this isn't such a good idea." She cringed as she said it, not wanting to upset him but knowing she had when his expression clouded.

"You already agreed," he said in a flat voice that clearly expressed his displeasure.

"I know, but..."

"Why are you always fighting me? Don't fight me, Kim. Just say yes and I promise no one will see you." He touched her hand again, fingers lightly caressing it, coaxing and convincing her.

What he'd said struck her hard. He kept telling her not to fight him. Dream Erik told her that too. She remembered it.

She stared down at his hand where it was still resting against hers. He wasn't going to sprout fur and purr. He wasn't. The real Erik and the dream one weren't one and the same.

But how did he keep saying things she'd heard in her dreams?

Maybe she hadn't heard him say that in her fantasies. Maybe her memories were hazy enough that things he'd said to her in real life were blurring with them. When she'd dropped the files, he'd told her not to fight him. It was probably that time she was remembering, not a time in her dreams.

She stared into his eyes. He was waiting for an answer, his look a little eager and hopeful. For once, she was going to do what she wanted. He'd promised her now. No one would see her. Besides, it wasn't everyday she had a drop dead gorgeous man practically begging her to go out with him. She'd be a complete idiot to turn him down and spend another night in alone.

She nodded.

He grinned.

She wondered what he was doing when he reached into his pocket and pulled out a mobile phone. He pressed a few buttons and then handed it to her.

“Write it down,” he said quickly, as though he feared she’d change her mind again if he took too long.

She did. Carefully entering her address into the note he’d opened, she checked it was all right and then added her mobile number to the bottom.

She’d never given a guy her number before.

She felt a little giddy.

Handing it back, she smiled at him as he checked it and then looked at her. She hoped he wouldn’t mention the number. It was impulse making her do it. She told herself that it wasn’t impulse. It was just in case he was late or got lost. It had absolutely nothing to do with some futile hope that he’d call her out of the blue for no reason other than to hear her voice.

“Nine pm sharp,” he said, standing.

She stared at his backside as he dusted bits of dried grass off it. “Uh huh.”

A flash of a smile in her direction and he was running off into the distance.

She sighed and flopped back onto the grass, staring unseeingly at the sky above.

What had she been thinking? Was she hoping it would turn out like her fantasies? She was crazy. He was just a man that matched her dream guy a little. That was all. Now she'd gone and made him the dream guy. The voice at the back of her head said that he was damn persistent about going out though.

She smiled at the sky.

Maybe he did like her.

Chapter 8

It was stiflingly hot. The gentle breeze blowing in through the window did nothing to cool the room. Erik lay on his back with his eyes squeezed shut as Kim ran short nails over his chest. He growled, urging her on. She giggled, a light sound in his hazy lust-addled mind.

Her fingers travelled lower, caressing and sweeping over his stomach. He tensed it, showing her the power his body held in the only way he could right now. She moaned appreciatively and ground her pussy against his hard cock. Another growl escaped him.

He felt her shift, and then felt the kiss she pressed to just above his navel. She kissed around it, licking occasionally as she explored his stomach. He propped his head up on his arms and watched her, not moving a muscle as she touched, licked and kissed him. It was fascinating to watch her learning his body.

He laughed as she found a ticklish spot on his side just above his left hip and she gave him a sly smile, as though she'd added it to her list of things about him that she had learned and was saving it for use at a later date. He didn't like being tickled. Well, only behind the ears.

She lowered her head again, kissing down until she reached his curly hair. She ran her fingers over it, study it, and then her gaze shifted across to his hungry cock. Another smile teased her lips, this time one that spoke of power and knowing. She could see how hungry he was for her, how badly he wanted her to touch there. By now, she could probably sense it, smell it on him like he could smell desire on her.

Her fingers trailed down over his thighs as she sat back, her gaze still lingering on his length.

His breath hitched in his throat and anticipation coiled in his stomach as she raised a hand. She lowered it slowly and stroked the tiniest tip of one finger lightly down his erection.

He tried to sigh but it turned into a low purr in his throat.

She smiled, looked a little more confident when he did that. He knew why, could see it in her eyes. It was the power she felt when she made him purr. As though she was the only one who could make him do it.

She was.

“What do you want, Erik?”

He smiled at her question. She was getting bolder in the dreams, and in real life too.

“You,” he breathed.

“You want this?” She lowered her head and slowly licked up the length of his cock.

He groaned and managed a nod.

He tried to watch her as she licked him again, her tongue tracing the ridges and veins of his length. She reached the soft head, exploring it carefully and making him want to hold her there. She stayed, as though she’d felt his need, and flicked her tongue against the sensitive sides of it.

His fingers curled into fists and he jerked his pelvis up, wanting more contact between them. She moaned and ran her tongue around the head of his cock, slipping the tip of it into the crack. He was about to groan again when she wrapped her lips around him and took him into her mouth. His groan became a strangled noise in his throat.

The strangled noise became a deep purr.

She took him in further, so deep he knew he wouldn't last long, and sucked him hard on the way back up, her tongue pressing firmly along the underside of his cock. When she reached the head, she flicked it with her tongue, and then plunged him back into the sweet abyss of her mouth. He lost himself there as she sucked hard on the way back up and then slid him back inside. Her rhythm was a slow steady torture, too divine for him to handle.

His fingers gripped the pillows as he tried to resist thrusting into her mouth but found that he couldn't. Her hands held him down, the sense of restraint only adding to the pleasure. Her tongue danced against the head of his cock and then she sucked him again, her tempo increasing until he was panting hard in time with her movements. He screwed his eyes shut, his moan becoming a snarl as his whole body tensed, waiting for the sweet moment he'd find release.

She rolled his balls in her hand and then pressed against the spot beneath them. He roared and came into her mouth, his cock throbbing as she continued to suck him and lick him.

He relaxed back into the bed, carried away on a hazy sea of bliss and sedated to the core.

Erik opened his eyes and looked down at the mess on his bare stomach and his hand where it still held his cock.

He rolled his eyes. Another shower before going out tonight then. He frowned and reached over for a tissue from the box beside his bed. Wiping up the mess, he almost laughed at himself.

Twenty-seven years of masturbating over the same girl. His brother would laugh at him, always did. Alistair couldn't understand why he kept himself celibate, resisting the women that life put in his path. He resisted because he wanted his mate, not some quick fuck.

Twenty-seven years though.

The dreams had been infrequent at first, only occurring three or four times a year. He'd known what they were instantly. God knows how old Kim would have really been when he'd started having them, but she was always the same age she was now, or thereabouts, in his visions. It was only once he'd fully matured fifteen years ago that they'd began to become more frequent, increasing until the point, two years ago, where he'd had them every night.

It would be different for Kim. She would only have had them the past year or so. Human females that were coming into heat didn't have them consistently until just a couple of weeks to a month before they were ready for mating. Judging by the way Kim smelt and the way she acted around him, she was ready.

He couldn't quite believe that he'd been waiting almost thirty years for her and this moment. He just hoped that she was receptive to the idea. He wouldn't be able to

keep it hidden from her forever. To mate with him meant leaving humanity behind and becoming like him. Her aging would slow to a stop as she reached maturity herself, and then she'd live forever like him.

He frowned and sat up.

Unless someone killed her when she was in her prime. He wasn't convinced that his mother had killed his father and then taken her own life. It wasn't like her at all. She'd hated his father with such a fiery passion, but she never would've killed him.

Walking into the bathroom, he tossed the used tissue into the toilet and flushed. He looked at himself in the mirror, studying his face and watching his eyes slowly yellowing as he allowed his primal side to the forefront.

He shook his head and turned away, looking back into the bedroom at the large double bed. Its crisp white sheets were crumpled where he'd been lying on them. He hadn't meant to fall asleep, but after returning home from his run and having a shower, he'd had nothing to do but wait. Time had passed impossibly slowly, dragging the afternoon out until it had become unbearable. He wanted to see her again.

He'd lain on the bed, staring at the ceiling and listening to the sounds of silence, while enjoying the cool breeze that was bringing the smell of summer in through his window. The next thing he'd known, he was lost in a fantasy.

Turning back into the bathroom, he turned the shower on, making sure the water was deliciously cool before stepping under the jet. He closed his eyes and thought about tonight.

In just a few hours, she'd be with him again.

Shortly after that, he'd see just where the hunger between them would take them.

He wanted her.

He was damn well going to get her.

* * * *

Kim almost fell over when the door buzzer rang through the flat. She hopped towards it, desperately fighting her shoe and squeezing it onto her foot just before she reached the intercom.

She pressed the answer button.

"Hello?" she said.

A little black and white picture flickered into life. It was Erik. Her heart pounded at the sight of him as he leaned in close to the camera and smiled winsomely.

"Going to let me in?" he purred the words at her.

She nodded, as though he could see her, and pressed the button. "Sure. Third floor. Don't take the lift."

The screen went black and she struggled to get her other shoe on. She repeatedly smoothed the little black summer dress down over her body, struggling to breathe normally as questions crowded her mind and her stomach danced with the thought of seeing Erik again.

She looked down at herself. It was the only black dress she owned and she was glad it still fit her. It was snug at

the top but flared out at the hips, making it light and breezy. Perfect for such tropically hot weather. She did the top button up and wondered what Erik would think of it. She'd chosen it purely because of his love of black. She was wearing black underwear too. Not that she was jumping to conclusions, but it was best to be prepared.

She pushed a strand of hair back into her ponytail and went into the kitchen. Taking the rosé wine out of the refrigerator, she poured two large glasses and carried them with her to the door. Placing them down on the side table in the narrow hall, she readied herself.

Someone knocked. Her heart jiggled about in time with her stomach. She took a deep breath and told herself that this was it. There was no need to panic. It was just drinks with Erik and finding out what that paragraph meant. That was it. It wasn't going to go any further than that, so there was no need to be disappointed if it didn't.

She opened the door, a bright smile on her lips.

God Almighty, if she didn't want to melt into a puddle right then and there. Her smile faded, replaced by a look of hunger she couldn't wipe off her face when she looked him over. He leaned against the door frame, his arms crossed and his brow raising as she stared at him. The black slacks and shirt he wore made him look impossibly hot, and there was such a look in his eyes as he looked at her, so much fire and passion, that she could only stare at him.

He smiled.

Her chest ached, her stomach tensing with need.

Picking up a glass of wine, she held it out to him, squeaking as she tried to say something.

He held a hand up and raked his eyes over her. She swallowed, her hands trembling as she saw the hunger in his gaze. His eyes narrowed and swept back up her.

"You look pretty tonight," he said in a deep bedroom voice that had her thinking that going out wasn't really necessary and she could just grab him, pull him into the flat and screw his brains out.

She extended the glass of wine again, hopeful that he'd take it so she could drink hers and kill the brain cells associated with the dirty little thoughts swimming about her head.

He held a hand up again. "I'm driving. I can't drink."

"Oh," she said, still trapped in his eyes. She swallowed the entire glass of wine in one go and started on the second. They did nothing to stop the nerves growing inside of her, or the dirty thoughts. Her head felt fuzzy and her cheeks burned up as the alcohol swept like fire into her veins.

She frowned as her brain finally caught up.

"Why are we going for drinks if you're not drinking?" She went into the kitchen and refilled her glass with shaky hands.

He followed her. She could feel his eyes on her and when she glanced across at him, she found he was staring at her backside.

"I know the owner of the club. I can leave the car there and get a taxi home." He smiled and then chuckled when her eyes widened. "I assure you, I'm not out to get you drunk."

She lifted the glass to her lips but he strode across the kitchen and took it from her.

"You're doing a pretty good job of that without my help," he said and drank the wine. "How about we get a taxi there, too?"

She nodded and then realised that his car would be outside her apartment block all night. He'd have to come back tomorrow to pick it up. The voice at the back of her head said that she could make things easier on him and let him share her bed tonight so he didn't have to go home. She shut it out, telling it that it wasn't going to happen.

Smiling at Erik, she watched him pour the remains of the bottle of wine into the two glasses. He handed her one, and sipped his.

"You look pretty too," she said and furrowed her brows when he cocked one at her. "In a very manly way...of course...for a client."

"I'm not sure whether to thank you or be offended that I'm pretty, but in a very manly way." He finished the wine and put the glass down on the side. "Ready?"

She picked up her mobile. "I'll call a cab and then grab my jacket and we can go."

She walked out into the corridor, cringing to herself as she listened to the phone ringing at the taxi company.

What on Earth had possessed her to tell him that he looked pretty? Men weren't pretty. She should have said that he looked delightfully fuckable or insanely sexy, or one of the other million things that had been floating around her head in that moment. God, he did look good though. Adonis had nothing on this man.

She ended the call with the taxi company and grabbed her jacket and purse off the couch. Putting her jacket over her arm, she went back to the kitchen and Erik. She smiled at him from the doorway.

"I'm ready," she said.

His gaze narrowed on her body again and then he looked straight into her eyes.

He smiled at her.

"Aren't you just."

Chapter 9

Erik led the way towards the club. He walked along the road when they reached the queue of people waiting to get in. When he realised that Kim had stopped at the back of it, he turned around to face her.

"What are you doing?" he laughed the words, a little giddy over being out with her. She did look fantastic in her little dress. It hadn't gone unnoticed that she'd chosen to wear black. It really suited her. She'd look great in animal form.

"Queuing," she said with a shrug.

"Not queuing," he said and caught hold of her arm. He held onto it as he walked and then let go of her when she fell into step beside him.

"Don't we have to queue?" She looked confused.

"I don't queue." He laughed again and nodded towards the row of people all jostling and peering along the line towards the doors. "That's for them, not me."

"Oh," she said, her brows raised and her eyes wide.

He got the feeling she'd never had VIP access to a club before.

Reaching the door, he nodded at the bouncer. He was a huge round man, bald headed and hard as nails. It was a strange contrast to his primal side. He'd seen him in cheetah form. As a human, he looked nothing like the slim, graceful cat he really was.

"Alistair here?" Erik said.

The bouncer shook his head and then grinned, exposing slightly elongated canines. Erik looked over his shoulder at Kim. She was staring open-mouthed at the hulking mass of man in front of her.

"Shall we?" Erik intimated the door as the bouncer took the black velvet rope off its hook, letting them pass.

She moved past him with nothing more than another glance at the bouncer. When the bouncer grinned again, Erik wondered if this was such a great idea. It wasn't often that humans entered this club. If you didn't have the right identity card, the only way of getting in was to be accompanied by a shape-shifter.

Whenever a human did happen to come to the club, they were met with curious glances and whispered comments. He hoped it wouldn't be that way tonight. Usually humans came with the lower ranks, not with one of the elite like him.

This would cause a few rumours to spread. He gave it five minutes before people were talking about her and ten before they decided that she was a potential mate. The club would be packed and that's the only reason they'd be so slow. In a room with only ten or twenty shape-shifters, it would take a split second to smell her scent and know she was in heat.

Lucky for him that being in heat didn't mean it was open season for mating calls. Mates came around once in a lifetime, twice if you were fortunate, and were destined for one person only. Many of his kind didn't find their mates. He couldn't believe that he'd found his. With no face to go on, he'd thought it would be impossible.

He looked around him at the club. The dark interior was lit with blue lights and purple neon. It was packed just as he'd expected it to be. Between him and the bar were at least seventy people.

Kim looked at him, her eyes still wide, but this time she looked fascinated rather than curious.

"I'll get you a drink," he said over the noise of the music.

It was usually an eclectic mix, but on Saturdays, the club played purely rock and alternative music. It didn't mean there wasn't a slow song to dance to now and then. And it didn't mean that he couldn't get the management to play any song he wanted, regardless of genre.

He looked at Kim, wondering if she'd dare dance with him. When her eyes met his, fire swept through him and he narrowed his on hers. He stared intently into her eyes, letting her see his hunger and how she made him feel.

He wanted her. He was going to stop at nothing to get her.

Her pupils dilated. It wasn't the low light making them react. He could smell her scent. It told him she was as hungry as he was.

Leading her towards the bar, he leaned against it when they finally reached it and signalled the bartender. He recognised him. Another black panther. It was nice to have another one to talk to now and then. His species was rare amongst shape-shifters. The more common

blood seemed to dominate, and that was the blood his father and brother had. Puma.

If he managed to convince Kim to mate with him, then he'd have another black panther to talk to. More often than not, a chosen mate was already a shape-shifter, but sometimes it turned out to be a human.

He ordered two glasses of wine.

His mother had already been a black panther when she'd mated with his father. Her bloodline extended back further than he could remember, but his father's went back further.

Handing one glass of wine to Kim, he silently toasted her and then nodded towards their destination. She looked there, and then back at him. He smiled reassuringly and started walking through the crowd. It was a tight squeeze, and a few steps in he realised that he was getting separated from Kim.

Kim gasped when a hand took hold of hers, gripping it tightly. She looked up to see Erik still smiling at her and then looked down at her hand where it was held in his.

The air in the room was cool, a shocking contrast to the muggy heat of outside. She'd expected it to be hotter in here, with all the people closely packed together, but the only time she'd felt hot since coming in was when Erik touched her. She shifted her hand in his, holding it and making the most of the chance. She was surprised when his fingers slipped in between hers, tightly locking their hands together. She stayed close behind him as they moved through the crowd, using him as a shield. There was no way she could see where they were going. She couldn't see anything above the people around her. They

were all taller than her, and some of the women they passed were incredibly beautiful.

She wondered why Erik had chosen her when he could probably have any girl in this room.

His fingers tightened against hers, his thumb stroking hers softly. She stared at their hands, mesmerised by the tenderness he stirred by caressing her. It felt as though he was trying to reassure her and comfort her. She looked at his back. He glanced over his shoulder at her, his eyes silently asking a question.

Was she all right?

She nodded.

He smiled and squeezed her hand.

A little thrill ran through her.

She wasn't imagining it. She couldn't be imagining it. He cared about her. His look; his actions; it all made her believe it.

They broke through the crowd and she was surprised that she'd made it through unscathed and with her drink intact. They moved past the booths at the side of the room and then walked down an aisle between two of them. Erik disappeared through a dark curtain. Following him in, she looked around at the room. It was lined with mirrors. A dark softly furnished bench seat wrapped itself around a small highly polished table.

Erik slid into the seat.

She shuffled in opposite him.

She noticed that he was reluctant to let go of her hand. The feel of his fingers pressing into her, holding her so tightly, made her warm inside. It wasn't just the wine. She took a sip of it to steady herself. It was good stuff, probably beyond what she could afford.

Looking across at Erik, she saw he was staring at their hands. There was an odd expression on his face, one that she couldn't quite interpret. It was somewhere between wonder and disbelief. Couldn't he bring himself to believe that he was holding her hand, touching her? She couldn't quite believe it herself. It felt so comfortable and natural.

He gave her a hesitant small smile and then released her. She took another sip of her drink, watching him lean across and close the curtain. She liked the privacy and seclusion it gave them. Suddenly she felt as though there was only her and Erik here. There weren't masses of people on the other side of the curtain.

He toyed with his glass and then frowned. It was thoughtful. She wondered what he was thinking and looked around the booth. The light was warm, contrasting with the colder lighting in the main part of the club. She could see herself in the mirror opposite. He'd said she was pretty. Maybe she was tonight. She felt pretty, sexy. He made her feel that way. His attention and smiles, and the way he touched her—it all combined to make her feel as though she really was sexy and attractive.

Shuffling back in her seat a little, she tried to get more comfortable and relaxed. She was sitting in silence with him again. It really was a nice feeling. As though they didn't have to say anything to each other—just being together was enough.

He moved, pressing a button she'd not noticed before and then sitting back again.

"So what do you want to know?" he said, his voice deep and almost a whisper. It made her stomach flip over, heating it a little more.

He leaned forwards, resting his elbows on the table and intently staring at her. She blushed but knew he wouldn't be able to see it this time. The lighting in the booth would hide it well. She could blush all she wanted to here.

He looked as though he was waiting for an answer so she thought about it for a while, trying to line up all the questions that she'd had floating around her mind since meeting him.

She gulped a mouthful of wine to give herself some false courage and then leaned forwards too. His eyes dropped. She leaned forwards a little more, letting him get a better look at her cleavage. He wasn't the only one who could do seductive and sensual.

The evident struggle it took for him to get his eyes back up to hers made her feel a bit dizzy, and when his gaze met hers, the temperature in the room seemed to triple. His eyes looked so yellow in this light, warm and shining. She stared into them, listening to the silent words of want and desire they spoke to her. Did her eyes look like that? As though they were begging him to throw the table to one side and forget the conversation and the wine, just take her instead.

If she felt just a bit braver, she'd do as his were asking her. She wanted to see if the reality matched the thrill of the fantasy.

She drank down the rest of the wine. It went straight to her cheeks.

There was a knock on the frame surrounding the curtain.

"Come," Erik said, his eyes still fixed on hers, dark and seductive.

God did she want to.

Someone drew the curtain aside and stepped in. She was vaguely aware of a man asking Erik something and then Erik responded. All the while, he was looking straight into her eyes. The curtain closed again. He drank the rest of his glass of wine.

"Tell me about Alistair," she said.

His expression darkened, losing all of its relaxed air.

"What about him?" His voice matched his look.

She could see the anger in his eyes and wished she hadn't mentioned his brother.

"You two don't seem to get along, that's all. You're both so different."

He leaned back into the seat and stared at the wall behind her. He was looking in the mirror. Was he trying to see if he was like his brother?

"He's like our father. I'm like our mother. They're both very different creatures and so are we. He thinks of nothing but women, and I think of other things." His dark look didn't shift.

She remembered Simon's words about Erik, or possibly Alistair.

"Blackwell," she said and Erik flinched. "It's an interesting name...sounds like it has a lot of history."

"It has. A lot of bloody history. There's nothing nice about my name. Every connotation it gives, it lives. My family history is not nice, Kim. Don't go there."

He definitely wouldn't call himself by just his last name then. Realising that she was making him uncomfortable, she decided to bring the conversation away from his family.

The curtain opened again, revealing the same waiter as before. He placed an ice bucket down and presented a bottle of something with a flourish. She tried to see what it was. Two long stemmed champagne glasses were placed on little paper napkins on the table. The man left.

Erik poured her a glass of champagne.

"What is it?" she said, eyeing the deep rosy liquid. It was bubbling furiously. Something about it said that whatever slight hint of drunkenness she was feeling was about to explode into full-blown giddiness.

"Dom Pérignon." He put the bottle back into the ice bucket and moved it to one side, away from them.

"It's pink."

He smiled and toasted her. "It's damn expensive. Just savour it. You seem to like rosé and my bank account can take it."

She sipped it. The bubbles went up her nose and carried the alcohol straight to her head. She smiled at the delicate flavour and smell of it. She'd thought the wine he'd bought at the bar had been expensive. She'd never had Dom Pérignon before, and doubted she'd ever have it again on her wages.

Leaning against the table, she smiled across at him. He was watching her, visible hunger still in his eyes.

"Do you like it?" he purred.

She nodded, and tried to think of another question to ask him while her entire body overheated. He'd said that he'd tell her everything she wanted to know. What did she really want to know about Erik Blackwell?

"How old are you?"

He raised a brow and thoughtfully sipped his drink. "Thirty four."

Her brows rose too.

"Tell me about yourself." She propped her head up on one hand, conscious that he would be able to see right down her top again, and not caring. If anything, she wanted him to look. "I've got too many questions..."

"Give me a starting point," he said, resting his elbows on the table again and leaning closer to her. He moved his glass so it was next to hers. His hand was incredibly close and all she could think about was the way he'd held her—possessive, protective.

"Where did you grow up?"

He leaned back a little and looked thoughtful again. "That far back, eh?"

She nodded.

"All right. I grew up at my family home, but spent a lot of time at school, or abroad. My parents believed in a good education and that meant boarding school. Alistair didn't mind, but I did. I didn't like being sent away from my family." He frowned and then it melted away when he looked at her. "That probably makes me sound like I'm a big baby."

"Not at all. I've not really got any family. My parents are moving abroad for their retirement, thank God, and I barely see my sister. She's always so busy. We try to get together every so often to catch up but we just seem to be drifting apart." She took another sip of champagne. It really was delicious. The bubbles popped on her tongue, making her senses tingle. "How much younger than you is Alistair?"

"How did you know he was younger?" His expression turned curious.

"Just a hunch. Older siblings always seem to be more mature, especially when it comes to boys."

"Only two years older."

"But what a difference, hmm? Simon told me all about your brother. He thought it was about you. I knew it wasn't."

Erik leaned back, his look darkening for a split second before it softened again. "Let me guess, all manner of nasty little tales."

She nodded. Her head spun slightly.

"Let's not talk about him," Erik said and moved closer again, shifting forwards in his seat.

He topped up her glass and his knee brushed against hers under the table. A thrill ran up her legs over the slight touch.

"I've travelled extensively, have an interest in martial arts, and I'm very interested in you," he said, his voice low enough that she thought she'd misheard him at first. "Tell me about you. Tell me your hopes and dreams, your childhood, family. I want to know it all."

Intense heat burned her cheeks, setting them on fire. She hadn't been imagining him saying that he was interested in her then. She tried to think of what to say, wanting to make it sound exciting so he would think she was worthy of the interest he had in her.

Before she could speak, his hand was on hers, resting over it, engulfing it. She looked at it. His fingers toyed with hers. Either he was shaking or she was. Or maybe it was both of them. He looked unsettled, not his usual confident self. His seductive smile and façade had slipped, revealing to her the man beneath. He really was interested in her, and, by the looks of things, he didn't care if her childhood had been boring and her dreams were impossible. He just wanted to know more about her.

"Kim?" he said, a nervous edge entering his eyes. "Tell me about the things you want in life. Do you want the whole husband and kids package?"

Her heart set off at an alarming speed and she couldn't breathe. She grabbed her glass of champagne and gulped it, choking as it tried to go down her windpipe. He slid around the bench seat and was beside her in an instant. She closed her eyes, holding her throat. His hand gently patting her back and his concerned words made her tremble. The patting became a slow rub as she began to get control of her breathing. His warm palm moved in gentle circles against her bare back, tantalising her and drawing her focus there. She remembered the feeling of his fingers against her shoulders in the lift. Her stomach tensed as heat settled in her abdomen.

She turned to him and smiled, feeling ridiculous. His question had caught her completely off guard. She knew it was just a question, not a proposal, but it had been the last thing she'd expected.

"I've never thought about it," she said, her voice still strained. "I'm only twenty nine...no...I do. Life goes by so quickly doesn't it? Too quickly. You can't dilly dally about things you want."

"My thoughts exactly," he said and refilled her glass and his.

She noticed that he wasn't moving back to his side of the table. Her thigh was hot where his was pressed against it. As he shifted in the seat, they rubbed together, making her leg hum and tingle. She wanted more contact. She wanted his hand back in hers, his mouth to her ear as he whispered sweet words into it, and their bodies pressed hard against each other.

Preferably naked.

Chapter 10

Erik smiled when Kim looked at him, her eyes wide and cheeks flushed. She looked hungry, and as aroused as she smelt. He could understand. The dreams had him thinking five steps ahead of where they were now too. He couldn't get them off his mind. Every time he looked at her, he thought of the thousands of times he'd touched and kissed her, caressed her and watched her face as she melted in pleasure along with him.

He probably shouldn't have skipped the more formal questions about her youth and her life, but he'd had to know if she had any intention of ever settling down with someone. He knew that in this day and age that didn't mean marriage and kids, but a mating was as close to a marriage as he could get. He had eternity ahead of him. That was a few name changes or rebirths. It usually worked the same way. They'd have kids that people knew about but no one saw. These apparent replicas of them would miraculously enter the world at the time when their parents had apparently died. The cycle would go on. He didn't mind being reborn in the public eye now and then. He was sure that some people thought his family were cursed. So many generations had died horribly and early in their life. The paperwork involved made it a pain, but a necessary one if they were to avoid discovery.

His thoughts drifted away when he reached out a little with his senses and felt Kim watching him. He liked that feeling. The intense passion she stirred whenever she looked at him was almost overwhelming, but at the same time, it was nice. He knew that when he looked at her, she felt something similar.

Sipping his champagne, he thought of another question to get her talking again. He was probably making her uncomfortable by sitting this close to her and not speaking. He told himself that he should go back to his seat opposite her, but sitting next to her was bliss and he didn't want to relinquish it just yet.

"So what's life like for you? You've heard about my years spent locked away at a boarding school, and my family."

She smiled a little smile, a hesitant one. He'd noticed earlier that she looked nervous about telling him about herself.

She drank a mouthful of champagne and swallowed it as she leaned back into the seat, nestled close to him. She was near enough that he could feel her, sense her a hair's breadth away. All he had to do was lean a little.

He closed his eyes when her arm touched his, their sides pressed against each other for a split second. She breathed in sharply, and then sighed. He smiled and looked at her, watching her teeth tease her lower lip. When she finally looked up at him, he was stunned to see she didn't look at all embarrassed or awkward about what had happened.

If anything, she looked as though she wanted it to happen again.

He slid a little closer when she took another sip of champagne, using her momentary distraction to narrow the gap between them.

"Life? Well... it's day in day out isn't it? I mean, it probably isn't for you. You're probably like those people in Heat magazine, swanning about on your yacht with

babes hanging off your arms and a permanent grin,” she said, looking nervous again as she neared the end of her sentence.

“Not at all,” he said in a low voice, edging a little nearer. He stared at her mouth, fascinated with the way she kept teasing her lower lip. He’d die if she let him do that. He licked his lips, imagining kissing her and sucking her lip into his mouth. Damn, he’d die a happy man though.

He was so desperate to feel her mouth against his that a kiss could probably kill him. Even if that were true, he’d still beg her to do it.

She was looking at him, brows raised, as though there should have been more to what he’d said and he’d forgotten to say it.

“I only meant that I don’t own a yacht, and I don’t want girls hanging off my arms.”

She smiled. Her eyes shone with a little more confidence. They dropped to his mouth when he smiled, and stayed there, focused intently. He could sense her want and what she was thinking. She wanted that kiss, wanted to kill him just like he was silently begging her to.

Leaning towards her, he got as close to her as his sense would allow. Her eyes closed, hiding their dark depths from him, and her brows rose slightly into an expectant look. It was right there for the taking. All he had to do was let himself snatch this opportunity. She was asking him to kiss her.

He picked up the bottle of champagne.

“Want some more?” he whispered, his mouth close enough to hers that she’d only have to move an inch for them to touch.

He begged her to, pleaded her to find that confidence inside her to make the first move so he wouldn’t feel wretched like he knew he would if he kissed her. This had to be her decision. If it was his decision to make, he could have swayed her by kissing her in the lift, or on the roof, or even in the park. She had to choose this, choose him.

And he had to tell her just what he was inside.

He didn’t know how she was going to react to that. In the visions, she’d sometimes seen him start to change, and she’d heard the way she made him purr. Was it enough to prepare her for the reality of what he was? To her, shape-shifters were the stuff of books and movies, not real life.

She was staring at him as he stared at the table. He could feel her eyes boring into the side of his head and an unanswered question hung heavily in the air between them.

Why hadn’t he kissed her?

A furtive glance at her was enough to show him that what little confidence she’d found, he’d stolen it from her. He shouldn’t have pulled away. He should have kissed her. How could he do that though without her knowing what she was getting into? This wasn’t a brief fling, or a relationship that would last maybe two or three years, this was a life altering decision, for both of them. He couldn’t go into this knowing that she would leave when she found out what he was. He wanted to be

with her forever, and he had to be honest with her if he was going to achieve that.

She looked at her watch, frowning. A quick look at his revealed that it was getting late. The club would be starting to empty. He turned to face her when she leaned away from him, drawing the curtain aside a fraction and looking out into the main room of the club. She let the curtain fall closed again and smiled at him.

He drank the rest of his glass of champagne and opened his mouth to speak but she beat him to it.

“Do you want to dance?” Her voice shook badly and the nerves showed in her eyes.

His heart flipped and beat harder, sending the alcohol to his brain at double time.

He nodded dumbly.

She grabbed his hand and was immediately on her feet. When he slid out of the seat and came to stand beside her, she wobbled slightly and pressed her free hand to her head, smiling to herself. Clearly she wasn’t used to champagne. He was going to tell her they didn’t have to dance and that he should probably take her home, but when she looked up at him, all smiles and happiness, he couldn’t bring himself to say the words. She wanted this, regardless of the fact she was a little intoxicated. He’d seen her sober. She wanted to be close to him. She wanted those fantasies to become a reality.

He just had to tell her and then he could make every single one of them real, just as soon as she knew about him.

Grabbing the bottle of champagne, he swallowed down the remains of it to try and shrug off his inhibitions and then smiled right back at her.

If she danced close to him, if she made it clear that she wanted to kiss him, then that was enough confirmation for him. He'd kiss her then. If she tried to take it further, he'd tell her about himself. He would.

Leaving the booth, he kept a firm hold of her hand and led her towards the dance floor. The music was fading as they approached and his heart missed a beat when he heard that the next one was a slow tune. He looked over his shoulder at Kim. She was still smiling, looking a bit giddy, and it was hard to tell whether it was the alcohol or whether the prospect of being in each other's arms was making her as dizzy as he felt.

He told himself to get a grip and then promptly did, sliding his arms around Kim the moment they were on the dance floor.

Kim smiled into Erik's eyes as she came face to face with him. The nerves she'd managed to suppress in order to ask him to dance had returned with friends now that she actually was. She took a deep breath and listened to the music, letting it soothe her and waiting for her head to stop spinning. It was just a dance.

She groaned quietly in her throat when Erik's hands tightened against her back, tugging her closer to him until their bodies were touching. He moved slowly with her and her hands trailed up his arms, gaining confidence when his gaze shifted to watch them, his eyes darkening. His arms tensed beneath her touch. She felt his muscles through his shirt. They were taut, powerful. They made her knees weak.

Her hands continued their journey and her breath caught in her throat when Erik's gaze moved back to meet hers. She stared into his eyes as her hands reached his shoulders. His body felt as good as it had looked this afternoon, and as good as it had felt in her fantasies.

She couldn't believe this was happening. A glance at her surroundings showed that it was mostly couples on the dance floor and some of them weren't even dancing, they were just kissing each other.

She swallowed, wishing Erik would kiss her. Since he'd said she looked pretty, she'd given herself leave to believe that her fantasies might just come true, or that he was at least going to kiss her tonight.

Surely you didn't get a girl's hopes up by telling her she looked pretty when you had no intention of kissing her?

Erik's hands sliding into the curve of her back brought her out of her thoughts and she found herself still staring deep into his eyes. She was lost in them, and the feel of the music drifting through her and the way he was moving with her. It was slow, sensual, bodies pressed close together until there wasn't room for air between them. She pressed herself against him a little more, showing him that she wanted this too.

It wasn't just him.

It was time she showed him that.

Right now, she didn't care about work and what would happen there if someone found out about them.

She just wanted to be with him, in his arms, feeling his touch, tasting his lips, and losing herself in the moment.

He smiled slightly. His hands pressed harder against her back and made her feel as though she couldn't escape him. She didn't want to leave anyway. Things were finally getting interesting. Sliding her hands over his shoulders, a thrill ran through her when they brushed against the bare skin of his neck. She caressed it, slipping her hands around the back of his neck and intentionally leaving her hands grazing him.

His eyes closed a fraction and he breathed deep, deep enough that his chest pressed against hers. She kept her eyes locked with his, not wanting to break the moment. The music had disappeared, drifted away into the background along with the rest of the world.

She bit back a moan when he moved position and his leg slid between hers. The delicious friction stirred desire, which fed the need she was feeling, making it overflow and become impossible to resist. She moved her leg so his was pressed against it and he responded by lifting it slightly.

Her mouth opened in a sigh when his thigh grazed her left inner one, sending a shiver through her that settled in her abdomen. She found a little more courage and let her hands leave his neck. Trailing them downwards, she rested them on his chest, feeling the beat of his heart and his muscles as he breathed. His heart was racing as badly as hers.

He moved again, one hand leaving her back. She gasped when she felt it against her thigh and fire burned where he touched. He slid it a little higher, raising the hem of her skirt, and she was surprised when his leg brushed the inner thigh of her right leg. She swore she could feel his cock against her. She could also feel the slick arousal in her knickers.

She wanted to close her eyes, but wanted even more to keep them open. She couldn't take her eyes away from his, no matter what happened. She just had to keep staring into them, seeing everything he was feeling in their depths and knowing that this wasn't a fantasy.

This was real.

Her hands slid lower, over his stomach, feeling the muscles there, before following the line of his belt around to his hips. His hands came up, his body moving achingly hard against hers, melting her. She swallowed when he ran his fingers lightly up her bare arms, leaving a trail of fire in their wake which quickly turned into goosebumps. He caressed her shoulders, his touch barely there and teasing, arousing her whole body with a promise of what he could make her feel like if she only let him. She knew what he could do to her, the dizzy heights of ecstasy they could reach together.

She leaned her body into his, her crotch against his strong thigh as his hands trailed down her back. Her eyes widened when they settled on her backside, pulling her closer until his thigh was rubbing against her pussy with each move they made. Her mind went hazy with the desire that soared through her, lifting the whole of her insides with it and making her let go of every last thread of restraint she'd been holding onto.

She didn't care about anything any more. She didn't care about the company finding out. She didn't care about the people in the room that were probably staring at her. She didn't care if this was all a dream.

All she cared about was being in his arms and feeling a connection between them. With his eyes locked on hers, and hers fixed on his, it seemed like they were one and

the same, one soul in two bodies, one heart beating fast to the rhythm of their combined breathing.

His hands moved up again, raising the hem of her dress enough to expose her backside for a second before the material fell. Excitement erased any embarrassment she might have felt on knowing people would have seen it.

She smiled into his eyes, wrapping her arms around his neck and locking her hands behind his head. He was smiling at her, the lights of the club playing on his face, softening his look until she was sure that there was a hint of affection in his eyes, something other than desire and lust.

"You're beautiful," he said.

Her eyes widened again, her smile disappearing as she struggled to believe that she'd heard him correctly. No one had ever told her she was beautiful. He moved closer, his eyes finally leaving hers, dropping straight to her mouth. Her stomach clenched, flipped. Her heart pounded in her ears. She could feel the kiss coming, shivered with the anticipation of it. His hands tightened around her, drawing her closer still. His head dipped.

He closed his eyes.

His mouth was so close to hers that she could feel his breath on it.

"So beautiful," he whispered against her lips.

She closed her eyes and the gap between them at the same time. Her whole body buzzed with the thrill of their first touch, and when he began to kiss her, she wanted to melt in his arms and surrender to him like she did in

her fantasies. She swept her tongue along his lips and he opened his mouth, claiming hers in a passionate kiss. Heat burned through her, igniting her hunger and turning want into painful need. She kissed him back, burying her fingers into his hair and holding his mouth firmly against hers. She screwed her eyes shut, focusing on the smooth slide of this tongue against hers and the warmth of his mouth. He tasted like champagne.

Suddenly he was gone and it took her a moment to get her senses together to open her eyes and look at him.

"There's something you need to know," he said, his expression becoming a little too serious for her liking.

Panic loomed in the pit of her stomach but she got control. Nothing was going to spoil this moment.

"You're not married or engaged are you?" Her brows furrowed and she silently prayed that he wasn't.

He shook his head and smiled. "No, it's not that. It's—"

She shook her head, cutting him off. "Then it doesn't matter."

She pressed her lips back against his, shutting her eyes the moment they met and losing herself all over again.

He hooked his hands over her shoulders, his kiss becoming more fervent. Their tongues duelled, fighting for dominance. His leg ground against her, stirring the fire in her belly until she was the one winning in their fight. A shiver bolted through her when he groaned and his hands caught her backside. He rubbed his hips against her and she tensed, her eyes opening when she felt his hard length.

She broke the kiss and licked her lips, panting hungrily as she stared into his eyes. They were incredibly bright in the low light, staring at her with fierce desire. Her knees wobbled a little, partly because of the alcohol, but mostly because of that look. He really wanted her.

And damn the world, she wanted him too.

"People are staring," Erik said.

She looked around them at the other couples on the dance floor. Some were indeed staring. She shrugged. It didn't matter.

Erik took hold of her hand and led her back to the edge of the dance floor. She slipped free of his grasp when they reached it and smiled at him when he looked at her.

"I'll join you in a minute," she said, considering what she was about to do and whether it really was a wise move. "I just have to visit the little girls room."

Chapter 11

Erik leaned back in the chair in the private room, cock hard and aching, waiting for Kim. He breathed deep, trying to calm himself down and telling himself over and over again that kissing was as far as it went. He had to tell her.

The voice at the back of his mind reasoned that he'd tried to tell her and she'd told him that it didn't matter, and when she kissed him, he believed her. In his heart, he knew different. It was easy to say that something didn't matter when you didn't know what it was that the other person wanted to tell you. If she knew what he had to say, he was damn sure it would matter.

The curtain twitched and then parted. Kim appeared, looking a little more flushed than when she'd left him to go to the bathroom. He wondered what she'd been doing in there. His heart was still racing, blood thundering through his veins as she moved towards him, stirring his desire back into life again.

Before he had a chance to speak, she was sliding into his lap, straddling him but with her backside resting on the table. Her mouth was on his, kissing, tongue probing and exploring his mouth, one moment slowly, the next hungrily. She moaned when his hands cupped her backside, pulling her down onto his lap, and she kissed him harder. His tongue met hers, curling along the length of it and tasting her sweetness. His cock throbbed, begging for her attention, and his mind veered off to remember his dream about her sucking his length.

He closed his eyes and groaned into her mouth.

Her hands left his shoulders and she drew back, breaking contact between them. He opened his eyes and watched her fingers, mesmerised as she slowly unbuttoned the top of her dress, revealing her bra-clad breasts to him.

When his gaze met hers, she smiled shyly, but then dropped her gaze to her breasts before meeting his eyes again. It was an invitation. He was never one to refuse an invitation, especially one like she was extending.

Her attention flicked to the curtain and the confident look she was wearing faltered for a second before she was kissing him again, her hands on his chest. He kissed along her jaw and down her neck, holding her against him but not close enough that she couldn't continue what she was doing. She was unbuttoning his shirt. The first sweep of her fingers against his bare chest sent raw hunger through him. His hands trailed up her arms to her shoulders, and he drew the straps of her dress down. He sat back in the seat, staring at her breasts and growing painfully hard for her.

She glanced at the curtain again. He looked there and then back into her eyes.

"No one will disturb us," he said in a low voice.

She seemed to grow bolder on hearing his words and continued to unbutton his shirt until it was completely undone. She spread it wide, her eyes roaming his chest and stomach. He looked down at it, his gaze following her fingers as she traced the shapes of his muscles, lightly teasing his skin with her nails. He sucked in a sharp breath and she smiled. He recognised that look from his dreams. She felt powerful because of the way he reacted to her touch. He was happy to give her power

over him. There was nothing as enthralling or arousing as a confident woman.

Leaning his head back, he saw her look at the curtain again. When she looked back at his chest, he could sense the excitement on her. The idea of being caught doing this with him thrilled her.

He slipped a hand inside her dress, cupping a breast as his other hand worked to undo more of the buttons. Her eyes were fixed on his again, staring intently into them and making him feel so connected to her that he could almost sense her next move. She bit her lip as he gave her breast a gentle squeeze and rubbed the nipple through the lacy black material with his thumb. Her eyes became hooded, dark. They reflected her hunger for him, showing him everything she was feeling.

He bit back a purr when her hand slid down and cupped his erection. His brows furrowed and she smiled slightly, small enough that he might have missed it if he hadn't been watching for it. She grew a little more confident and he groaned when she felt along the length of his cock. He rolled his eyes closed when she rubbed it through his trousers, torturing him with the feeling of being close to her, but too far away from any real pleasure.

She leaned towards him, pressing her breasts into his palm and grazing her cheek against his.

"I want you," she whispered into his ear.

His cock bobbed against her hand.

"You want me too," she said with a sly smile as she pulled back.

"I don't have anything," he said, aching to be inside her and cursing himself for not having the good sense to be prepared.

Her smile widened but turned a little nervous. She hitched her dress up and slid her hand into her panties.

He stared at her when she pulled out shiny foil packets.

"Little girls room," she said, her voice trembling now.

He grabbed her and kissed her hard in an effort to chase away any embarrassment she might have been feeling.

Kim smiled against his mouth, the condoms still firmly gripped in her hand. She wrapped her arms about him, her lips playing with his as their tongues teased each other. This was the right decision. She wanted this, and so did he.

Running her hands down his bare chest, she pulled back and stared at his body. It was tensing beneath her touch, reacting beautifully to her caress. She traced her fingers down over his stomach muscles to his belt and struggled to keep hold of her confidence as she began to unbuckle it. He sucked his stomach in, his hands gripping her hips tightly. She could feel them shaking and she knew he was nervous too. What did he have to be nervous about? She'd never been with a man who'd felt that way, but a look into his eyes confirmed that he did.

The belt gave way and she moved to the zip on his trousers. She eased it down, not wanting to spoil this moment by rushing. She wasn't surprised to see he was wearing black underwear. He shifted a little when she had fully unzipped him. Licking her lips, her stomach

squirmed with nerves and her heart pounded against her chest as she edged her hand towards him. She breathed hard, arousal and alcohol making her feel dizzy, almost delirious.

Not brave enough to touch him straight away, she rested her fingertips against his stomach before sliding them lower. Her eyes met his as she turned her hand so it was pointing downwards, palm facing him. She ran it down to his balls, feeling them move fluidly beneath her fingers under the slightest pressure, and then moved her hand along his hard cock. Her eyes half closed and she held her breath as she ran her fingers to the tip of it. Erik's reaction made her feel empowered. He closed his eyes and bit his lower lip, resting his head against the mirror behind him.

She looked at him, and her reflection at the same time. Drawing his cock around, she pulled at the waist of his boxers and dropped her gaze there when she freed it. The sight of it made her pussy throb with need and she tensed her muscles, sending a pulse of pleasure to her clit. She could feel the dampness in her knickers.

She licked her lips again and teased the crown of his cock with a light touch. His hips jerked hungrily towards her and she touched him again, this time stroking her fingers down the length of him and fondling his balls. He groaned low in his throat and opened his eyes, giving her a look that made her feel as though he was begging her to put him out of his misery.

Sitting back on the table, she put the condoms down and hitched her dress up. His attention was immediately with her, his eyes wide and roaming what little he could see. She firmly seated her feet on either side of his legs and slipped a finger of each hand into her knickers. She

raised her backside and drew them down to her thighs. The visible look of hunger and fascination on his face was too good to waste, so she brought her knees together over him and slowly drew her underwear down her legs. Sliding her shoes off, she raised one foot and pressed it against his chest, followed by the other foot.

He caught hold of her ankles.

Between her legs, she could see his cock bobbing, a glistening pearl of arousal telling her how much he was enjoying her teasing.

She leaned forwards, pushing her breasts together with her upper arms as she reached to push her underwear down her legs. Meeting his hands, she gently removed them and drew her feet towards her to remove her underwear. She tossed them onto his chest. They tumbled down and landed on his cock.

Spreading her legs so her feet were either side of his hips, she reached over and took the panties off his cock, making sure the material brushed lightly against it.

Erik groaned again, his jaw tensing and his gaze boring into her.

She straightened up and moved her legs a bit wider apart.

His fingers curled into fists, his gaze dropping to rest on her exposed pussy.

He brought his hands up, ghosting them over her thighs and around her backside. He moved her closer to the edge of the table, and then pressed one hand against her chest. She took the hint, leaning back and splaying

her hands out behind her for support. Nerves threatened to overtake her again as he peeled back her dress, his attention fixed on her curly mound.

Her gaze flickered to the curtain and she thought about all the people out there. Anyone could walk in on them. A thrill ran through her and she gave herself over to it. Her eyes closed the moment Erik ran a fingertip lightly over the inside of her left thigh. She leaned her head back and focused on his touch, trying to guess where he was going next and wishing it would be where she wanted.

He grazed her other thigh, a little more pressure this time. She moaned, quietly at first, but then a bit louder, telling herself to let go and surrender to her desire.

"Look at me," Erik said.

She opened her eyes, not even hesitating.

She gasped and tensed when his finger brushed down her pussy lips, tickling her.

"I want you," he said and then smiled. "You want me to?"

She smiled at the way he'd turned her earlier statement into a question. She nodded and then screwed her eyes shut when he slipped two fingers between her lips and slid them down from her clit to her entrance. He brought them back up, slick with her arousal, and circled her clit.

Damn she was wet and ready for him. The feel of his fingers on her was going to become too much to bear too quickly.

Her eyes opened and she stared hungrily at his cock. Shifting forwards, she leaned over and ran her hand around it. She moved it slowly up and down, gripping it gently so she didn't bring him too close to the edge. He frowned, his eyes darkening as he looked at her, his fingers still exploring her.

Picking a condom up, she held it between two fingers, her eyes daring him to take it, and take her.

He snatched it from her and tore it open. Her heart was racing again and it was then that it hit her that it was really happening. She impatiently watched him rolling the condom onto his cock. She wanted him inside her already.

She was going to have sex with Erik.

Her fantasies were about to come true.

She jumped when he grabbed hold of her waist, lifting her and moving her across to sit on the back of the bench seat. Her back pressed against the cool mirror and she shivered.

He moved between her legs, kneeling on the seat with his trousers falling down around his knees and pushed her dress up. She looked over his shoulder at the mirror and smiled at the sight of his tensed backside, and then her eyes widened when she saw herself.

She was going to watch him fucking her.

Her clit throbbed again and liquid heat filled her.

Looking into Erik's eyes, she could see he was waiting for her. She spread her legs more and put her arms

about his neck, hoping it would be all the encouragement he needed. He moved forwards and she stiffened when his arm brushed against her inner thigh and the head of his cock touched her clit.

He smiled at her.

She smiled back.

Her smile was replaced with a sigh when he slid inside her, filling her up and pleasantly stretching her. She kept her eyes locked with his as he muttered something and she swore he'd said 'twenty-seven years'. She told herself she was imagining it and it was easy to forget once he moved inside her. All thought and reason left her, pushed away by the intense desire and need burning inside of her. He pulled almost all of the way out, and then slid back in again.

As his tempo increased, she moved forwards as much as she could on the seat to get into a better position for them both, and kissed him. He groaned into her mouth and she lowered one hand to his backside, digging her fingernails in as the pace of his thrusts doubled.

He roughly kissed her throat and collarbone, and she clung to him, begging him to go faster and moaning breathily into his ear when he complied. His hands grasped her thighs, holding her painfully tight and she slammed against the mirror behind her with each of his thrusts. The feeling of his cock pounding into her drove her senseless and she couldn't help feeling the eroticism of what they were doing when she opened her eyes and watched them in the mirror.

It was raw and primal, desperate coupling, and far from a romantic first time. He buried his face in her neck,

kissing it and breathing hard against it as he took her. She brought her leg up, wrapping it around him and tightening her grip on him. She wanted it harder, rougher.

“More,” she moaned into his ear, her other hand burying itself in his hair and holding him against her neck.

He groaned against her throat, sliding into her with long, deep thrusts. She stared at them in the mirror, fascinated with how they looked—consumed by need and desire, surrendering to it completely.

His fingers tensed against her flesh and she furrowed her brows when she felt his cock throbbing inside her, pulsing as he came. He breathed heavily against her, his chest pressing hard against hers as he struggled for breath. She wrapped herself around him and was surprised when he laughed in her ear.

“That was one hell of a bad first impression,” he said, drawing back but remaining inside of her.

She moaned and pressed her back into the glass behind her when his fingers teased her clit, squeezing it and circling. She tensed her muscles, feeling his cock still inside her, and focused on the movement of his fingers against her.

Her stomach tensed, her whole body following it as he teased her, making her tighter and tighter until she felt as though she was going to burst. His name tumbled from her lips, interspersed with whispered begs for more. Writhing against his fingers, her breathing came faster and faster until she was racing towards completion and one single flick of his finger would send her over.

He squeezed her clit.

Her muscles contracted around his softened cock, pulsing with her orgasm as it warmed her through. She breathed hard and tried to smile at Erik. He pulled out of her, removing the condom and tying it up.

"It'll be better," he said.

She smiled now, amused that he cared.

Grabbing his shirt, she yanked him against her and kissed him passionately, showing him that she hadn't been disappointed like he clearly thought she was.

Leaning back, she looked into his eyes for a few seconds, absorbing the look he was giving her and trying to understand it.

She ran her hand down his chest.

"Why don't you come back to my place and prove it?"

Chapter 12

Erik kissed her slowly, drowning in her and falling into oblivion with each feather-light brush of her fingers against his neck and face. He could sense she wanted more, just like he did, but the back of a cab was no place to let things get crazy.

He still couldn't believe that he'd let her convince him to take things that far at the club. The look a few of the waiters had given them when they'd left had said their antics hadn't gone unnoticed. It wasn't just that though. He'd said he'd tell her before it went that far, and he hadn't. In the heat of the moment, she'd been too good to resist and he hadn't even thought about the consequences.

Now he didn't want to think about them. He wanted to bury his head in the sand and keep on kissing her, pretending that he was just a man and she was just a woman, and he hadn't started something between them that could be their undoing.

He'd tell her when the time was right and hopefully she wouldn't hate him for it, or completely freak out. Mating was a complicated process, and thankfully sex was only a small part of it, and what they were doing wouldn't affect it.

Her hand brushed against his chest, exploring his muscles as much as it could when his shirt was mostly done up. He reciprocated her move by cupping her breast, giving it a gentle squeeze and smiling inside when she moaned into his mouth. He couldn't believe how this night was turning out, and things were only

going to get better once they got back to her place. If she wanted him to prove that sex between them could be a hundred fold better than what it had been in the club, then he was more than happy to oblige. He liked a challenge.

The taxi stopped.

The man at the front mumbled something about money. Erik fumbled in his wallet, not wanting to break contact with Kim but having to in order to get the money out. He handed the cabby a twenty pound note and told him to keep the change. A ten pound tip was what the cabby deserved for having to put up with them kissing each other to death in the back of his taxi. Although the idea of the cabby paying them had crossed his mind. He knew the man had been watching.

Opening the door, he stepped out onto the pavement and held the door for Kim. She looked a little flustered when she got out of the taxi and glanced at him, her fingers smoothing down her dress.

She looked up at the apartment building and then back at him.

Her flustered look turned nervous.

The night hadn't done anything to lower the temperature. It was still muggy and sticky, too close.

She stared at him.

The taxi pulled away.

It seemed to snap her out of whatever thoughts were weighing her down. A smile graced her lips, and it grew wider when he took hold of her hand.

She didn't say anything, she just locked their hands together and led him up the stairs to the front door of the building. He waited in silence as she unlocked it and then followed her up the stairs, his own nerves battling against his confidence. He knew that some of the visions she'd had of them were the same as his own. Those dreams were shared. If they were both asleep at the same time, then they would experience the same fantasy.

Now he had to make those fantasies into a reality for her. It was easier said than done, and sense told him to start out slow and build up to their most recent dreams. It was time they got to know each other.

Kim smiled at Erik when they reached her door. She fumbled with the keys and hoped he didn't notice how badly her hands were shaking. In the club, she hadn't been able to stop herself from asking him back to her place. During their journey here, the nerves had returned and she wasn't sure how to act around him. The kisses in the taxi had set a different kind of tempo inside her, a deeper kind of desire that asked her to take it slow now. They'd both made it obvious they wanted each other, and now that the need between them had been sated, she wanted things to switch tracks. She wanted the dream where they'd explored every inch of each other. She wanted to find those ticklish spots and sensitive areas that made him purr.

She reminded herself that real men didn't purr.

Moan then.

She wanted to make him moan and look at her like he had in her dreams, as though he could see right down into her soul and see the person she was inside, the one she didn't even know yet. She wanted to find herself with him, and lose herself in him at the same time.

Walking into the kitchen, she put her jacket and bag down on the side. She looked in her refrigerator and wondered what she was doing. Was it more alcohol she was looking for? She didn't want that. They were both probably sober by now. If they were sober, then whatever happened now meant so much more than it had done in the club.

She turned to find the kitchen door empty when she'd been expecting Erik to be there. Walking out into the hall, she locked the front door, and then frowned when she looked down the corridor and into the lounge.

Erik was pacing. She watched him, studying the subtle changes in his expression. There were nerves in it sometimes, but he still looked dangerously seductive when his gaze came to rest on her. She was drawn to him, torn between wanting to kiss him and comfort him for some reason she couldn't quite put her finger on. There was a struggle written in his eyes, as though he was fighting some internal battle that he couldn't put voice to, but one she understood instinctively. She just didn't know what it was.

She walked down the hall, straight up to him, and stopped him in his tracks. He stared down into her eyes, his honey ones showing her everything he was feeling, and she wished she could understand it all.

Raising her hand, she cupped his cheek and then stroked it. Her thumb ran across his lower lip and the heavy

emotions in his eyes began to lift. His pupils dilated and he pressed a kiss to her thumb. She trailed her fingertips down his neck and over his collarbone, following it to the notch below his Adam's apple.

She craned her neck and pressed a kiss to it, listening to his steady breathing as she explored his throat. He tasted salty and smelt of warm summer sun. She could feel his heart beating against her lips as she kissed up the side of his neck and then down towards his collarbone. His skin was so warm. He tilted his head back and she smiled when she heard the quiet groan in his throat.

Slowly unbuttoning his shirt as her mouth moved down to his chest, she drew everything out, wanting to make the most of this night. She stepped back when she opened his shirt, and ran her hands up to his chest, her fingers splaying out and running over his stomach muscles, tracing the shape of his ribs. Her eyes followed her hands, watching as she dipped them towards his armpits, rubbing thumbs over his aroused nipples, before palming his chest and stroking his shoulders.

She pushed the shirt off his shoulders, drawing it slowly down his arms, delighting in the feeling of his strong muscles beneath her fingers. Slipping the shirt off over his hands, she tossed it onto the couch and ran her fingers back up his arms. She stared at them, memorising each vein and the shape of each muscle as she explored them. He looked stunning. His square shoulders were drawn back slightly, adding to the definition of his body. There was such prowess in it, power, like she'd never seen before.

Her heart jumped when his fingers brushed across her chest and he began to unbutton her dress. She looked

into his eyes, watching his fascinated expression as he slowly revealed her to his gaze. Desire stirred in his honey eyes, sending shivers of awareness and arousal through her body. She brought her hands along his arms, ghosting lightly over them, and then took hold of his hands. Guiding him, she parted her dress and it slipped down her, catching on her hips. A wriggle of them and it was pooled around her feet.

She brought his hands down, making him cup her breasts and then sliding them around to the back as she stepped towards him. He took the hint. A single movement and he'd undone her bra. She drew in a sharp, deep breath when his fingers skimmed up her back to her shoulders, and he pushed the straps off them, lowering them down her arms.

Cool air washed over her exposed breasts and her nipples hardened, desperate for his touch. She didn't care that she was stood before him in just her knickers. She closed her eyes at the first tentative sweep of his thumbs over her nipples. His fingers pressed into the sides of her breasts, raising them slightly as he circled her nipples with the pads of his thumbs. She moaned quietly, wishing it were his mouth on her.

Opening her eyes, she reached across to him and unbuckled his belt. She could see his hard cock through his trousers. The memory of the way it had felt inside her stirred her desire and she licked her lips, wanting to feel it again. She carefully undid his trousers and slid them down his hips.

He kicked his shoes off and then stepped out of his trousers, moving closer to her.

Her hands explored his hips, memorising each dip and peak of his muscles and his strong legs. She felt warm wherever he touched, his fingers grazing down the curve of her spine, running over the small of her back and tracing across her stomach. His hands seemed to be everywhere at once, leaving her burning for more.

She hooked her thumbs into the waist of his boxers at the same time as he began to push her knickers down her legs. She smiled when he looked at her, his eyes still reflecting his hunger and his body telling her how much he wanted her. Stepping back, she shimmied out of her panties and kicked them to one side. When she looked back at him, he was naked.

She gave herself a moment to look him over, taking in his physique and how good he looked. She was right. Adonis had nothing on this man.

Moving back into his embrace, she kissed him hard, her tongue exploring his mouth as his hands roamed over her body. Fingers teased her nipples, heightening her arousal and making need burn hotter inside of her. She melted into his arms, feeling her way around his body, moving slowly lower at the same time as his hands did. She moaned into his mouth when he ran a hand over her curly hair, and then slipped a finger between her pussy lips.

Her hand came to rest on his cock. He groaned and kissed her harder, his finger circling her clit and making her realise how wet she was for him. She stroked his length, feeling it jerk beneath her touch, evidently wanting more attention. She smiled against his mouth and lifted her leg, placing her foot down on the seat of her couch. His hand slid lower and her eyes widened when he slipped a finger up inside of her. She tightened

her grip on his cock for a moment before releasing it again. Concentrating on the slow pumping of his finger, she matched his rhythm with her breathing, her fingers playing lightly over his length. He moaned again and sucked her lower lip into his mouth, kissing her more hungrily.

She knew what he wanted. She ran her thumb over the head of his cock, rubbing the sensitive spots either side of it, making him moan again and shudder. She wanted it too. She wanted him back inside.

Erik frowned when she stepped away from him. He was about to ask her what she was up to when she walked away and disappeared into the kitchen. When she came back, she was carrying her purse and he hoped to God she had in mind what he thought she did. She turned the overhead light down a little, dimming the room, and placed her bag down on the couch.

He watched eagerly as she opened it, his cock begging him to touch it while he was watching her. She looked delicious bent over like that, her backside raised in the air, breasts swinging freely.

When she straightened up, she was holding another condom. He smiled, took it, and tore it open.

He frowned when she took it back from him.

She stepped towards him, one hand wrapping itself exquisitely tightly around his length while the other lowered the condom towards it. His brows furrowed when she rolled it onto him, her movements slow and sensual, her eyes never leaving his. There was such blatant want and hunger in them that he had to take a

deep breath to stop himself from taking her there and then.

He had to retain control.

This had to be better than last time.

She'd challenged him after all.

He kissed her slowly, lowering her towards the floor. He didn't want to rush things this time. He had to show her just how good things between them could be. If he couldn't find the words to tell her about his primal side, then he had to make things as good as they could be so when she inevitably found out, there would be less chance of her leaving him.

Kissing along her collarbone, he nestled himself between her knees. He ran his hands down her sides as she finally came to rest fully on the cream carpet. It probably wasn't the best place for making love, but it was more interesting than a bed. Her fingers roamed his body, scratching at times and a feather light caress at others. He moaned into her neck, one push away from purring as her fingers continued their sensual dance down his back. It felt so good to have her this close to him, to smell her desire and her need, and see the growing affection in her eyes. There was no doubt in his heart now that she liked him, possibly as much as he adored her.

He lowered his head to her chest and kissed across to her left breast. He ran his tongue around the nipple, feeling it tighten beneath his touch, and smiled inside when she raised her knee, grazing his hip with it. One of her hands quit its exploration of his body and pressed against the back of his head, holding him. He wasn't

going anywhere. He could do this all night, just licking and suckling her. He'd still be hard for her at the end of it.

Her other knee came up and she clamped his hips between them. She mewled and writhed beneath him, her stomach flattening against his. It seemed he could wait all night, but she couldn't.

Running his tongue around her nipple one last time, he moved across to the other one and sucked it into his mouth. She could wait a little longer. He wanted her ready to burst before he entered her. He wanted to explore every inch of her like he had done in their dreams.

"Erik," her voice was a breathy moan.

It sent a shiver of pleasure through him to hear the way she spoke his name—so hungry and pleading, and laced with tender need, as though she never wanted him to stop doing this to her. He'd never stop. She only had to say the word and it would always be like this between them.

She caught him by surprise when she rolled him over onto his back. He lay submissively as she sat back on him, knees either side of his hips and her crotch firmly pressed against his. She smiled. She looked so confident and in control that the sight of her whispered words of submission to him. His mind said to let her be in control, but his heart told him that she'd issued a challenge and to surrender control to her would be to fail that challenge.

He groaned when she wrapped her hand around his cock and guided it to her entrance. She sunk back on his

length, her smile disappearing in a moan as he filled her. He was deeper than last time. This position let him all the way inside. It would be so easy to let her ride out her pleasure on him.

Flipping her over, he pinned her to the floor with his body, his eyes locked with hers. She stared into them, hers wide and dark with desire. Drawing out of her, he slid back in with gentle force. Her brows furrowed but her gaze remained fixed on his. He held eye contact as he moved inside her, long slow steady thrusts that would see them both coming undone.

He felt so connected to her. Even when they'd made out in the club and it had been rushed and rough, he'd still felt as though they were connected on some deeper level. His eyes half-closed when she tightened around his length, her sweet breath hot on his face and her quiet moans urging him on. He gripped her hands, locking fingers with her and holding them tightly. She looked at him with wide eyes and he wondered if she could feel the connection too.

The pace of his thrusts increased, his hips curling in an effort to find the spot that would have her crying out his name. Her hands left his and she grabbed hold of his shoulders, her nails digging in. He lowered his head and pressed his cheek against hers, closing his eyes as he concentrated. The sweat on their bodies made their skin stick together one moment and slide off each other the next. He could feel it dampening his back. The heat of the summer mixed with the heat of their lovemaking. Her body tensed beneath his, her breathy moans begging him not to stop. He grimaced as she dug her fingernails in deeper, sure that she would leave marks for him to remember this moment by. He thrust harder into her, groaning in her ear and holding back his desire

to growl. Her whole body was tensed, ready and waiting for that one last thrust that would push her over and take him with it.

She writhed beneath him, her legs coming up to wrap around him, her whispered words of encouragement ringing in his ears. Letting himself go, he grabbed her shoulders and plunged into her, harder and faster, moving with the tempo of his heartbeat. It lured him on, telling him to go faster and faster until he couldn't keep going any more. He obeyed, a slave to the lust and pleasure filling his mind, and to the begging of the woman in his arms.

He could sense how close she was. Her legs locked against his back and her muscles clenched his cock, milking it and making her unbelievably tight around him. He thrust harder into her, long quick strokes that had him biting his lip to hold himself back. His balls tightened, his instincts screaming that just a few more thrusts and he'd be there, and hopefully she'd be right there with him.

She jerked beneath him, her legs flexing around his hips and her pelvis dropping down as she came. He felt her convulsing around him, pulsing with her orgasm as she moaned into his ear, her breathing fast and choppy. Gritting his teeth, he rode out her orgasm, stretching out the pleasure for her and seeking his own.

She pressed a kiss to his neck and then his cheek. He growled low enough in his throat that she wouldn't hear it and came hard, his cock throbbing as he slowed his thrusts. He breathed heavily into her neck, kissing it occasionally as the warmth of his orgasm spread through him, sedating his every nerve. His heart was rocketing. He closed his eyes, listening to the staccato rhythm of

their combined heartbeats. He could hear hers beating furiously, but slower than his.

Rolling over, he pulled her on top of him. The sweat stuck their skin together, making it hard to move her, but he managed to pull her up his body. She smiled at him and then closed her eyes when he craned his neck.

He kissed her slowly, reaffirming their connection and trying to show her just how he felt.

Just how she'd made him feel.

He hoped she knew.

Chapter 13

Kim yawned and smiled dozily. She felt so relaxed. She stretched slightly, seeking a cool spot under the sheets. She could hear cars outside and the occasional laughter of children playing. She fluttered her eyes open and her smile widened when she saw Erik. He was lying on his side in bed beside her, his honey eyes bright in the morning light. They were fixed intently on her.

"Hey," she said quietly.

"Morning." He smiled.

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath when he kissed her, stirring the feelings of contentment and calm back into life. This was good. She hadn't felt this good in years. Sunday was really feeling like a Sunday. When he went to kiss her deeper, she pulled back and covered her mouth.

"I should brush my teeth," she said, slipping out of bed with her hand still covering her lips.

She didn't bother grabbing anything to put on to cover herself up. Screw modesty. Erik rolled onto his back and stretched, a tangled sweep of sheets barely covering his hips. His eyes raked over her naked body. When he looked at her like that, she felt so sexy and beautiful. She lingered a little longer, lowering her hand and letting him get a good look. He smiled lazily, his eyes closing slightly as he heaved a long sigh. He looked content again, stretched out in her bed as though it was the only place in the world he wanted to be.

She couldn't believe she'd slept with him. She couldn't believe they'd done it three times, and each time had got more intense. She smiled back at him, desperately trying not to blush.

Walking into the bathroom, she kept smiling. It seemed she couldn't stop. She looked in the mirror at herself and ran her fingers through her sleep-tangled hair. She felt a little rough after last night's drinking session, but she'd never looked as pretty as she did today. She was beautiful. That's what he'd told her, and she believed him. The way he looked at her, and the way he kissed her, made her feel he was telling the truth. He really did think she was beautiful. She grinned at her reflection.

It dropped away when she heard Erik getting out of bed.

Her bed.

She smiled again and picked up her toothbrush, wondering if it was normal to feel so giddy and silly after the most wonderful night of your life.

Brushing her teeth, her thoughts replayed the entire night while she stared into the mirror. She'd hoped that it would end up like this, but she'd never dreamed it would happen. Well, she had dreamed it, but reality was never like a fantasy. Only it was now. Her fantasies were becoming her reality.

Erik appeared behind her in the mirror. He was still smiling and still looking incredibly relaxed. He looked damn sexy too. His black hair was tousled and there was a hint of sleepiness in his eyes. The way he was standing naked behind her, his fingers rubbing his hair as he woke himself up—she'd never seen anyone so sexy.

She focused on brushing her teeth as he stepped up behind her, but all concentration disintegrated when his body touched hers. She could feel his groin against her, his hip touching her backside. His hand slid around her waist and he pressed a kiss to her shoulder.

Her eyes widened and she realised that she had a mouthful of toothpaste that she had to spit out. She gave him a panicked look.

He grinned and nodded towards the sink. She shook her head. He closed his eyes and chuckled quietly.

Rinsing the toothbrush, she put it back into the holder and then reached up and covered Erik's ears before bending over the sink and spitting the contents of her mouth out into it. She released Erik as he opened his eyes and gave him a little smile before grabbing the mouthwash.

"May I?" he said.

She looked at him. He was pointing at her toothbrush. The thought of a minty-fresh Erik made her nod immediately.

She swigged the mouthwash and watched him brushing his teeth as she swirled the mint flavoured liquid around. Her eyes trailed over his body, taking in the strong, sweeping curve of his back and his buttocks. Adonis definitely had nothing on him. Move over Michelangelo's David.

He was perfect.

Bronzed sun-kissed skin stretched tautly over packed, defined muscles, all topped off with the most handsome

face she'd ever seen. And those eyes. He looked at her, his honey eyes inquisitive. He was probably wondering what she was thinking as she stared at him. She wondered what he thought whenever he looked at her.

She motioned for him to shut his eyes and cover his ears. He did. She spat the mouthwash out into the sink and tapped his shoulder to let him know it was okay to come out now.

He spat into the sink and rinsed with mouthwash, spitting that into the sink too. She wondered why she was being so delicate around him, when he was so relaxed around her.

"You want a shower?" she said.

His eyes dropped to her body and slowly raked back up, turning up the temperature inside her. He didn't need to speak in order for her to know exactly what he was thinking. It was there in his eyes when they met hers. She could do a shower. It sounded like fun. And it was one step away from getting him into the bathtub with her.

Sliding the cubicle door to one side, she turned the water on and checked the temperature of it. She looked back at Erik. He stepped towards her and she couldn't stop herself from imagining just how good his body was going to look when it was all soaped up. Life was full of firsts, and this was another.

Stepping into the shower cubicle, she made room for Erik. He stood under the shower with the water beating down on his back and slid the door closed. The water was cool as it sprayed off him and onto her, but it did nothing to lower her temperature. She reminded herself

that things couldn't get too physical. They'd used up what measly supplies she'd bought in the girls bathroom last night.

Her eyes wandered over his body, slowly working their way up to his face. His hair was wet now, plastered against his forehead and shining with the morning light coming in through the bathroom window. She smiled into his eyes, building up the courage to do something. Her gaze slipped, following a rivulet of water as it ran down his body. It traced a line over his chest to his stomach, curving around his navel before following the contour of his body downwards.

She stopped there, staring at his cock and the dark curly hair nestled around it. It was soft still, but she got the impression that if she touched Erik anywhere, it would stir into life.

Picking up the shower gel, she poured a little onto her palm and lathered her hands. Her eyes met his again and he smiled at her. She swallowed and stepped towards him. Her hands trembled as she brought them up to his chest and placed them on him. She moved them in small circles, lathering his body until she ran out of soap. She frowned.

Erik leaned forwards and she turned to follow his hand as he reached past her. He grabbed the shower gel and squeezed a large dollop onto his body. She blushed as it ran down him, following the path of the water and tempting her to follow it with her hands. He took hold of them and placed them back on him, his smile encouraging her to let go and explore him, enjoy the moment.

He squeezed some of the soap out onto his hands and lathered them. She trembled in anticipation, her body silently crying out for his touch as she waited. His hands seemed to move impossibly slowly, and she almost muttered words of sweet relief when he finally touched her, his hands cupping her slippery breasts. She focused on his movements for a moment, the gentle sweep of his hands over her skin and the slight pressure he applied as he ran over her nipples, and then began her own discovery of him.

Her hands followed the trail of soap downwards, rubbing it into his skin. It turned to lather only to be cut through by the water as it cascaded down him, leaving streaky patches of soap and bare skin. His hands slid down her sides, following the curve of her waist and she tried not to laugh as they tickled her. He chuckled, showing her that he'd noticed. She went straight to a spot just above his hip and tickled him there.

His hands stopped moving.

So did hers.

How the hell had she known he was ticklish there? She stared at the spot, frowning, and touched it again. He wriggled when she did, trying to evade her hands. How had she known? Maybe all men were ticklish there, or one of her ex-boyfriends was.

It felt so familiar though, as though she'd done that to him before. She remembered that she had. She'd tickled him once in one of her fantasies. She had known he'd be ticklish there. How? A fantasy was just that. It wasn't real. Everything that she knew about him there, couldn't possibly be true here.

Could he purr?

She ran her hands up his soapy chest, pushing the remaining suds with her, and slipped her fingers into his hairline. She stared into his eyes when instinct moved her to rub the spot behind his ear. His eyes closed slightly and then opened again, wide as though he was trying to stop them from closing completely as she scratched there. They slipped shut and he tilted his head towards her. He pressed a kiss to her hand and caught hold of it, bringing it back down to his chest. His eyes opened and he looked at her. He looked worried.

She shrugged it off as her reading into things too much. There was no fur and he wasn't about to begin purring on her, no matter how much she rubbed him behind the ears like a cat.

She gasped when he grabbed her waist and turned with her, placing her under the water. It drenched her in seconds, flattening her hair against her face. She stepped forwards a little and flicked her hair back, clearing it from her eyes. Erik was smiling at her but it faltered when she made eye contact.

His gaze dropped to her body and he raised a brow. She looked down at her tightening nipples and brought her soapy hands up. She caught his gaze again and circled her nipples with her fingertips. He groaned and a frown married his brows for a moment. The next thing she knew, his arms were around her and he was kissing her. She could feel his length hardening against her hip and wrapped her arms about his neck, kissing him back and trying to get her mind off how strange things had been a few moments ago.

She shrieked against his mouth as the water turned cold. Letting go of him, she tugged the door open and skidded out into the bathroom. She shuddered as she grabbed a towel for herself and handed one to Erik.

"So much for hot water today. The building has crappy timing." She rubbed her cold body with the towel and stepped around Erik to turn the shower off.

Erik just wrapped his towel around his waist and stared at her. He still looked hungry, as though he was going to eat her whole. Her stomach rumbled, reminding her that he probably was hungry after last night.

Her mother had always told her that she'd caught her father by believing the age old saying that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach. She was willing to give it a shot and believe it if she got Erik at the end of it.

"Breakfast?" She smiled at him, hopeful.

He nodded and grinned. Her knees felt a little weak. She dropped her towel and wrapped her arms around his neck. Hopping up, she put her legs around his waist as he grabbed her backside to support her. His lips played softly against hers, sending shivers of warmth through her as she leaned into him. She looked around as he moved and saw that he was carrying her into the bedroom. He laid her down on the bed and lay on top of her, his body covering hers as he kissed her again, his fingers running through her wet hair. She sighed beneath him, her hands tracing the muscles of his back as her tongue tangled with his. God this felt good. She could lie here forever with him kissing her, the outside world passing by the window and the room bright with sunshine, warm with summer.

She could die right here, and not care.

As long as Erik came with her of course.

He stopped kissing her and she opened her eyes, staring into his honey ones. They were smiling at her, slightly narrowed and full of a look that made her melt inside. He'd looked like that last night when he'd told her she was beautiful.

The longer she stared into his eyes, the more she found herself thinking about things between them. Sometimes when he looked at her, like he was now, she got the impression he could have feelings for her, and it made her wonder what her feelings for him were. She felt as though she knew him, almost intimately, as though they'd met in more than just fantasies and like this. There was a closeness between them that she knew wasn't one sided. The way she felt around him, and the way he acted around her—it was more than just a physical attraction. The warmth he made her feel and the way his touch soothed her. She couldn't make sense of it. She barely knew him. How could she feel so intensely connected to him?

Her heart skipped and danced when a thought flitted across her mind. Love? She didn't think so. It was far too soon to be falling for him.

Or was it?

She frowned and the moment drifted away when a phone rang. Erik's look darkened and he pushed himself up off her. She propped herself up on her elbows and watched him cross the room to his clothes. He rifled through them and produced a mobile phone.

He scowled at the display and then opened it.

“What do you want?” His voice was heavy, full of anger and resentment. He paused for a moment and his gaze shifted across to her. “That’s none of your business. I warned you about that at the restaurant, Alistair. I wasn’t kidding either.”

Realising that the conversation was about to turn nasty, Kim stood and slipped into a little dark blue dress. She glanced at Erik. He managed a smile at her and she returned it, wishing that Alistair hadn’t called. She didn’t want anything to spoil her time with Erik, and Alistair brought with him a reminder that Erik was a client, and this was exactly the kind of thing she could be fired for.

Walking out of the bedroom, she opened the windows in the lounge and then went into the kitchen. A quick inspection of the cupboards revealed that there wasn’t much in them that could be classified as food. She sighed to herself. It wasn’t as though she’d been expecting her dream guy turned real guy to spend the night. When she’d agreed to go out with him, she’d gone straight home to get ready, skipping the grocery shopping that she should have been doing.

She grabbed the bag of bread off the side and opened it, frowning as she took out a slice and inspected it for mould. The last thing she wanted to do was give Erik mouldy toast. That definitely would not be the way to his heart. She hummed quietly to herself as she put some slices of bread into the toaster and tried not to listen in on Erik’s conversation with his brother. She could hear him quite clearly. It wasn’t as though he was keeping his voice down.

She'd witnessed first hand the animosity between them and now that there was more evidence, she couldn't deny it. The meeting, last night at the club, and the way Erik was speaking on the phone, they all made her see that the two of them hated each other. It raised one question in her mind again.

Why were they entering into this contract with each other if they couldn't stand each other?

She remembered the paragraph and the fact that she'd not mentioned it once last night.

The toast popped and she put it on a plate before refilling the toaster. She stared at it, thinking about everything that had happened over the past few days and what the contract said. She just couldn't understand why Erik wanted to sign it. There didn't seem to be anything at all beneficial to him in it, and that clause about blood gave her the willies. What kind of contract mentioned blood?

"Sorry about that," a strong male voice spoke close to her ear and an equally as strong pair of hands caught hold of her waist and turned her around. He lifted her effortlessly onto the work surface and sat her down, nestling himself in between her knees. He smiled. "Now where were we?"

She closed her eyes as he kissed her, his hands locked tightly against her back and his body pressing into hers.

She didn't know where she was. One minute she was thinking about that contract, the next it was nothing but a distant and very hazy memory, one that didn't bother her at all.

When he kissed her, nothing seemed to matter except the way it felt to have him hold her, and the touch of his lips against hers.

He pulled back, still smiling as he looked into her eyes. She looked deep into them, finding no trace of the anger she'd seen moments ago when he'd answered the phone. She wanted to mention it to see if the darkness that had been in his eyes would come back, but after the way he'd reacted to her mentioning his brother last night, she knew it wasn't wise.

The toaster popped again and he looked at it, and then at her.

"I was making breakfast," she said and leaned over to take the two slices of toast out of the machine. She placed them on the plate with the others. "Only I don't seem to have anything edible in the flat."

She gave him an apologetic look. His expression was blank for a few seconds and then he smiled, stepping away from her and looking through the cupboards. She noticed that he was dressed and a part of her wondered if he was planning on leaving soon. She hoped he wasn't. It was still early and there was the whole of what could be a nice lazy Sunday in front of them.

"Anything to put on the toast?" he said, pushing jars and bottles aside.

She watched him for a moment, desperately trying not to think about how domestic this all was, and then shuffled closer. She looked over her shoulder at the cupboard and reached in. Rifling around, she placed everything that wasn't out of date on the work surface.

"Peanut butter, marmite or honey," she announced with a triumphant smile and made a mental note to go through her cupboards and throw away all the old stuff.

He pulled a face, somewhere in between thoughtful and repulsed. She silently prayed it wasn't disgust. So her choice of food wasn't quite the same as what he probably ate on a daily basis. Her wages didn't extended to posh champagne.

"I'm going to have to go with this," he said, picking up the peanut butter. He smiled and relief swept through her. "It reminds me of when I was younger and back at the house, before my parents died. The housekeeper used to let me have it whenever I snuck down to the kitchens."

She frowned, watching him spread the peanut butter on his toast as she took in what he'd said. She hadn't realised that his parents were dead. He hadn't mentioned it last night. He handed her a piece of toast, smiling broadly. She took it and continued to look at him. No matter how much she'd thought she knew about him, it seemed there were still things she was yet to discover.

"You're not eating?" His voice broke into her thoughts. She blinked herself back to the world. "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine," she said and delicately bit the corner of her toast, chewing it slowly so she didn't look like a pig. "Why?"

"You just looked a little distant. Are you sure you're all right?" He took a bite out of his toast and had swallowed it down before she had a chance to respond. "Sorry I'm

being a bit strange. Alistair calling me out of the blue has thrown me."

"It's understandable." She hopped down from the counter and took another bite of her toast as she went to the refrigerator. She opened it and grabbed the orange juice, placing it on the side. Shutting the refrigerator door, she looked at Erik. "You really don't like him do you?"

He shook his head and finished off his toast. "It goes both ways. When our parents were alive things weren't so bad between us. Now we'd probably kill each other if you left us alone in a room together for long enough."

She took another bite out of her toast and poured two glasses of orange juice as she chewed it thoughtfully. Handing one to Erik, she swallowed her mouthful.

"So why the contract?" she said.

He drank down his glass of orange juice and then sighed. "It's complicated."

"Is that a nice way of saying I wouldn't understand?" She smiled and sipped her drink.

"It's a nice way of saying you don't want to get involved in this."

"I am involved," she said and they both fell silent. She knew he'd hated her reminder that she was his client as much as she did. Forcing a smile, she pushed away all the questions about the contract and his family.

She placed the remains of her toast down on the plate and walked over to him. He looked down at her, his

expression heavy and thoughtful. She was ruining their day. Time to make things better again. Taking his toast from him, she tossed it onto the plate and then caught hold of his shirt collar. She lured him down to her and kissed him, slowly exploring his mouth with light brushes of her lips, so barely there that it made her feel light and giddy inside. He responded by placing his hands against her hips, holding her gently and kissing her with equal tenderness. She stepped closer to him, into his embrace, and melted when his arms encircled her, wrapping her up. The world drifted away and the way she'd felt when they'd been kissing on the bed came back full force. She sighed against his lips, loving how relaxed this felt. He tasted like peanut butter. She presumed she did too.

His lips left hers and trailed down her neck. She was surprised when he stopped kissing her and just held her. He pressed his cheek against hers and she closed her eyes, wrapping her arms about him and holding him.

His grip on her tightened and she wondered if there was something wrong. She pushed against his shoulders and looked into his eyes as he stared at the work surface. Lightly cupping his cheek with her right hand, she brought his head around to face her. There was a look in his eyes again that she couldn't decipher. Maybe his brother had said something to upset him.

She smiled reassuringly, touched by the way he let his guard slip around her and was showing her the man he was beneath his strong exterior. The corners of his lips twitched a little, but he didn't manage a smile. There was so much sadness in his eyes that it made her heart ache. Who was this sadness for? Was it for his parents, or for them, or someone else?

Her fingers stroked his cheek and she let her guard slip too, wanting him to see the way he made her feel so if any of the mixed feelings in his eyes were about her, he'd feel reassured about those at least.

He smiled this time and kissed her. It was a gentle caress that made her ache inside, but not with desire. She felt as though he'd breathed a little of his sadness into her and she knew without words what he was trying to say. She clung to him, kissing him and wishing he wasn't about to leave.

He broke the kiss and brushed a few strands of hair out of her face.

"I have to," he said, as though he'd heard her thoughts.

His hand slipped into hers and he led her to the door. She followed in silence, staring at their joined hands and trying not to think about tomorrow. None of this would change. There would still be feelings between them. He wasn't going to change his mind about her.

She stopped at the door and looked up at him as he turned to face her. She let herself believe that the look in his eyes was for her, that he didn't want to leave, and that this was hurting him as much as it was her.

Opening the door, she forced a smile as he stepped out into the hallway. His hand took hold of hers again and he toyed with her fingers, looking at them. When he raised his head, she gave him another smile, trying to hide how much she was hurting. She didn't want him to leave. She didn't want to go back to the real world.

He kissed her briefly and caressed her cheek with the back of his fingers, smiling at her.

"I'll see you tomorrow," he said and kissed her again.

She nodded. He would. There was a meeting tomorrow to discuss the contract. She felt sick at the prospect of having to sit so close to him and not being able to touch him, or look at him for too long.

He moved a few steps, his hand still in hers, but then came back to her and kissed her again. It was harder this time. There was no sadness in it, only passion and hunger like he'd shown her last night. She threw her arms around his neck and lost herself in it, pouring out her feelings into it and ridding herself of them as she told herself that everything was going to be fine. She smiled against his mouth, thrilled by the desperate way he was kissing her, and then pushed his shoulder.

"Go," she said with an even broader smile.

He grinned and kissed her one last time before his hand slipped from hers. She watched him walk to the stairs and held her hand up in a wave as he looked back at her. He blew her a kiss and disappeared down the stairs.

She sighed and leaned against the doorframe, listening to his receding footsteps.

Tomorrow would be fine. If she was lucky, he'd ask for somewhere to smoke and she'd have some time alone with him.

She grinned.

Life was suddenly looking up.

Chapter 14

Erik stood the moment the door opened and Laura walked into the room looking a little flustered. She hurried to her desk and placed down the files she was holding and then turned to face him with a bright smile.

"Mr. Blackwell, we weren't expecting you until eleven. I hope nothing is wrong," she said, her cheery voice doing nothing to cover the tightness in it.

He knew what she meant by nothing be wrong. She was panicking that he was going to pull out of the contract negotiations with them and find another lawyer. He smiled.

"Nothing like that, I assure you," he said and she visibly relaxed for a moment before acting as though she didn't know what he was talking about.

She knew.

He paced across the room, trying to think of the best way to say what he had to as his heart battled against his mind. He knew this was wrong of him, and that there was a chance Kim wouldn't see his actions in the same light that he did, but he had to do it. She'd said it herself.

"I want Kim off the case." His heart ached in his chest and he took a deep breath, forcing himself to continue reciting the words he'd practiced so well since yesterday.

"Why? She hasn't done anything to upset you, has she?" Laura moved towards him.

He sidestepped her, not wanting her close to him. He didn't want to be here at all. But he did want Kim to feel as though she could be with him without losing her job.

"No, on the contrary. She's been wonderful. I just don't think she's right for this case."

Laura gave him a knowing look and nodded. "I see. This is because she asked those questions on Friday. What did she say to you in the lift?"

He rubbed the bridge of his nose to ease his building headache and said nothing. Kim had done nothing wrong in the lift. If anything, he was the guilty party. He was the one doing things wrong. He didn't mind that Kim asked questions about the contract, that was just her job, and he'd gladly explain things to her if he could find a way of doing it that she'd understand. He had to tell her. Since leaving her yesterday, he'd spent the whole time thinking about her and what was going to happen when she found out about him, and had decided that he had to tell her as soon as possible. Maybe then she would be more understanding about it.

Maybe then she wouldn't leave him.

He growled under his breath, quiet enough that Laura wouldn't hear him.

"You seem very agitated," she said and moved to block his path as he paced back across the room.

He looked at her. "I have a headache. I want this contract signed as quickly as possible, and I want Kim off the case. Can you do that?"

She took another step towards him, her lips curving slowly into a smile. Her eyes narrowed slightly.

"I can do anything you want me to," she whispered.

He grabbed her waist as she threw her arms about him, her lips pressing hard against his. Pushing her backwards, he restrained himself from using his full strength and tried to get her off him.

The door opened and he shoved her away.

He turned to see Simon smiling at him from the doorway.

"I'm terribly sorry," Simon said in a snide tone. "I didn't mean to interrupt."

With that he was gone and Erik knew exactly where to.

* * * *

Kim put her bag down on her desk and jumped when Simon appeared next to her. She pressed her hand to her heart and scowled at him for interrupting her thoughts about Erik.

"Morning," she said and went to open her bag but Simon stopped her when he spoke.

"You wouldn't believe what I just walked in on in Laura's office." He was smirking, the kind of smile that made her stomach turn.

"What?"

"Erik Blackwell kissing Laura."

Her heart sank on hearing those four words, and her stomach went with it, shortly followed by the world dropping away.

She stared into Simon's eyes, desperate to see if he was telling the truth. Tears rose into hers when she saw the smile in his, the twisted pleasure he was taking from telling her something he knew would hurt her. She couldn't believe it.

Grabbing her bag, she mumbled something about not feeling well, and walked out of the office. When she reached the main entrance hall, she broke into a run, clutching her bag to her chest as she fought her desire to break down and cry.

This couldn't be true.

She felt so stupid for ever believing that a man like him could like her. He'd said she was beautiful. Was that a lie too? Was this all some scheme to get her into bed with him?

But the way he'd looked at her, the way he'd touched her. It couldn't be a lie.

Her heart reproached her. If it wasn't a lie, then why was he kissing Laura?

The journey home passed in a blur of unshed tears and the moment she reached her apartment, and the door was safely locked behind her, she broke down. She sobbed into her hands, feeling wretched and hollow as she tried to make sense of it. Simon hadn't been lying. Erik had been kissing Laura.

She was so stupid. She should have listened to Simon.

Erik was clearly as much of a player as his brother.

She was a fool for thinking he actually wanted to be with her.

Running into her bedroom, she grabbed everything that smelt like him, everything she'd cherished yesterday and last night. She crumpled the towel in the bathroom and the bed sheets up in her arms, and ran with them into the kitchen. Tears streaked her face as she shoved them into the washing machine and turned it on. She stepped back as it began the cycle, staring at it and still trying to come to terms with what was happening.

Falling to her knees, her mind emptied and she watched the sheets going around in the machine.

So much for things looking up.

So much for being beautiful, and feeling loved.

She pressed her hand to the side of her head when she felt a little dizzy. She went to stand but the world spun around her and she swore she'd seen a flash of the building. It was followed by a flash of the hallway, and then her door.

There was a knock.

Her head shot around to face the kitchen door and the corridor beyond.

Her heart thundered.

Getting to her feet, she moved cautiously to the door. Her hands were shaking as she stood staring at it, instinctively knowing who was on the other side. She

was too confused to even attempt to make sense of what had just happened, not when she couldn't even understand everything before it.

"Who is it?" she said, her voice trembling.

"You know who it is," his voice came through loud and clear.

He was right. She had known it was him before she'd even asked. She couldn't deny it. She'd felt him. Shaking herself out of it, she told herself that it didn't matter what she'd felt.

She looked through the peephole at Erik. "Go away."

He looked flustered, anger shining in his eyes but mixed with disappointment and anxiety.

What was he doing here? Did he know that she'd heard about him and Laura?

He knocked again, making her heart jump with each harsh thump of his fist against the wood. Instinct told her to open it, but she firmly shut it out, keeping control and telling herself that she wasn't going to give into him. It didn't matter that he looked so hot when angry. He'd kissed Laura.

"I know what he told you, Kim, but that isn't what happened." He sounded as though he was ready to break down the door if she didn't open it soon.

She didn't budge. Instead, she slid the safety bolts into place. They probably wouldn't stop the door from giving if he put his full strength behind it. It was more for her

sake than his. She had to stop herself from letting him in like she wanted to.

"You mean you weren't kissing Laura?" she said, not holding back her anger and hoping he heard it in her voice. He deserved to hear the pain he'd caused her.

"Laura was kissing me!"

She stepped back from the door when it rattled with the force of his blow. A thrill ran through her over how he was acting. She shook it off. Now wasn't the time for fantasies about Erik. She hated him. He'd played her for a fool and she hated him.

"I don't believe you," she said, her voice lacking the conviction she'd hoped for. A part of her did believe him.

And it was a big part.

"You've got to believe me. I have no interest in Laura. I was only in her office this morning to get you off the case."

Her whole body slumped and her heart sunk on hearing those words. Annoyance quickly replaced any hurt she was feeling. He'd wanted her off the case? Wasn't she good enough to work for him?

"I know what you're thinking," he said through the door. She said nothing. "Don't hate me. I wanted you to feel like you could be with me...if I'm not your client—"

"I still don't believe you," she interjected, this time with more venom. She was impressed with herself. After he'd said that he'd only wanted her off the case so they could be together, she'd almost moved to the door to open it.

There was a noise that sounded distinctly like growling and the hairs on the back of her neck rose. Her stomach tightened, her body tensing with it. Something inside her said to back away from the door a little more. She knew Erik had made that noise. He'd growled. It wasn't a typical annoyed male sound of frustration either. It was a feral growl that had made her recoil in fear and made her fight or flight instincts kick in.

By the feel of things, her sense was saying flight.

But she wasn't frightened of Erik. Her heart said that he'd never hurt her, and it was because she was refusing to believe him that he was upset. If she went out into the hall, he wouldn't harm her.

"How did you know I was here and that I knew?"

"It was Simon who saw Laura trying to stick her tongue down my throat," he said, a little less annoyed sounding now.

"And?" She frowned, confused.

"Men with the hots for a woman can smell their own kind." His voice was grittier again now but she got the impression he wasn't angry with her.

"I don't understand." The voice at the back of her head called her a liar.

"Simon is mad about you..." A pause. "But not as crazy as I am."

She stared at the door, feeling a little stunned. Damn him to Hell. He was confusing her and making her not want to be angry with him. She hated him.

"Come away with me," he said and her heart leaped into her mouth.

The words were said with such tenderness and calm that she stepped back up to the door and looked at him through the peephole. He was leaning against the banisters, his hands firmly gripping them as he stared at the door.

"Give me a chance to show you that you're wrong about me."

She pressed her palms against the door, wishing she had the courage to open it and open her heart to him again.

"Go away with you? Where, when?" she said quietly, but he clearly heard her because he pushed off from the banisters and came to the door.

"Today...to the country. I know a little place there." He pressed his hands against the door and she swore she could feel them against hers. "Please, Kim?"

She told herself to stay mad at him. She wasn't going to let him tempt her into agreeing. He'd kissed Laura. He'd smashed everything they'd had together.

"I'll think about it," she said and cursed her heart for winning over her head.

He smiled and it relaxed her a little to see it.

"Will you let me in while you think about it?" he said, his look hopeful.

She took a deep breath and held her nerve. "No."

"Let me just say something then." There was a note of desperation in his voice so she stayed near the door a moment longer, wanting to hear what he had to say. He stared into the peephole and she waited. Nothing could have prepared her for what he said. "All I want is you, Kim. You're the only one for me. I've waited my whole life for you. I know you feel the same."

She sighed and nodded, having to acknowledge that he was right, even though he couldn't see her. She watched him move away from the door and lean against the banister again. Everything he'd said was exactly how she felt. When she was with him this weekend, even before that, she'd been so connected to him, as though she'd found the missing part of herself and the search was over. Here was a man that could love her, and she might love him too.

She reasoned with herself that neither of them had hidden the attraction, and that Laura had been coming on to Erik from the moment he'd walked through the door. When she thought about it, it wasn't surprising that Laura had tried to get him. Heck, she'd do anything to have him as hers too.

He raised his chin and loosened his tie, and then ran his fingers through his hair and heaved a sigh. It was probably sweltering in the hall.

Her mind took her back to that day when they'd first met and were out on the balcony. He'd asked her if she liked the heat. The heat she felt with him was intense, a passion she'd never felt before. It was consuming and frightening. It made her feel so weak but strong at the same time.

She sighed and thought about what she was going to do.

She was about to walk away from the door when he spoke again.

“If you come with me, I’ll tell you anything you want to know. Anything...everything about me. No lies. Nothing held back.”

She wondered just what there was he needed to tell her and remembered that when he’d first kissed her, he tried to tell her something and she’d stopped him. What was it about him that he felt she needed to know? Now she thought about it, she wanted to know and wished she hadn’t stopped him, but she’d been so desperate to feel his lips against hers that she hadn’t cared.

Maybe he’d tell her about the paragraph in the contract too.

She had a decision to make. Give him a chance to prove he really was only interested in her, or turn her back on him forever.

Chapter 15

Erik sat down on the floor, leaning his back against the banisters, and not caring that he was probably ruining his suit. He toyed with his car keys. He hadn't even put them away before he'd been running into the building. Thank God someone had been coming out just as he'd been going in.

Laura had detained him, slowing him down. All he'd wanted to do was find Kim and straighten everything out, but by the time he'd finished arguing with Laura about client relationships and threatening to tell her superiors about her actions if she didn't let him go, Kim had been gone twenty minutes.

He'd run two red lights to get here and broken the speed limit. He probably had a slew of tickets coming his way, but he didn't care. He'd run a hundred red lights and drive a thousand miles if it meant he got to see Kim.

He hadn't planned on laying his heart out on a silver platter for her, but when she'd said she wouldn't let him in while she thought things over, he'd had to let her know how he felt. If she knew, then maybe she'd come with him. He looked at his watch. It was just gone ten in the morning.

Heaving a sigh, he leaned his head back against one of the poles of the banisters and closed his eyes. She was going to say no. He could feel it. He hadn't done enough to convince her that it had been Laura kissing him and not the other way around.

He was losing her.

He frowned and tried to push those thoughts away, focusing instead on emptying his mind and passing the time until she made her decision.

The world drifted away, disappearing into the blackness and he lost track of time.

The sound of a door opening made him look around, his heart thundering as his mind said that it was Kim. He smiled at the elderly woman as she passed, giving him a reprimanding look for blocking the hall. When she'd disappeared down the stairs, muttering something to herself, he stretched his legs out and looked at his watch again.

Almost two in the afternoon.

Had he fallen asleep? It was hard to tell. He'd just been empty, surrounded by darkness as he waited for his sentence to be pronounced. It was either death or a reprieve. He hoped to God it was the latter. He wasn't going to accept the other.

A beam of light shone on his legs when the door in front of him opened. His heart was in his mouth as he slowly raised his eyes, struggling to find the courage to see what the verdict was.

She didn't look too angry.

He got to his feet the second she dumped a bag down beside her and turned to close the door. He couldn't believe it. He wanted to smile but she looked at him with eyes that said he hadn't got himself off the hook yet.

Picking her bag up, he frowned at the weight of it. How long did she think they were going away for? It felt as

though she'd packed her whole life into this small suitcase.

She locked the door and turned to face him.

"I'll go with you," she said, her voice showing a firmness he hadn't been expecting. "But only so you'll explain some things to me."

He nodded and waited for her to walk past him before following obediently. He'd barely known her a few days and she'd managed to become the alpha in the relationship, leading the way and being in charge of him. It was better this way though. She was in the strongest position after all, especially now Laura had kissed him and she knew. He didn't mind being the submissive one if it meant she stayed with him. There was too much to lose, and he had been hiding too much from her to be able to dominate her.

He couldn't lose her.

It had taken him twenty-seven years to find her after all.

The warm summer air did nothing to lift his mood as they walked down the steps of the building. She stopped, looking back at him. He realised that she didn't know which car was his. He gave her a little smile, wishing she would say something to alleviate the tension between them and reassure him that there was hope for them, and pointed the way. She walked beside him now and he shifted the bag so it was in his other hand, away from her. She was close enough that he could almost feel her hand brushing against his as they swung past each other. He wanted to reach out and take it, to feel it held firmly in his, to feel it holding his tightly. He wanted

anything, just a tiny sign that would reassure him and settle his anxiety.

His eyes traced her profile as they walked. He hadn't been able to park close to her building. He'd driven into the first spot he'd seen, not risking there being one closer. It had been a short run to her apartment.

The sun shone beautifully off her hair and her delicate perfume scented the warm air, making his heart ache as he looked at her.

Just one small sign. It was all he asked.

She looked out of the corner of her eye at him, giving him a sorrowful look, and the corner of her lips tugged into the briefest of smiles. He silently thanked God as a weight lifted off his chest and then pressed the alarm button on his key fob.

Her brows rose when she looked at his car. He wondered what she was thinking as she stared at it, an amused twinkle in her eyes.

It was just a car. A black, convertible, Aston Martin. Nothing fancy.

Opening the door for her, he closed it again once she'd got in. He put her luggage in the boot and then went around and slid into the driver's side. Starting the engine, he revved it a little and put the roof down. It was too hot for being stuck in a car for hours. He was thankful that she hadn't asked how far away the place was that he was taking her to.

Kim rifled in her little bag that was on her lap and he watched as she tied her hair back. She was still on edge. He could see it in her eyes.

Pulling out into the quiet road, he focused on driving and what he was going to do to make things up to her. Things were becoming intense a lot quicker than he'd anticipated. The heat between them, the attraction, was almost unbearable. He wanted to touch her, to reach across and place his hand on her jeans-clad knee to reaffirm their connection. His gaze roamed over her as he pulled the car to a stop at traffic lights. He was guessing that this wasn't what she'd worn into work this morning. The dark blue jeans fitted her loosely, but the black baby doll t-shirt was snug, stretching across her breasts.

He dragged his eyes away from them when the car in front began to move. At least she was coming with him, even if she was saying it was just so she could get some answers.

The drive through London passed in silence. He was lost in his thoughts, going over things repeatedly in his head, searching for the right thing to do and a way of breaking things to her that would see her understanding and not freaking out.

He pulled the car onto the motorway and frowned when the overhead signs warned of heavy traffic ahead. He should have avoided the M25. It was always hell unless you were driving along it after midnight.

Shifting the car up a gear, he shot into the outside lane and sped along.

The breeze the sweeping around him was refreshing.

The silence in the car was stifling.

“Kim?” he said, not wanting to disturb her but needing to.

He felt her look across at him.

“You do believe me don’t you?” He glanced at her, just long enough to see that she really was looking at him.

A pause.

“Yes,” she said, her voice quiet and laced with muddled emotions. “She’s a bitch like that.”

Relief lightened his heart, making him relax into the seat. His shoulders lowered, his whole body slumping a little as the tension left him. It was good that he’d got that out in the open. He couldn’t imagine having to drive over hundred miles with that playing on his mind. Another glance at her revealed that she was still looking at him. She was beautiful. The fine strands of her ponytail were being whipped around by the wind. They danced across her face, making her look mysterious. Her eyes were bright, not hiding anything from him, and he wished he could take a long look into them to see all her feelings for him. What he’d said to her was true. He’d waited his whole damn life to find her, and now that he had, he wasn’t going to lose her. Nothing was going to come between them. He wouldn’t let it. Fear crept into the corners of his heart as he thought about how she could react to the knowledge that he was a shape-shifter, that inside him was a primal side that he couldn’t hold back sometimes. He stared at the road in front of him, hoping that she’d understand. She had to. He couldn’t face life without her. He had to tell her how he felt.

He felt her gaze leave him.

He swallowed and considered what he was about to say.

"Kim?" his voice shook.

She turned back to face him.

"Erik?" she said, her tone soft and coaxing, as though she knew what he wanted to say and that he needed gentle encouragement.

He swallowed again.

"Nothing," he said, losing his nerve. This was no time for declarations of the heart. He had to be sure first. If she left and he hadn't said it, maybe his heart wouldn't break as badly. Maybe it would hurt less.

He was glad she didn't push it, but at the same time, a part of him was disappointed.

He glared at the long row of traffic in front of him and pulled into the next lane over. It was going to be a long journey.

Kim shifted in her seat and he looked over at her. She had her eyes closed, her head resting against the back of the seat and her bag down between her feet now. She looked relaxed, and felt it too. In her, he could sense none of the tension that had been there when she'd opened the door and agreed to go with him.

He pulled the car to a stop behind a dirty white van. A lorry pulled up behind him and he put the roof up. He didn't want Kim having to breathe in all the fumes while boiling in traffic. When the roof was up, he turned the

radio on quietly and put the air-conditioning on. He flicked through the stations on the radio, trying to find something soothing. Some classical music came on and he left it on that. Kim smiled, her eyes still closed. He wondered if she knew he was doing all this for her. He'd always take care of her and not let anything happen to her. He'd protect her from the world.

He looked at her, passing the time in traffic by studying her face, watching her as she started to doze. He smiled. She was trying hard not to fall asleep but he could see she was losing the fight. The heat of summer was making her sleepy. It made him sleepy too. He just wanted to stretch out under the sun and let it warm him right down to the bone.

Driving the car forwards a little when the van in front moved, he frowned when he heard sirens and looked in the wing mirror. An ambulance and a police car were coming, fighting their way through the traffic.

It was going to be a long, hot drive.

But at least she was with him.

* * * *

Night had fallen by the time he pulled up in front of the house. He put the handbrake on and looked over at Kim. She was fast asleep. Getting out of the car, he went to the back and opened the boot. He took her luggage out and looked around when a light cut through the darkness. He smiled at the woman coming out to greet him and intimated for her to be quiet when she took the suitcase off his hands.

Going around to the passenger side of the car, he opened the door and leaned in. He unbuckled Kim's seatbelt and slid it carefully off her, trying not to disturb her. He waited a moment before bending down and hooking one arm around her back, and the other under her legs.

She weighed practically nothing in his arms as he lifted her out of the car. She stirred a little, opened her eyes and looked at him sleepily, and then sighed and went back to sleep.

Kicking the car door closed, he decided to take Kim into the house and take care of the car later. He carried her through the broad front door and into the hallway. There weren't many lights on. When Kim had fallen asleep in the car, he'd called ahead to warn the housekeeper of his arrival, but she probably hadn't had the time to get most of the house ready. He didn't mind. He doubted they'd use more than eight of the rooms while they were here.

The housekeeper closed the door behind him and smiled at the sleeping woman in his arms.

"It's good to see you two finally together," she whispered.

He sighed and looked down at Kim. "Not finally yet. It's still more of a maybe. She doesn't know."

"She'll understand. I've got a feeling about it."

"You and your feelings," he said with a smile. "Give her anything she wants, understood?"

"I've already called and arranged all the necessary food. It will be arriving tomorrow morning. I'll make sure she's not left wanting anything."

He nodded and carried Kim up the stairs. She stirred a little again, looking up at him with sleep-filled eyes that said she wasn't quite aware of what was happening.

"You need some rest. It's been one hell of a day." He kept his voice low and soothing, almost purring the words at her.

She smiled slightly and yawned, her eyes roaming the corridor they were walking down before coming back to meet his. They seemed to ask a silent question, and if he was reading it right, she was going to be disappointed by his answer.

Setting her down in front of the door to her bedroom, he opened it for her and waited for her to walk in. He followed her, watching her yawning and taking in the large room. When she looked at him, he could see she was waiting for an answer to her question.

He walked over to her and looked at her for the longest time before pressing a soft kiss to her lips.

"I'll see you in the morning," he whispered against her mouth and then drew back, adding quietly to himself that he'd see her in his dreams too. It was probably best that she had a night without him, a night alone with only their visions to link them. It would help bring out the bond between them again and hopefully remind her of how good they could be together.

She gave him a tired but confused look as he backed away from her. He wanted to give in to her, but even if

he did, he wouldn't give her what she really wanted. The only place he could give her that right now without feeling terrible inside was in their visions. If he got into bed with her, all he'd want to do was hold her.

She stepped towards him.

He smiled, brushed the rogue strands of her hair back into place and touched her cheek.

"Night," he said, and turned and walked out of the door, closing it behind him.

Tomorrow, he'd see just how open-minded she was and just where their relationship was going to go.

Chapter 16

Kim stretched as she woke, feeling relaxed as she sank into the soft mattress beneath her and vaguely recollected her dream. Two things stood out in it. One was the incredibly powerful feeling of connection between her and Erik. She'd felt as though they'd been entwined right down to their souls. The second was the handcuffs.

It hadn't been kinky, not like she'd expected it to get when he'd pulled the handcuffs out. It had been intense and had shown her a different side to this strong man. She opened her eyes and stared at the ceiling above her, realising that it wasn't a ceiling at all. It was a canopy.

She sat up and yawned as she looked around the room. She was in a four-poster bed in the middle of what looked like a very expensive room.

A very big expensive room.

Not really the kind of room you'd find in a little place in the country. She got the feeling that Erik had an odd impression of what was little. This looked like a big place in the country. She didn't have a clue whereabouts they were. The moment they'd hit traffic on the motorway, she'd been out like a light. The cool air and calming music had seen to that, and the comforting presence of Erik. Something about him made her feel safe, as though he'd defend her and protect her from anything.

There was something sexy about that. A knight in shining armour.

And his steed?

That car was incredible. When she'd pictured the type of car he'd probably drive, she'd done a good job. It was definitely sleek, curvy and irresistible. She'd never been in an Aston Martin before. She'd give anything if he'd let her drive it. She could just imagine the thrill of being behind the wheel of something so powerful and eye-catching.

Getting out of bed, she investigated the room, pulling the drawers in the dresser out and looking inside them only to find them empty, peering in the cupboards and eventually finding herself in the bathroom. It was more modern than the bedroom, the cream marble tiles contrasting against the darker, more earthy, trim. It was so light with the sun coming in through the etched glass window. She couldn't see out of it, but then she was thankful for that since it meant no one could see in. The toilet and sink were white, and expensive looking. She frowned. There was no shower. Instead, there was a beautiful roll-top bath sitting on ornate iron lion's feet in the middle of the room.

Sumptuous didn't cover it.

All it needed was to be full of water and with red rose petals floating on the surface, and it would be straight out of a dream. Maybe a few candles too.

And Erik.

This place was probably costing him a fortune to put her up in, and they weren't even sharing a room like she'd been expecting them to.

Walking out into the bedroom again, she saw her suitcase on a stand. She went over and opened it, looking at what she'd packed. She'd thrown pretty much everything she could get her hands on into the suitcase, unsure of what to pack and too drained to think straight. It was all there, from a swimming costume to a thick jumper. She looked at the jumper. Why on Earth she'd thought she'd need that, she'd never know.

Pulling out a long cream sundress, she placed it on the side and put some underwear with it. A modest cream bra and knickers. She was here to talk business, not be seduced. She frowned. He didn't seem to want to seduce her anyway. She hazily remembered the chaste kiss last night. She'd felt the passion pushing to get free in that kiss, but he'd kept it so light and almost emotionless.

He was probably just being cautious.

After all, she'd flown off the handle at him about Laura.

She frowned when she thought about her, and then remembered that today was Tuesday and they were supposed to be at the office signing Erik's contract with his brother. Scratch that. Erik was supposed to be there. She was off the case.

She still couldn't believe he'd done that. It infuriated one half of her while the sentiment behind it melted the other. He'd only wanted to make her feel as though she could be with him, but what damage had he done to her career? She hoped he'd done it tactfully and not made her sound incompetent.

Going into the bathroom, she stripped off her underwear and drew herself a warm bath. She stepped into it and sighed, closing her eyes, giving herself a moment to

relax before starting to wash herself. She grabbed the soap that was sitting on a little dish attached to the side of the bath and cleaned herself while thinking about Erik.

She wondered where he was. He'd said he'd see her in the morning. She looked through the bathroom doorway to the bedroom beyond. The tall heavy curtains were drawn. She couldn't tell if it was morning or not. For all she knew, it could be mid-afternoon.

Getting out of the bath when she was done, she dried herself off with the fluffy white towels on the rack and then went into the bedroom to get dressed. When she was clothed, she sprayed herself with perfume and pulled her hair up into a ponytail. She glanced at herself in the mirror on the dressing table and realised that she looked quite pretty in the sunny dress.

She went to the curtains covering one of the windows and threw them open. She gasped.

In front of her was a perfectly manicured garden with a box hedge maze at the far end. Beyond that, stretched a long field with trees all around it.

This definitely wasn't a little place in the country.

She went to her bag and took her mobile phone out. It was almost midday. She sent a quick text to Simon to say that she still wasn't feeling well and asking him to explain things to Laura, and then went to the door of the room.

She noticed there was no fire escape route sign on the door, and no lock.

Opening the door, she stared at the other side of it. There was no number.

This wasn't a hotel.

She closed the door behind her and walked down the hall, listening for any sign of Erik or someone who she could ask where he was.

She didn't meet anyone between her room and the garden. She walked along the patio that stretched the length of the back of the house. The garden looked even more impressive at this level. She was a few steps above it, looking down. Her gaze traversed the rose bushes that were fenced in by low square hedges. They were made into patterns, each wide square a little different in design. There were tall trees off to her left and right, enclosing the garden and making it feel private and safe.

Peering around, she still couldn't see anyone, so she walked down the steps towards the maze. She looked back at the house when she was almost there. It was massive. She'd only been to houses this big when visiting National Trust properties. She'd never known anyone who lived in one.

Was this Erik's?

Was this the family home he'd grown up in?

She couldn't imagine a place like this having a jar of peanut butter, not even if it was the housekeeper's.

Turning her back on it, she took a deep breath of the fresh air, letting it fill her lungs and fill her with summer at the same time. The sun was hot as it beat down on

her, warming her and making her feel content. The flowers smelt beautiful. It all conspired to relax her and she was soon humming to herself as she watched bees go about their business and butterflies, miles away in her thoughts and enjoying the outside.

A flash of the house made her close her eyes and frown.

Another one and she was seeing herself.

She opened her eyes and they widened when she saw a large black cat slinking out of the maze.

It stopped and looked at her, raising its head and sniffing the air as though trying to catch her scent.

She froze, hoping that she'd become invisible by doing so.

She'd heard of rich people being eccentric, but keeping a panther and letting it roam loose around the grounds was just asking for a court case.

Her eyes widened further when she remembered that Simon had said one of the rumours he'd heard was about a girl being mauled.

Her heart started a slow steady thumping that quickly accelerated. She kept still as the panther lowered its head and stalked towards her, its shoulders shifting as it did so. Its golden eyes were locked on her. It licked its lips and she squeaked at the sight of the large canines.

She trembled, petrified as she waited for it to reach her, too scared to run away as her mind kept telling her that it would hunt her if she did. Her heart was pounding painfully fast. The panther was going to attack her.

It growled, low and deep.

She could almost feel it rumbling through her.

She tensed when it closed the gap and sniffed her foot, working its way up her leg. It was massive. If it stood on its back legs, it would easily be as tall as her. The sight of the huge paws made her shake. She could imagine the power in a single blow from one. Would she even stand a chance?

She was surprised when it rubbed against her, sleek fur tickling her knees and dragging her dress with it as it arched against her and turned away. It came back, rubbing its chin against her thigh.

Maybe it was a good sign.

She'd seen programs about big cats. She tried to remember what they'd said. Was it scenting her?

It growled again as it rubbed the length of itself against her. It vibrated through her. She looked down as it nudged her hand and went under it. Her fingers trailed over the velvety fur between its ears. She didn't dare stroke it. It seemed to want her to.

It came around again, doing the same thing and making her stroke over its head and along its back. Its tail tickled her arm as it passed. A giggle slipped through her tightly clenched teeth and she began to feel a little more relaxed.

It rubbed against her hand and she instinctively knew what it wanted. Curling her fingers as it passed, she buried the tips of them into the soft black fur and rubbed it behind the ear. It stopped moving and pushed up

against her, its front paws leaving the ground. She rubbed a little harder, pushing her fingers through the thick hair and wrapping her hand around its left ear, pulling softly as she brought her hand up the length of it.

She was amazed at how she suddenly felt unafraid of it.

When it began to purr, she stroked it more, urged on by the strangely familiar sound. She bent down slowly, bringing herself onto eye level with it. It looked at her as she rubbed its fur, fascinated by the lush velvet feel of it and the way it was reacting to her.

It closed its eyes, looking content.

She frowned when it turned away, slinking back into the maze.

Standing, she realised that she wasn't alone. She spun on the spot, finding herself being watched by a woman.

The woman smiled and walked towards her.

She didn't move. The adrenaline from meeting the panther was still affecting her legs and she was afraid she'd fall if she tried to walk.

"Would you like a little breakfast?" the woman asked.

Kim looked at her. She had to be over sixty. There was something kind about her face. It was surrounded by wild grey hair that had been forced back into a bun and was rebelling against it and coming loose. The woman's smile was warm, beyond friendly. If she'd hadn't just met her, Kim would've said that the woman liked her.

Kim nodded and then frowned.

"The..." she said and pointed in the direction the panther had gone.

"He's quite harmless." The woman gave her another broad smile. "This way please. I'm sure Mr. Blackwell will be along shortly to join you. I thought breakfast on the patio would be nice."

Kim noticed the white iron table that was sitting off to one side, fully in the sunshine. Beside it in the shade was another table, like a trolley, this one spread with food and various drinks.

Following the woman, she smiled gratefully as sat down at the table and was poured a cup of tea. She sipped it absentmindedly, her thoughts still with the panther. Where had it gone? Did it live in the maze? She made a mental note not to go in there alone.

The woman wheeled the trolley of food so it was nearer to her, said something and left.

She didn't watch her walk away, instead she took a small plate and a croissant off the trolley. She picked at it while staring at the garden. This place was amazing. She couldn't imagine living somewhere like this. She'd never want to leave it. The city seemed so stuffy and horrible compared to this. Here the air was fresh and the light breeze made the heat bearable.

She sighed.

Picking up the delicate china cup, she sipped the tea and listened to the silence.

It was cut by the click of heels on the flagstones.

She knew who it was without looking.

Erik slid into the seat opposite her and she tried not to stare at him like she wanted to. It was hard when she saw what he was wearing. He looked stunning in the white linen shirt and the black linen trousers. So very different to the man she'd met in London. He seemed to fit his surroundings. There, he'd been the businessman, wearing the crisp Armani suits and giving off a vibe of power.

Here, he was a man, relaxed in his surroundings and revealing to her just who he was beneath the suit.

He leaned back in his seat, legs stretched out as he stared off into the distance. She used the opportunity to drink in the sight of him. He was so relaxed, his look one of effortless beauty. She noticed the first few buttons of his shirt were undone. It was strange to see him in white, but it showed off how tanned his skin was and how dark his hair was. It also seemed to brighten his eyes, making them golden.

Like the panther's.

She looked closely at him, remembering the way he'd reacted when she'd rubbed behind his ear in the shower and the way the panther had reacted to that same touch. She told herself not to be so crazy. He was a man. Like she'd told herself a million times since meeting him—men didn't purr and they didn't sprout fur.

His gaze slid across to meet hers and, needing to do something with her hands, she poured him some tea and pushed it towards him.

He smiled.

She'd never seen him look so truly happy.

He looked more than content now, and she wondered if it was because of the weather, or her, or being here. Or maybe it was all of it. Maybe it was sitting here together on the patio of this beautiful house under a hot summer sun that was making him happy.

It made her happy.

He stretched and yawned.

She stared at his teeth and told herself that they were just teeth, not massive canines.

He picked up his tea and sipped it. She looked at his hands. Just strong, supple hands, not paws.

She was going crazy.

She didn't even want to know how she'd seen herself, like she didn't want to think about what had happened back at her place.

"I saw your kitty," she said, eyeing him closely.

"I know." His smile broadened and he slouched further into the chair. He looked dangerously sexy like that—lounging there with a look in his eyes that told her that he knew what wicked thoughts were running through her mind. She pushed them away. She was here to talk business, not surrender to her desire for him. "Did you like him?"

His expression gained a hopeful edge.

"Don't you have to have some kind of licence for them? I mean, he seemed friendly enough, but what if it escaped?" She noticed he looked a little disappointed. Had he wanted her approval of the creature? Next he'd be doing a Mr. Darcy and asking if she liked the house.

He toyed with his cup, pushing the handle with the tip of his finger so the cup went around in circles on the saucer.

"There's no chance of that," he said, his smile returning. "He's quite tame."

She decided to give him what he wanted to hear. It was the truth after all.

"He's beautiful. I've never seen one in real life and I've definitely never touched one...been so close to one. He's so soft..." Her eyes met his. "Gentle."

He smiled right into her eyes. "I'm sure he liked you too."

She leaned back in her chair and ate the last piece of her croissant. She wondered if she should offer him something to eat but then remembered that it was gone midday and he'd probably had breakfast at a regular hour.

She looked up at the house behind her.

"This isn't a little place in the country that you know," she said and he looked at it, and then back at her. "It's a huge place in the country that you own."

He shook his head. "Not me, not yet. It's my brother's."

She frowned at that. Had his parents left the house to his brother? That seemed a little strange. He turned to face her and she noticed that it was more than just the first few buttons of his shirt that was undone. She could see his chest, the defined muscles of it tempting her to leave her seat and settle on his lap, to explore it like it was begging her to. She noted his hair was mussed, wilder now than she'd ever seen it. Well, besides the time she'd woken up next to him. She rubbed her fingertips together, remembering the feel of the panther's fur.

"What are you thinking?" His voice chased away her thoughts.

She hesitated, and decided not to say. He'd think she was crazy if she asked whether he could somehow transform himself into a panther like he always started to in her dreams. That would be one way of making him take her home. Now that she was here, she never wanted to leave.

Instead of saying what she wanted to, she used the opportunity to get answers to a few things that had been on her mind.

"That paragraph, the one about blood."

He stretched again, this time not looking at all bothered by the mention of it.

"My brother wanted it. It's in case he has children. If they get...sick...or something, weak, and his blood doesn't match...he wants mine." He stumbled over the words and she got the impression he was choosing them very carefully.

"What if you don't match?" She leaned forwards, looking into his eyes.

"It's hard to explain," he said.

"It's blood groups, not rocket science. You either match or you don't."

He stood sharply, his look thunderous, and she realised that she should've taken his answer and left it at that.

His fists clenched, a flicker of lightning in his eyes, and then the storm passed and he ran his hands through his hair. He walked a short distance away and then paced back towards her.

"It's complicated. I didn't want the damn clauses, but if I don't agree to them...then all this will be his by default. My parents...my father, made sure of that. His favoured son to inherit...not me..." He walked up to her and she looked deep into his eyes, seeing all the hurt in them and wanting to hold him and make it go away. "Never me. All I got when they died was the company. Ironical since it was all Alistair wanted and all I wanted was the house."

She stood but he walked away, leaving her feeling cold as she watched him struggling with the pain she'd caused by dragging up what was clearly a family feud.

"I sign the contract," he said and then pointed to the house. "I get to live here."

"Is it worth it?" she said, slowly walking over to him.

She put her hand on his arm, feeling how tense he was, and searched his eyes when he looked at her.

"This is the only place I can be myself, Kim. The real me. Here, I'm free."

She frowned, not quite understanding what he was trying to say.

"There's something wrong about that contract, Erik. I can feel it."

"Feel it?" he laughed the words at her. She stepped away from him, confused by his reaction and the sudden hardness in his eyes. "You don't know what you feel right now."

He grabbed her hand and pressed it hard against his chest. She stared into his eyes, trying to understand his change in temperament and what he was doing. She didn't like it. He was holding her too tightly and it was starting to hurt. She tried to get her hand free, but he closed the gap between them and gripped her hand harder.

"Can you feel that?" he said, his voice low and dangerous.

"Feel what?" She tried to pull away from him again.

"Look at me. Don't fight me. Look at me."

She did, but only because he'd again said something from one of her fantasies.

She stilled, staring into his eyes and forgetting her struggle to get her hand free.

He whispered, "Can you feel me?"

She swallowed.

"I'm touching you...of course I can—"

"Feel me." He cut her off, narrowing his eyes on hers.

She stared into them and, in a split-second, she was lost and there was only him in the world. The silence filled her head and then it was chased away by the sound of her heart beating.

No.

It wasn't her heart.

It was his. She could hear it, feel it thundering beneath his chest. She could sense his heat and his hunger.

She could feel him.

She snatched her hand back, shocked by what she'd experienced.

"Is this some trick?" she said, voice trembling as she clutched her hand to her chest, her gaze still locked with his.

"I dream of you," he whispered and her eyes widened. Shocked became stunned and confused. "But the dreams didn't prepare me for the reality of us."

She blinked, and then did the only thing she could think of.

Throwing her arms about his neck, she kissed him, releasing all the feelings she'd been holding inside and letting them flood her as she struggled to make sense of

the world. Suddenly, she realised she didn't care. She didn't understand how he'd made her feel him, or how she'd seen herself standing in front of the house. She didn't care about anything but feeling Erik's arms holding her tightly and his lips moving in a sweet, tender kiss against hers.

She frowned when he stopped her. She caught the look in his eyes. He was holding back again.

"I'm sorry," she said in a quiet voice and composed herself.

"It wasn't wrong." His fingers brushed against her cheek and she looked up at him.

"Do you really dream about me?" She loved the feeling of his touch—light and tender. He nodded. "I dream about you...before I met you."

He smiled, as though he already knew that.

"How?" she said.

He slid his arm around her, leading her down the steps towards the garden. He sighed and she looked up at him as they walked.

"It happens sometimes. Don't question it." He was staring into the distance.

She decided he was right. It was best not to question some things. She glanced into the maze as they passed it.

Was the panther in there now?

She looked at Erik.

Or was it out here?

Chapter 17

This was nice.

And it was going better than he'd thought it would.

Erik smiled down at Kim. She was walking beside him, her eyes darting about as they took everything in. They were heading towards the woods, skirting the perimeter of the garden. His favourite spot to look at the house from was coming up. There was a wide rectangular pond with a tall fountain in the centre of it. It was a beautiful view in all directions from there, but it made the house in particular look stunning.

He wanted her to see it in its best light so she'd understand just why he was willing to sign that contract.

"So you get the house if you agree to his terms?" Her conversation had been all business since the revelation that they shared dreams about each other. He knew she was avoiding having to think about that, and how it was possible.

He looked over his shoulder at the house.

He didn't want to talk business. He wanted to find a way to make her understand the connection between them and everything that had happened. She'd seen through his eyes, and he'd seen through hers. The bonding between them had started, and they were beginning to run out of time to mate.

Brushing his hair back into place with his fingers, he remembered the feel of her hands in his fur. She'd been

so brave, petrified at first, but then so relaxed around him in his panther form. He'd been surprised by how quickly she'd found the courage to stroke him, to rub him behind the ear, and he knew that there had been a moment of recognition within her. She had a suspicion now, brought about by the things that happened in their dreams and by the way he'd reacted when she'd tickled behind his ear in the shower. He never hid who he was. He couldn't.

If she tickled him behind the ear right now, he'd have a hard time stopping himself from purring.

It was one hell of a weak spot.

If she did stay with him, she'd have a power over him with that. Anything she wanted, she could get by tickling him there.

His senses pricked. He glanced across at Kim and found her looking at him. It was probably her stirring them. She always did when she was this close.

"I don't get the house exclusively," he said, answering her earlier question as they reached the fountain.

"You get a share?"

He nodded. "In exchange for half of my company."

Her eyes widened. "Is that wise? I mean, can't Alistair stage some kind of takeover if he owns more than half of it?"

"I'm the only shareholder. He couldn't own more than half. I'll have fifty-one percent of the company and he

has fifty-one percent of the house. We're not splitting things equally. I wouldn't agree to that."

"But you would agree to a paragraph about blood?"

He sighed and cursed her inquisitive mind. It would be so easy to stop her right where she was now and tell her exactly what the paragraph meant. He would if he knew for sure that she wouldn't freak out.

"He would," someone said behind him.

He stopped, his fists clenching as he turned to face his brother. "What are you doing here?"

"I could ask the same thing." Alistair stepped towards him and Erik moved so Kim was slightly behind him.

He could sense the anger coming off his brother and he knew what this was about.

"Shouldn't you be in London, in a meeting, with me and some stuffy lawyers?" Alistair leaned to one side and looked past him, his eyes narrowing into a dark look. "Although you seem to have brought a lawyer with you."

Alistair's eyes turned golden and he grinned.

Erik's heart began to pound, the hairs on the back of his neck rising as his instincts kicked in. He had to protect her.

"Kim, go back to the house." Erik looked at her. She was staring at Alistair, fear written clearly in her eyes. He could understand. Alistair wasn't exactly hiding his anger and it wasn't everyday you saw someone's eyes turn more yellow. She didn't move. "Kim, to the house, now."

She looked at him and he got the message loud and clear. She was too scared to move and she didn't understand why. It was a mind game and she didn't know the rules. Her instincts were telling her to stay with him, with her mate, where she would be safe, and he was telling her to leave. She was safer away from him right now.

His distraction in looking at her too long cost him dearly.

Before he could react, Alistair had grabbed her arm and was yanking her towards him. Erik growled and pulled her free, only for Alistair to try and take hold of her again.

"Don't you touch her!" Erik roared the words, pulling Kim close to his chest and wrapping an arm around her. "Leave her alone."

She pressed herself against his body, her face buried into his neck and her palms against his chest.

Alistair growled and bared his teeth as they extended.

Erik growled back at him.

"I won't lose her now that I've found her." He held Kim closer.

A spark of recognition entered Alistair's eyes.

"She's your mate? This is a joke, right, brother? I thought you were just after her for that sweet body, not something as ridiculous as this. A human mate?" Alistair laughed at him.

He shook his head. "Leave now and I'll come in tomorrow and sign everything...if you'll just leave."

Alistair grinned, giving him the impression it wasn't going to be that simple now that he knew what Kim meant to him.

Erik stepped away from Kim. Looking into her eyes, he tried to silently reassure her that everything was going to be okay.

"Run," he whispered, his voice pleading her to listen this time.

Alistair growled again and he could sense the change as it began to run through him. There was no way he could stop it. He could almost feel his eyes as they began to yellow and the first sweep of tingles through his body. It was the precursor to the change, the warning sign. Kim didn't need to see this, not yet, not now.

Her eyes widened as they dropped to his hands. His claws pushed through, fur erupting in a wave along the back of his fingers as they shifted into their panther state.

"Run!" he shouted this time, pushing her as the pain turned his stomach. She stumbled forwards and began to run, but she was too slow, and so was he. Alistair lunged at her, and before he could tackle his brother, he'd knocked Kim off balance and she was falling.

Erik flinched when she cracked her head on the side of the pond and slumped to the ground. His senses immediately reached out and relief bloomed inside of him as he heard her heart beating strong.

He roared at his brother and ripped his shirt open as his bones shifted, cracking out of place and then back into the new position. Alistair changed at the same time as him and their clothing was left behind as they leapt at each other. Erik dug his claws into Alistair's back and rolled with him, his teeth sinking deep into his shoulder, hard enough that he tasted blood and faintly heard Alistair's cry of pain.

His brother deserved to pay for hurting her. He'd warned him. They clashed again in a fury of teeth and claws, of growls and cries as they struggled for dominance. He'd fought with his brother before, nothing more than play fights to hone their instincts. He wasn't playing any more. It was time Alistair realised which of them was strongest.

Leaping from his back, Erik ran, luring Alistair away from Kim. He panted hard as he came out into the open and then jumped over one of the low hedges as his brother pounced. Alistair growled in frustration as he disappeared from view. Erik wouldn't keep him waiting long. Saving his energy, he stalked around the side of the hedge, keeping his focus on Alistair.

He attacked the moment he saw that Alistair had his back to him. They rolled together, back legs kicking and scratching at each other's stomach and ribs. He dug his claws in deeper and released a feral growl as he bit down on Alistair's front leg.

Alistair sprung free, blood soaking into his pale golden fur. He bared his teeth and backed away when Erik moved towards him.

The acquiescence was there in the way that Alistair lowered himself submissively, but Erik knew it wasn't

over. He roared at Alistair in a show of strength and power, letting him see that if he tried anything, he'd have more than a hurt arm and shoulder to show for it.

Alistair slinked off into the bushes, limping as he wound his way back towards the house.

Erik didn't move until he saw that Alistair was back in human form and heard a car leave.

Turning around, he went back to Kim, hoping to God that she was all right.

And knowing that she'd seen him start to change.

* * * *

There was something rough stroking her face. Warm and rough. It dragged her cheek with it as it ran over her skin. It was gentle.

Comforting.

She frowned and moaned as she tried to open her eyes and her head ached. The first thing she saw was the gravel on the ground. She was strangely close to it. The second thing was the black panther standing over her, licking her face.

She was very strangely unafraid of it.

Slowly sitting up, she let the panther continue to lick her face, not wanting to upset it by stopping it, and tried to get her bearings. She was on the ground. The coolness at her back made her look around and she saw the wide pond behind her.

She remembered something happening. It was all a blur and then there had been a lot of pain followed by darkness. The panther purred. She rubbed it behind the ear, still trying to gather herself and waiting for everything to come back to her.

Alistair had been here.

Erik had fought him.

Her hand travelled lower, stroking the panther. She frowned when she found it had a wet chest. Bringing her hand away, she baulked at the sight of the blood on her fingers. She struggled to stand, her head spinning, and looked at the panther. It was licking the wound on its chest, still purring. It wasn't necessarily a good sign. Cats purred when they were hurt too, didn't they?

"Stay here," she said to it, as though it was going to listen to her, and began to run towards the house.

When she reached the main garden, she looked back and saw that the panther was gone. She sprinted on, running as fast as she could and pressing her hand to her head to stop her brain from falling out. It pounded with pain as she ran, each footstep making it hurt. She had to see if Erik was all right. Something must have happened to him or he would've been there when she'd woken up.

Wouldn't he?

She shoved the glass doors open and went to call out to the housekeeper but realised she didn't know her name.

"Help!" she shouted, running into the hall. "Help!"

There was a commotion up the corridor and the housekeeper was hurrying towards her.

“Whatever is the matter?”

“There was a fight. Alistair. Erik. It’s hurt...the panther is hurt.” She panted hard and then winced as skull-splitting pain shot through her.

“You’re hurt,” the woman said and put her arm about her, supporting her.

“I’ll be fine. I just banged my head. I can’t find Erik.”

“Go to your room and lie down. I’ll find Mr. Blackwell. He’ll be straight up to see you.” The woman ushered her towards the stairs.

Kim did as she’d asked. A lie down sounded good right now. The woman would probably be able to find Erik quicker than she could. She stopped on the bottom step and looked back at her.

“Don’t forget the panther,” she said, her voice showing her worry. There had been so much blood.

The woman smiled.

Kim looked at her hand as she walked up the stairs, getting the horrible feeling that something was wrong, that Erik was hurt.

Reaching her room, she sat down on the bed and then lay back. Her eyes unfocused as she tried to recall what had happened. Everything was still a mess in her head. She could only remember Erik telling her to run and then

she was unconscious. Someone had pushed her. It must have been Alistair.

She couldn't forget the look in Erik's eyes. He'd been petrified. Had he been scared that Alistair was going to hurt her like he'd hurt all those other girls?

Maybe she was lucky to just come away with a nasty knock to the head and nothing more.

She sat up, unable to keep still for long as her thoughts returned to Erik and his whereabouts. She was worried. Her stomach was turning over and over again, her heart trembling at the thought that something terrible might have happened to him.

Getting up, she walked around the room and eventually found herself by the windows. She looked out on the grounds, searching them for a sign of him. It was getting dark now. She hoped that the housekeeper would be able to find him. She couldn't hope that he wasn't hurt. She already knew that he was.

This time she didn't question how she knew. Erik was right when he'd told her not to question it. Sometimes it was best just to accept things.

Before she could think twice about what she was doing, she was walking back to the door of her room. There was no way she was going to sit around here while Erik was missing.

Heading down the corridor, her heart jumped into her throat when she heard voices and recognised Erik's. She ran to the top of the stairs and had made it down the first few before she stopped dead.

He was hurt.

His white shirt was stained with blood.

She ran down the remaining stairs and the look in his eyes when he saw her spoke volumes. He had been hoping she wouldn't see. Rushing over to him, she got a good look at the cuts on his chest before he pulled the shirt closed around him. The long scratches reminded her of the wounds on the panther.

"What happened?" she said, a little out of breath as she struggled with her emotions and tried to stop herself from shaking. There was so much blood on his shirt. She wished he was wearing black now. The dark red on white was too much to bear. It made her stomach turn and her panic worsen. "Was it the panther?"

He shook his head, the look of worry not leaving his eyes. What was he worried about?

"It was my brother. He's gone now." He let go of his shirt and it fell open again.

Her gaze dropped to his chest and her eyes widened as she remembered what had happened. She swallowed, trying to take in the conclusion her mind was racing to make. The scratches were the same as the panther's. Before Erik had made her run, she'd seen the fur on his hands and felt the claws. She wasn't imagining it. She wasn't. This wasn't her fantasies.

She remembered everything.

It was real.

Her chest tightened and her throat constricted with it, making it hard to breathe as the world came crashing in around her. She felt as though it was going to swallow her whole and she wished it would because she couldn't make sense of this at all.

"What are you?" she whispered, still staring at his chest.

She couldn't believe it until he said it, until he offered some proof and told her she wasn't going insane.

He looked at her, admission in his expression and no trace of denial of the accusation that she was throwing at his feet.

She'd seen him change, just like she had in her dreams.

No, they were their dreams. They were their dreams, and she'd seen through his eyes, and she'd felt him when they'd been outside.

And she'd seen him changing into something.

Into the panther that had been licking her when she'd come around.

Erik had been there; he'd just been the panther and not the man before her now.

Shaking her head and not wanting to believe what she knew was true, she turned and ran up the stairs without so much as a glance at him.

It couldn't be real.

He couldn't be the panther.

Chapter 18

Kim had made it halfway along the hall before she felt him grab her arm. His grip was tight and unrelenting as she struggled to get free. Her gaze met his as she turned. There was so much pain and fear in his honey eyes, so much that it cut her to the core and she stilled.

She didn't stop him when he led her back down the hall and then into one of the rooms. It was a bedroom.

He let go of her hand and she walked to the other side of the room, and then to the bed. She held onto one of the posts to steady herself, and waited in silence for him to speak and make everything all right again.

He closed the door and sighed. She could sense the uncertainty in him, and wished that she had the courage to say what she knew he wanted to hear. He wanted to hear that whatever had been happening between them over the past few days wasn't over.

She wanted to hear it too.

But how was she supposed to deal with something like this?

Things like this didn't happen in real life. This was make-believe. This was a fantasy. Men didn't turn into panthers. It wasn't physically possible. Surely?

"I wanted to tell you...I tried," he whispered quietly, but she heard him, and she heard all the muddled feelings behind those words. When she'd met him, he'd been so strong. Now, he looked weak and scared.

She'd made him scared. She'd taken his strength from him and had peeled back the layers to reveal the man beneath. He didn't want to lose her. That's what he'd said to his brother.

She didn't want to lose him either.

She looked at him, at the boyish look on his face and the blood on his chest. He was still bleeding, and her head was still killing her. This was all so screwed up. All she wanted to do was forget what she'd seen and pretend that he was just a normal man, but she got the impression that it wasn't an option.

He had tried to tell her.

She realised that this was what he'd wanted to say to her before they'd made love the first time. He'd tried to tell her and she'd stopped him. She didn't know how she would have reacted if he'd revealed it to her that night. She knew him so much better now, felt so connected to him, that it seemed impossible to turn her back on him.

She sat down on the end of the bed and stared at the floor.

He'd said that he'd answer any questions she had, that he'd tell her everything about him, if she'd come with him to this place. She had. Now she had so many questions that she didn't know where to begin.

"I wanted to tell you," he said, coming across the room to her.

"How about you tell me I'm crazy...that this can't be real. It's just a dream." She looked up at him.

He gave her a look that said it wasn't possible. "I can't lie to you."

"Why me?" she whispered to her knees, not wanting to look at Erik and see the blood on his shirt. He needed to tend to the wounds. She'd do it if he let her, but she could feel that he needed to get things out in the open before he took care of himself. It touched her heart. It was probably hurting him to stand there with those scratches across his chest. How had he got them? Was Alistair like him?

Erik sighed heavily and she half expected him to tell her it was complicated.

She remembered him shouting at his brother. She remembered him saying that he wouldn't lose her now that he'd found her.

He'd said she was his mate.

Her mind reeled at that thought.

She stared at a spot on the carpet, letting it all slowly sink in, and letting emptiness fill her.

"I knew somehow," she said and Erik moved again, stepping closer to her. Her gaze shifted to his feet. They were bare, dirty. "What you were...that all of this would happen. Why me? What's a mate?"

She looked at him now, right into his eyes, trying to see the explanation there so she didn't have to wait to hear it.

He knelt in front of her, between her knees, and looked up into her eyes. There was such a look of hope in his.

He was probably taking how calm she was a good sign. In a way, she supposed it was. Either that or she was sinking slowly into dementia and that's why this all made sense on some level and didn't freak her out as much as she felt it should have.

"Because we belong together, Kim." His voice was soft, soothing. It drew the smallest of smiles out of her. He looked so noble kneeling before her and it made her feel as though he was holding his heart out to her, asking her to love him for what he was and understand as best she could, begging her not to leave him. "We're meant to be. It's destiny. When I said that I've been waiting my whole life for you, I was telling you the truth. A mate comes around once in a lifetime. We were chosen for each other. Think of it as a soul mate."

"A soul mate." She frowned as she tried to take it in. "And the dreams? You said we shared those."

"We do now. I've had them for twenty-seven years," he said it as though it was perfectly normal.

Her frown intensified as she calculated it in her head. "Since you were seven?"

"No," he said with a smile. "We age differently to others, slower. Now that I've matured, I won't age any more. Thirty four years has been more like fifty."

"Oh," she said, still trying to take it all in and finding it increasingly difficult. She looked into his eyes, at his open expression. He was trying to be honest with her and she silently thanked him for that. She preferred that he was honest, even if it meant she thought she was going insane. "I haven't had the dreams all my life. Is that normal?"

He hesitated. Clearly there was something else she didn't know.

"You're in heat."

He'd said it so fast that it had been nothing but a blur, one word. Her brows rose and she pursed her lips. Okay. She was in heat. God knows what that meant.

"It just means you're receptive to your mate. It's a mating call. You wouldn't notice because you're human, but others like me do. I do." He was still talking fast and the look of panic was back in his eyes.

"How?" she said.

He cringed. "I can smell it, sense it."

"Okay." She nodded again, not quite sure what to make of the fact that there were apparently other panther people in the world and they could all smell that she wanted a man. Great. She frowned. No wonder Alistair had been coming on to her.

Her head ached.

"I think I'm still unconscious."

He smiled up into her eyes, his look softening again, and reached up to touch her cheek but stopped himself. She wished he'd touch her. She needed to feel that all this was real.

"This isn't a dream. You felt the connection...you're my mate."

She furrowed her brows, confused but desperate to understand. She always felt the connection between them and had always known it was more than just a physical attraction. It ran deep, right down to her soul and into the very depths of her heart.

"What does that mean? I'm not like you," she said.

"You can be."

"No, I can't. I don't know what you are...I don't understand this. I've been seeing things and now I know what I saw was through your eyes." She looked away from him, at the far wall, and kept her gaze fixed there. "All these feelings...is this me, are they real, or is this all just because of this mating stuff? Do you really feel the way you do, do you see me as you would if it wasn't for all of this?"

He caught hold of her cheek and brought her eyes back to his. "Kim, listen to me."

She nodded, blinking back tears as she struggled to calm herself again.

"You're beautiful. The way I feel about you has nothing to do with the mating because it hasn't even begun properly yet. We're all born to love one person. You and I are just lucky to have that one person revealed to us."

She swallowed hard but her throat remained dry. Was he saying that he loved her? Did she love him? Could she love him?

She looked at his hands. So many times she'd seen them change in her dreams and she'd never been

frightened. Now she was so scared, but she didn't fear what he was. She was scared of her feelings.

"I'd never hurt you," he whispered. "Not even when I'm changed."

Her gaze met his and she tried to let him see that she believed him, even if she couldn't find her voice to say it. He'd protected her from Alistair. He'd done nothing but take care of her since he met her. She knew in her heart that he'd never let anyone hurt her, especially himself.

"Show me," she said quietly, not quite sure whether she really wanted to see it or not. She felt terrible inside when he gave her a look of confused hurt and she realised that commanding him to change made him feel like a freak. "Please? I just want to understand, to believe this is real."

He nodded and stood.

Her heart was pounding against her chest as he stepped away from her. Its rhythm was erratic, her breathing coming in short gasps as the tension in the room elevated. She didn't know what to expect and her mind raced through all the scenarios it could imagine.

Her attention was immediately with him when he removed his shirt and then pulled the strings on his linen trousers. She watched them drop around his ankles and he stepped out of them. She supposed it did make sense to be naked before changing. It wasn't like panthers wore clothes.

He gave her a little smile before divesting himself of his underwear. Her eyes lingered there and it was hard to

remind herself just why he was standing nude before her.

He took a deep breath and held it.

Was he nervous? She was. Her whole body was trembling, her hands shaking where they gripped the edge of the bed.

“Don’t be frightened,” he said with a pleading look.

She stopped breathing when thick black satiny fur began to appear on the backs of his hands. The look he was giving her made her heart ache. There was so much sorrow in it mixed with so much hope that she would understand. She wanted to.

The bones of his body began to shift and she saw his jaw tense, his brows meeting in a frown. Did it hurt? She was fascinated as she watched the fur sweep over him, his bones adjusting and a tail appearing as he bent down. The noises were horrible, terrifying. It sounded as though he was breaking himself for her. Before she knew it, there was a panther before her, standing in the middle of Erik’s clothes.

And she wasn’t scared at all.

The panther moved towards her.

She smiled when it looked at her, wanting to reassure him that his changing hadn’t frightened her.

“Are you house trained?” she said in a tight voice, not sure what else to say to him when he was in this form.

The panther growled at her, a disdainful look in his golden eyes.

"I'm sorry," she said as he turned away from her. He turned back around and brushed his long thick tail across her knees. She shrugged and smiled. "It's defence mechanism humour."

He paced across the room, looking at her occasionally.

"You'd make a great guard dog...cat...I'm not sure what to call you."

He reared onto his back legs and growled as he began to change back. It looked just as painful as when he'd changed into the animal. Suddenly, Erik was standing naked before her.

"Just call me Erik," he said and picked up his underwear, slipping them on. She was thankful for his modesty. She would never be able to concentrate when he was nude around her.

"Did something bite you to make you like that?" She tried to think about all the movies she'd seen with werewolves in it. "Are you like a werewolf...a werepanther...do you change when it's a full moon?"

He laughed and went to the bathroom. She watched him get some things out of the cupboard and then come back to her.

"Let me," she said as he unscrewed the lid of the antiseptic.

She was surprised that he did. He came over and knelt before her, holding the bottle and cotton wool out to her.

Taking them, she doused the cotton ball with the antiseptic and then carefully applied it to the scratches on his chest. He sucked in a sharp breath through his teeth and winced.

"Sorry," she muttered and lightened her strokes. The cuts weren't deep, but they had bled all down his chest. She focused on her work and let him speak. It was probably best this way. He could get it all off his chest while she got all this blood off it too. Tending to him made it all feel a little more normal.

"I don't change with the moon," he said in quiet voice.

A glance at him revealed that he was watching her hands, a tender expression on his face. She could almost feel his relief that she wasn't running away. She couldn't even if she wanted to. Instinct was telling her to stay and her legs weren't cooperating.

"We're not werepanthers. We're shape-shifters. Lycans. I wasn't bitten either. Although you can change that way. With my family, it's hereditary. It's a gene passed down through the bloodline." He took another sharp breath. She smiled an apology into his eyes and began cleaning up the dried blood. "My mother was a panther like me. Father was like Alistair, a puma. Myself and Alistair carry both of the genes—for panther and puma. What we change into is just the dominant gene. If a shape-shifter impregnates a human, there's a chance the child will carry the gene successfully but there's an equal chance that the gene will make it sick, in which case they'll need to be properly turned into a lycan by one of the same species."

"Is that what the paragraph is about?" She saw him nod. It all made sense to her now. Alistair was promiscuous

and in all probability, he would end up fathering a child at some point, and from the stories she'd been told, it was likely to be with a human. "If his blood doesn't match, if the dominant gene is panther, he wants you to change it."

"I said it was complicated." He smiled, a fleeting one that made the air in the room and her heart feel lighter.

She finished cleaning the cuts on his chest and looked at them. They didn't show any sign of starting to bleed again. Her fingers traced the edges of the wounds. She ached inside to see them and to know he'd got them defending her.

"Erik?" she whispered to his chest.

"Yes, Kim?" he breathed her name so softly that she melted inside.

Looking into his eyes, she took hold of his hands, threading their fingers together and pressing her palms against his. She needed to feel him, wanted his arms around her so she would know that the feelings he'd always shown for her were still there inside of him. She had to know that if she was going stay with him, that everything between them was going to be all right. She needed to know she'd be safe, and that he'd always protect her in this new world she'd be entering.

"Kiss me?" she pleaded.

He got up onto his knees and, still holding her hands tightly, pressed a gentle kiss to her lips. He was shaking. She didn't mind. She was shaking too. She closed her eyes when his kiss grew bolder, his lips parting, and hers parted too, allowing her tongue to meet his. It was

tender, reaffirming feelings that she'd known were still there between them, regardless of what he was and what was happening. When he kissed her like this, she didn't care about anything but being with him. Whatever happened in life, she could cope with it if she had him at her side.

When he broke the kiss, she kept hold of his hands and stared into his eyes.

"Erik?" she said. "What's a mating?"

He smiled, as though he'd been waiting for her to find the courage to ask.

"It's the affirmation of a bond between us, deeper than the connection that we have now. When you're in heat is the only time I can change you without hurting you."

"I need to be like you for this mating to happen?" She was glad he didn't laugh at her question. This was all so strange but she was beginning to grasp it.

"Yes," he said with a nod of his head and stood up. "The things you've been seeing...the visions and the times you've witnessed things through my eyes...it's all because of the mating. It wants to be completed, but while I thought you were ready for all of this two days ago, now I'm not so sure."

"I'm not ready?" She frowned briefly and thought about it. Was she ready to give up her normal life and become like him? "What happens if you don't change me?"

"Then life goes back to normal. The dreams will gradually become more intermittent until the day they stop."

"You mean this is our only chance?"

He smiled at her. "No, not at all. The cycle is eternal. If we don't mate this time, in two or three years there'll be another chance. You'll know because the dreams will begin again."

"Oh." She looked at her knees. "What's to stop you changing me...or changing on me when we're together...doing...you know."

She again expected him to laugh, but his look was deadly serious.

"I'd never force you, Kim. Never. I'm yours to command." He gave her an odd look and then walked over to a set of drawers. She leaned to one side, trying to see what he was taking out of the top drawer. Her eyes widened when he turned back to face her and held up a pair of handcuffs. "You had the dream, the same as I did."

He walked towards her, holding the cuffs out for her to take.

"I need you to trust me," he said and placed the cuffs into her hands.

They were cold and hard, not at all sexy looking like they had been in the dream. They made a chill run through her. She looked up into his eyes.

"I won't hurt you. I would never change on you, and I would never change you against your will. I trust you, and this is the only way for you to see that. I'll surrender to you..."

She looked at the cuffs again. She wanted to. The intensity of that dream had stayed with her and she wanted to experience it firsthand. He had to know that she trusted him and believed everything he said. She had to show him.

But she was scared.

Chapter 19

Erik watched her staring at the cuffs and wondered if he'd done enough to prove to her that he was worthy of her trust and the feelings he knew she held for him. This wasn't exactly how he'd planned on her finding out about his primal side, but so far it had gone relatively smoothly. She hadn't freaked out anywhere near as much as he'd been expecting. There was a quiet acceptance about her. She'd said that she'd known what he was somehow. He'd never hidden it from her in their visions. Maybe he should've changed fully there and she would've known for sure what he was.

She toyed with the chain between the cuffs, clearly trying to decide what she was going to do. He wanted her to feel that connection to him again. He wouldn't have even dared offer the handcuffs to her and ask her for this time together if she hadn't cleaned his wounds for him. He'd seen the affection in her eyes, the worry and the fear for him. All of the love.

It was hard for her to come to terms with what he was saying, but she was coping admirably.

She looked up at him, her dark eyes full of questions that she would never ask. There was a battle being waged inside of her and she needed reassurance as much as he did. He was offering it in the only way he knew how—by surrendering completely to her. If she chained him up, he'd be powerless. She could do anything she wanted to. Hit him. Leave him. Love him. She would be the one making the decisions, just like she needed to be.

She stood and glanced at the bed. He obeyed her silent command. She probably didn't know she was giving one, but he could sense it. She'd made a decision, now he had to wait to see what it was.

Crawling onto the bed, he sat in the middle of it and then lay back. He stretched his arms up above him, curling his fingers around the posts of the headboard and waiting for her.

He closed his eyes for a moment and willed his nerves to settle. She'd be able to sense them if she tried, just like she'd been able to sense his heart and his power outside. Now she knew how deep the connection ran, she would be instinctively feeling it.

The bed beside him depressed and he felt the cold steel against his wrist. He opened his eyes and watched her face closely, studying it for a sign of her intentions. She leaned over him and looped the cuffs through the poles before fastening the other around his wrist. She squeezed them both, tightening them. He swallowed.

A tiny spark of fear ignited inside of him and he closed his eyes.

He silently prayed that she wouldn't leave.

"Open your eyes," she whispered close to his ear.

He did, looking straight into hers and showing her all the fear inside of him. She looked taken aback by it and ran her fingers lightly down his cheek as though trying to comfort him. He held her gaze, resisting the temptation to close his eyes at the softness of her touch.

“Don’t leave.” The words escaped him, so quiet he was sure she wouldn’t hear.

“I’m not.”

Two words served to remove all the fear from him, erasing it and leaving him wondering just what she intended to do with him.

“I remember a dream I had last week, after I’d met you. In it, you told me that it was just a dream and that the best was yet to come. You were right. The dreams don’t even come close to the reality.”

He groaned when she lightly ran her fingers over his bare chest. She was staring at it, at the cuts that darted across it, and the more she looked, the more her eyes filled with tender emotions that made his breath hitch in his throat. After today, he’d thought she’d never speak to him again, and now she was being so open with him.

And he was going to be open with her.

It was the only way.

She had to know his feelings for her and he was desperate to hear hers. He needed the reassurance that she was fine with his primal side and that she trusted him. He’d keep the promise he’d made—he’d never hurt her and he’d never let her get hurt. He’d die to defend her.

Kim smiled down into Erik’s eyes. In all the time they’d spent together, she’d never seen him like this. He was powerless, and it wasn’t just the handcuffs making him that way. It was her and his feelings for her. He was

surrendering control and opening his heart to her, holding it out for her to treasure or smash to pieces.

How could she smash it?

Breaking his heart would only break hers too.

She didn't care how crazy having feelings for a man who could transform into a panther sounded in her head, in her heart it made perfect sense. She didn't care what he was, it was who he was that she'd fallen for, and it was the way she felt when she was with him that had made her stay to listen to what he'd had to say.

Now he'd rendered himself powerless for her, to prove without a doubt that he trusted her and that she could trust him. It was a strange thing to do. She was moved by it, but not as much as something else moved her.

He'd turned himself inside out, offered up his heart, and shown her how weak and scared he was deep inside. That touched her more than anything could. That had made her believe that what he was feeling was true and nothing to do with this bizarre mating they'd found themselves in the middle of.

She'd never seen a man do so much to prove to a girl that he loved her. She knew that's what he was doing. He was showing her without saying the actual words that he felt for her the same way that she felt for him. He was baring everything to her, and it was down to her to take the leap and offer her heart in return for his. She didn't want to hurt him and she didn't want to see him hurting any more. It cut her deep and made her want to hold him forever when she saw the pain in his eyes, and all the fear.

He was lying so patiently, waiting for her to make a move. She wanted to feel the connection like she had in the dream. She wanted to know if the reality of that would be better than the fantasy.

Running her fingers down his chest, she traced the shape of his muscles, exploring him. He really was beautiful, in both of his forms. Exquisite muscles bunched deliciously beneath her touch, making desire stir inside of her. She kept hold of the tenderness she was feeling towards him, mixing it with the desire that would soon threaten to overtake her. She wanted the connection. She needed the intensity.

Leaning over, she placed a chaste kiss to his cheek, and slowly worked her way downwards, finding her courage along the way. She began to alternate between licking and kissing, letting her mouth discover his body all over again while her fingers memorised the curves and her nose the way he smelt.

She glanced at him furtively out of the corner of her eye. He had his eyes closed, his fingers loosely gripping the two poles of the wooden headboard that he could reach.

She wanted to hold him so badly, but she made herself continue, knowing that this would reassure him more than her arms around him. If she gave him this, a soul stirring moment of togetherness, then he would know that she was never going to leave him.

Reaching the cuts across his chest, she kissed them lightly, wishing she could somehow heal them for him and make them go away. He sighed beneath her.

She smiled against his skin and began to work her way down over his stomach, kissing each muscle, thoroughly

covering it. She wished she could study all of him, just sit back and watch him walking around naked. He had such a beautiful body, toned but not overly built. His compact muscles made her feel the power in him right down in her core.

Sitting back, she ran her fingers over his shoulders and up his arms, delighting in the softness of his skin and the shape of his muscles. He was staring at her. She could feel the intensity of his look boring into her. Her eyes met his and she kept herself open to him, showing him everything he made her feel. His head cocked to one side, his gaze becoming questioning. She smiled at him, trying to show him that what he saw in her was the truth.

“Speak to me,” he said.

“About what?”

He craned his neck and looked at her hands, and then stared back into her eyes. “What you’re thinking. I want to hear what you’re thinking.”

Her hands stopped moving. The idea of having to speak her thoughts made her want to clam up, but she told herself that it could be good for them. They could say everything to each other without words, with a single look or touch, but this would bring it down to that intimate level they were both searching for.

Moving her hands again, she traced the veins and shape of his forearms, working her way towards his wrists. She stopped when she touched the cold metal of the handcuffs.

Nerves made her tremble and she was sure that she wasn't going to be able to speak without him hearing them. She'd never done anything like this before. She'd never felt this way about a man.

"You have an incredible body," she said, not daring to look at him. She half expected him to say thank you to her, but he remained silent. She chanced a look and saw he wasn't smiling, but there was tenderness in his eyes. Bringing her hands back down his arms, she held his gaze. "Sleek. Powerful. Like your inner panther. I could spend eternity doing this."

He smiled now.

"You have a beautiful body too. I'd give anything to see it." His voice was husky, deep and seductive. Clearly, he'd found his confidence again.

Sitting back on her heels, she unbuttoned the dress and went to slip it off over her head but stopped when she remembered that she wasn't exactly wearing what could be deemed underwear suitable for such a moment. She could see he was wondering what was wrong and continued, pulling the dress off and letting it fall to the floor as his eyes fell to her body. They narrowed. He purred and a thrill ran through her.

God, he could purr.

The sound of it empowered her.

She didn't think her underwear was sexy, but maybe he did. Were plain cotton knickers and bra a turn on? She'd always thought it was lace and satin that set men's hearts racing, but the look in his eyes said different.

Hooking her leg over him, she sat astride his waist, her eyes locked with his and their groins together. She could feel him hardening beneath her. His hips shifted, grinding his cock against her pussy. She pressed a hand into his stomach, pushing his groin back down, and gave him a chastising look.

"Tell me what you're thinking," she said.

He didn't hesitate.

"I could eat you whole," he whispered at her and a flicker of fear entered his eyes.

She smiled and chased it away. She knew he didn't mean his panther side. Remembering that she had to say everything she was thinking, she held his gaze and ran her fingers lightly over his stomach.

"I could eat you whole too, wrap myself up in you and never leave." She felt a little giddy with nerves as he smiled, all his feelings for her showing in his eyes. She could sense a question in him and didn't want to answer it. Even though she didn't want to leave him, she wasn't sure she wanted to become like him.

Leaning over, she kissed down across his chest and then shifted downwards until her knees were against his and her mouth was tracing a line above the waist of his boxers.

She pulled them down a little, following them with a trail of wet kisses. Unable to resist a glance at him, she saw he had his eyes closed now, his fingers finally tightly gripping the headboard. His whole body sung to her of what he wanted. She tugged the waist of his boxers down and he raised his hips. The underwear slid easily

off and she stopped when they reached his thighs. Running her hands under him, she moaned quietly at the feeling of his taut backside under her fingers. She stroked along the curve of it towards his thighs and hooked her fingers over his underwear again.

Kissing down his legs, she moved backwards, bringing his underwear with her and eventually pulling it off over his feet. She stopped to explore them, fingers dancing across his toes and sweeping up the arch of his soles. He wriggled a little. Another place he was ticklish. She splayed her hands out and ran them slowly back up his legs, memorising every inch of him and the way he felt. She circled his knees and pressed a kiss to each. He wasn't ticklish on the back of them. She'd die laughing if he tickled her there. Not that she was going to tell him that.

"You run a lot don't you," she said, breaking the silence as much as his heavy breathing had been.

"Yes." His voice was hoarse and quiet. It sounded as though it had taken a lot of effort to say that one word.

"What are you running from?" She moved up his thighs and looked at him, wanting to see the truth in his expression in case he tried to cover it with his words.

He paused and then took a deep breath.

"Nothing...maybe...sometimes the other side of me." He looked uncomfortable and she thought about letting it go, but couldn't.

Her fingers traced the dips in his buttocks as he tensed them. She went around to the spot on his hip where she knew he was ticklish. He raised a brow, silently telling

her not to dare. She didn't. He'd never talk if she did that.

"Why?" She leaned over, pressed a kiss to the ticklish spot on his hip, and then sat back again.

"Because sometimes I feel like a freak, outnumbered and unloved in this world...and I want to feel normal."

Her exploration of him halted and she looked deep into his eyes. She shouldn't have asked. She hadn't realised that she'd hurt him so much by pressing the subject. Crawling up the length of him, she kissed him tenderly, slow and deep, with as much love as she could pour into it. He wasn't a freak. He wasn't unloved.

"You're not alone..." she whispered into his ear, pressing her cheek against his. Her brows furrowed. "You're never alone and you're not unloved. I'll stand by you until the end of time...I just don't know whether I'm ready to be like you yet."

The words had left her before she'd had a chance to consider their implication. She drew back, giving him a fearful look. She'd wanted to open her heart to him but now that she had, she was scared he was going to hurt her. Was this how he felt? She was lost in a turbulent sea, crying out for him to throw her a line and rescue her before she drowned. Why wasn't he saying something?

He was just staring at her.

The room suddenly felt cold and oppressive, but she didn't dare move. She couldn't until he'd either saved her or drowned her.

"You're beautiful," he said at last. Her heart pounded against her chest, making her feel sick. His eyes narrowed on hers. "I've never met a girl so beautiful and that I loved so much."

Her eyes flew wide.

She gasped at air.

That wasn't a lifeline. That was like drying out the entire ocean in a split second just to save her.

Chapter 20

Erik tried to sit up but fell back again when the handcuffs stopped him.

"Don't panic." He sounded panicked so Kim wondered exactly how she was supposed to not panic. "I've loved you my whole life...you're mine and I'm yours. You can command me, tell me never to say those words again, and I won't."

She stared at him.

How could he be so crazy?

"Say them again." Her voice shook as it tried to squeeze out of her dry throat.

She leaned over him and looked down into his eyes, her palms pressed against his chest to support her. She could feel his heart beating, and it was beating frighteningly fast. It felt as though it was going to break free of his chest.

"I'm in love with you," he said with so much intensity that tears crept into the corners of her eyes.

She kissed him deeply, all the while thinking about how much she wanted to ask him where the key to the handcuffs were so he could make love to her. He wouldn't go for it. This was about him surrendering control to her, and they could still make love like this.

"Erik..." She drew back and looked into his eyes. He raised his brows, his honey eyes sparkling at her. "I want you inside me, where you belong."

It was the corniest line in the world, but she didn't care. When he was inside her, she felt complete and nothing mattered in the world but him, but the feeling of them together.

He grinned broadly, clearly amused by her corny line too. She rolled her eyes. He motioned in the direction of the drawer where he'd got the cuffs.

Getting off him, she pressed a kiss to his lips and then one to the head of his cock. She walked across the room, wriggling her hips just a fraction so he'd get a good show. She could feel him watching her.

She pulled the drawer out and found the condoms. Taking a couple out of the packet, she spotted the key to the cuffs and decided to bring it with her too. She bunched everything up into her fist and then shut the drawer.

A smile crept onto her lips.

Turning, she raised a brow at Erik. He looked so damn delicious stretched out on the bed completely naked. She glanced down at her body, at her underwear, and then back at Erik.

"Take them off," he said.

It wasn't a command, it was part wish and part voiced hope.

Reaching around behind her, she unhooked her bra and drew the straps slowly down her arms. She let it drop to the floor when she reached the foot of the bed and put down the stuff she was holding. She slipped her thumbs into the waist of her knickers and shimmied out of them, losing them as she knelt on the bed. Taking hold of the condoms and the key, she crawled up the length of Erik, her eyes taking in every inch of him and the devastatingly seductive look he was giving her. It said everything she could feel he was about to say.

“I want you, Kim. We belong together...come to me.”

She was surprised when she felt pulled inside, drawn to him, as though those last three words were a command and she didn't have the will to ignore them. She was glad that he hadn't said exactly what was in his eyes. She knew that he wanted them to be together forever, and she wanted it to, but the process frightened her. To be with him forever she would have to become like him. She just didn't think she was ready.

Even though her heart said yes.

She shunned her thoughts and focused on what was happening now. The future could wait.

“Erik?”

He gave her a look that said to go on.

She froze, her hands against his thighs and her eyes locked with his. He was looking at her with so much love and affection that she clammed up, the words she wanted to say fluttering away unspoken. She held his gaze, her brows furrowing slightly as she struggled with herself. Her words of love wouldn't come back, and she

wanted him to hear them and know that no matter what decision she made, she did feel the same way about him as he felt about her.

She loved him.

She loved him with heart, body and soul.

Shaking her head, she watched his eyes narrow and a frown marry his brows for the briefest of moments before she chased it away by lightly running her fingers down his hard cock.

His eyes closed, his lips parting as he breathed deeper. She looked at his erection, fingertips tracing the ridges and veins, brushing over the sensitive head. She needed him inside her. She needed that dream to become real.

Leaning over, she ran her tongue up the length of him, his flesh velvety beneath it, warm and soft. She moaned low in her throat, her hands pressing deep into his sides as she swept them up towards his chest. The chains of the handcuffs rattled and she could feel him straining beneath her. She wondered what it felt like to be tied up, unable to join in and do what your body was begging you to. He couldn't hold her where she was or touch her. All he could do was moan his encouragement.

She explored the head of his cock with her tongue, sliding around it and slipping it into the sensitive crevices. His hips jerked up and she complied with his silent request, taking him into her mouth and sucking him slow and gentle.

He groaned.

There was an edge of growl to it that thrilled her, sending a wave of arousal through her that made her slick with desire. She took him in deeper, turned on by the noises he was making. Her tongue teased and tortured him, licking up the length of his cock as she sucked it. He growled and she whimpered at the sound of it.

She'd never felt so powerful before. She had him at her mercy, helpless and hers for the taking, whichever way she wanted to. Her eyes roamed up the length of his body to his face. He had craned his neck to watch her, his eyes glittering yellow in the soft light of the bedside lamps.

Releasing his cock, she took hold of one of the condoms and tore the packet open. She rolled it down onto his length, doing it slow to tease him a little more, and then moved up so her face was level with his. She kissed him slow, her lips barely touching his. It stirred a heady lightness inside of her, drawing out her feelings as he tenderly kissed her.

She lowered her pelvis, grinding her pussy along the length of his cock. The tip of it rubbed her clit, making her moan into his mouth as tingles of pleasure spread through her.

She raised her hips a fraction and reached around behind her. Taking hold of his cock, she guided it into her, slowly sinking back onto it until it was buried deep. She sighed out her moan and closed her eyes, giving herself a moment to savour the feeling of him inside of her. She'd never felt so connected to anyone as she did with him, and when he was inside her like this, it felt as though they were one person.

Erik stared at her face. It was a mask of pleasure, her lips curved into a wide satisfied smile and her expression content. She opened her eyes as she began to move and he wished he could hold her, touch her, as she rode his length. Her movements were slow and deliberate, emphasising the bond they shared. He locked eyes with hers, looking deep into them and searching them. This feeling was divine, something beyond humanly possible. It was like looking right into her soul, seeing it all there before him and understanding it perfectly clearly. He could see her feelings for him and her fear, could see how much this moment together meant to her.

It was as much as it meant to him.

He'd taken the risk and offered himself to her, letting her do as she wanted with him, and she'd shown him that she had no intention of hurting him. He was floored by her understanding and acceptance of what he was inside, and it touched him deeply to see that she still had feelings for him and she still wanted to be with him.

He swallowed and tightly gripped the poles of the headboard as her muscles contracted around him, squeezing his cock. He began to lose track of the world, lost in her eyes and the oblivion of pleasure they were both heading towards. She pressed her hands into his stomach, her fingertips grasping at him. He tensed and moved his hips in time with hers, thrusting slow and deep into her, filling her over and over again. He wanted this to go on forever so he could always feel this close to her. She moaned and he answered it with one of his own. Her brows furrowed, her eyes betraying her soaring arousal and hunger. She kept it slow though, drawing it out, stirring his feelings for her and pulling them through his heart to his eyes for her to see. He wanted her to see them. She had to know how she made

him feel. She had a tough decision ahead of her and if she could see how much he loved her, and that he'd never hurt her, if she could trust him, then maybe it would make mating with him less frightening sounding. The gentle way she was treating him, and the feelings she'd shown him, told him that she wasn't going to leave him, no matter what her decision was.

Kim bit her lip, her eyes still fixed on Erik's, still drinking in the beautiful expression he was wearing. She was drowning in her feelings for him, and the more she moved, the more feelings broke to the surface. She felt as though they were opening themselves to each other, both letting go of their fear, both trusting implicitly and loving unconditionally. It was warm, enveloping, and frightening to a degree.

What she was feeling for him was intense and consuming. If this was what real love felt like, then she'd never known love before because it was nothing like what she had with him. This was so much deeper.

He was the air she breathed, the blood in her veins, and the missing part of her soul.

He was everything.

She was so scared of losing him, of something happening, and she wanted more than anything to be able to voice her feelings to him. She wanted him to hear the words, not just see them in her eyes. She needed him to know.

Her abdomen tensed, her pert nub rubbing against his pelvic bone with each down thrust, sending waves of pleasure breaking over her. She focused on the feeling of him inside her. They were just moving together, slow,

sensual and deep. There was no rush. Not even her desire to cum made her quicken the pace. It had to be slow. This wasn't about the sex. It was about the connection and the feelings they shared.

She moaned when he purred beneath her, the vibrations of it adding to the amazing feeling of him sliding into her. She couldn't believe how powerful that sound made her feel. It was her making him purr, her making him content and happy. She wished she could purr back and show him that she was right there with him.

Leaning back a little, she groaned when the change in position made it feel even better. Her body followed her abdomen, tensing and climbing towards her orgasm. She held Erik's gaze, deepening her strokes and rotating her hips to make the most of each thrust he made into her.

He purred louder, his eyes becoming hooded, and she could sense how close he was. She pressed her hands into his stomach, trying to keep her focus on him but losing it slightly as the feelings inside of her began to spiral beyond her control. She half closed her eyes, her breathing coming faster as she approached her climax. He thrust deeper into her, his strokes a little harder now, and she tightened around him, tensing her muscles to make the most of each thrust.

Moaning with each slide of his cock into her, she begged for a little more, just that one stroke that would push her over the edge into bliss. She kept her eyes open enough to keep eye contact with Erik, watching his face twist in pleasure and thrilled that it was her doing that to him.

She arched her back as the tightness inside her evaporated, exploding in a wave of tingles that raced

through every inch of her over and over again as she milked his cock. She continued to ride him, pushing him harder and harder until he thrust up inside of her, spilling himself into the condom and throbbing. She tensed her muscles, loving the feeling of him coming inside of her.

When her breathing had levelled off, she leaned forwards, holding him inside of her as she kissed him slowly. His tongue played gently against hers. She realised that she wanted his arms around her and leaned over to retrieve the key. Undoing the handcuffs, she rubbed each of his wrists in turn and then kissed the red marks on them. He broke free of her grasp and wrapped his arms around her, holding her close to him.

Her cheek pressed against his chest and she sighed contentedly when he rested his cheek against her forehead.

"I love you," he said softly.

She smiled and held him as best she could.

"I love you too." It wasn't such a frightening thing to say after all. It made her feel at peace and relieved in a way to have it out in the open at last. She closed her eyes when he purred. It rumbled through his chest, lulling her to sleep as he held her. She felt so comfortable.

She felt so safe.

She didn't want to go back to the world. She wanted to stay here forever.

Here, nothing bad could happen.

There, things could go horribly wrong.

And she was getting that feeling again that something terrible was going to happen.

Chapter 21

Kim kissed Erik slowly, not wanting to let him go. The morning sun was hot on her face and arms. She ran her fingers into his hair. It was warm and soft, heated by the sun. She didn't want to go into the apartment building at her back, and definitely didn't want to go to work. She wanted to stay here on the steps of her building and kiss him all day long.

The drive back to London had been long and slow. They'd left so early that the sun hadn't even started to rise. The closer they'd got to London, the worse the feeling in the pit of her stomach had got.

Yesterday seemed like a dream, a fantasy world that she wished she could have stayed in.

Now she was facing the reality.

She sighed as she pulled away from Erik, looking deep into his eyes and seeing all his feelings in them. He pushed her long dark hair behind her ear and smiled.

"I'm not asking for a decision straight away. There's still two days until we'll have to wait for you to be in heat again before we can mate." He hesitated a moment and took hold of her hand, toying with her fingers. "I could change you after that, but it's too dangerous and I won't risk you. It would be better to wait for you to be ready again."

She nodded. "I'll think about it. Will you be around tonight?"

"I was going to go back to the house after signing the contract. I've got some business to attend to there, but I'll see what I can do though."

She looped her arms around his neck. He was standing on the step below her and was still taller than her, but her eyes were almost level with his.

"I better go." He kissed her briefly on the lips. "The meeting should be over by midday...how about you just happen to walk by the room then?"

She grinned. "Sounds like a good plan to me."

She ran her hands down his arms. He did look stunning in a black suit, and the fact that she intimately knew the fantastic body it was hiding only made him even sexier.

He smiled and pressed a kiss to her hand. "See you then."

She nodded again and leaned against the black iron railings as she watched him walk down the steps and get into his car. He gave her one last wave and then his car roared into the distance. Sighing to herself, she folded her arms across her chest and frowned.

She really hoped that the feeling in her stomach was just nerves about him asking her to mate with him. She didn't want anything bad to happen to him, not after his fight with his brother yesterday.

Picking up her luggage, she opened the door to the building and went inside.

* * * *

Walking through the halls, Kim kept checking her watch to see what time it was. Simon had caught her at ten to twelve and he'd kept her talking until five past. She'd tried to brush him off with short answers, but he'd asked her repeatedly whether she was feeling any better and had kept telling her that she still looked a little flushed. Of course she'd looked flushed, she'd been rushed off her feet all morning and had been flustered about missing Erik.

She spotted the meeting room door was ajar and was about to push it open when she heard someone talking. She stopped, listening to them and trying to make out who it was. Peeking around the door, she frowned as Alistair paced into view. He was on his phone. She couldn't see anyone else there. Where had Erik gone?

She went to leave but froze when Alistair spoke.

"Yes, yes...everything is going to plan. Erik signed the contract. I can't wait to get on with the next phase."

Her heart sunk a little to hear that he'd actually gone through with it. She'd seen how much the house meant to him, and could understand him giving up half of his company in order to get a share of it, but she still didn't trust his brother. There was something wrong about the contract, and maybe it wasn't the paragraph about blood, but she still had the feeling and she couldn't ignore it.

She stood casually in front of the bulletin board beside the door, acting normal when a couple of men passed her by. She waited until they were out of sight and then stepped closer to the door. Alistair had piqued her curiosity and she had to listen in on him. She had to

know that Erik was safe and that this feeling inside of her was just nerves about what he was asking her to do.

The idea of giving up her life to be with him sounded like something from a dream, but whenever she thought about the change she'd have to undertake, she wanted to run away. She'd thought about it all morning, and she still couldn't decide.

She craned her neck, getting as close to the open door as possible without Alistair hearing her.

"Of course I'm going to go through with it." Alistair laughed and the sound of it sent a chill through her. "You think I'd ever have children with a human? The very idea is repulsive. I just want the company..."

She frowned when there was another pause.

"Listen to me. I will do this...I took care of the folks didn't I? He's no challenge to me...I'm not going to back out now. I want him dead. If he's dead then it's all mine."

She gasped and covered her mouth, her eyes wide as she backed away from the door. Her heart thundered, pounding against her chest as adrenaline made her shake. He couldn't be talking about Erik. He just couldn't.

The voice at the back of her mind said he could.

It all made perfect sense. Alistair hated Erik because of the company. He'd killed his parents to get his hands on it, and his mother had given it to Erik. Now he wanted to kill Erik for it. She felt foolish for ever thinking that the

clause about blood was a danger to Erik. It wasn't, but Alistair was.

The way he'd looked at her when he'd confronted Erik at the house. Women were just toys to him, a game. He didn't want a mate like Erik did. If he ever had children with a human, he'd want nothing to do with them. Half of the paragraphs in the contract had probably just been there to make it look as though he wasn't only after the company.

Erik had signed it, and at the same time had signed his own death certificate.

She'd read the contract. If any of the parties died, then all of the possessions passed to the sole survivor.

He was going to kill Erik.

God, she had to warn him.

Running through the halls, her sense of panic increased to boiling point when she couldn't see him in the lobby. She barged into Laura's office, her eyes wide as she looked around it, ignoring Laura asking her what was wrong. She shook her head and ran on, desperate to find Erik. When she ended up at her desk, she realised she'd been everywhere but the roof. She shoved her way past Simon and sprinted as fast as she could up the stairs. She had to find him. She couldn't let Alistair hurt him.

Pushing the door to the roof open, she scoured it but found no sign of Erik. She ran back down again, the door slamming behind her as she bolted through the corridors. Simon called after her, telling her to slow down before she killed someone.

She laughed mirthlessly at that.

If she slowed down, someone could die.

She grabbed her bag off her desk and ran out into the street, not slowing down until she reached the underground. It was only a twenty minute journey to the tube station nearest her flat, and from there it was a ten minute walk to her place. She hoped that Erik would be there, but instinct said he wouldn't be. There was only one place he might be.

Pulling her mobile phone out of her bag, she called Erik, her heart racing as she struggled to breathe. The phone at the other end rang and rang, but no one answered it. It went to voicemail.

"Erik. Stay away from Alistair. He killed your parents and now he wants you dead. He wants everything. I'm going to the house. I can't find you and I need to know you're safe."

She flipped her phone shut and shoved her pass through the machines at the entrance to the tube station. Thundering down the steps, she sprinted onto the train that was about to leave. She panted hard as she leaned against the pole behind her. She had to reach him before it was too late.

He'd said he was going back to the mansion.

She hoped to God she could catch him there.

* * * *

Kim slammed the door to her Clio and looked around her. The heat coming off the golden gravel drive was

unbearable. After the stifling heat of her car journey, it was the last thing she needed. Her heart hadn't slowed down once during her trip here. The traffic was insane and, without the relief of air conditioning, being stuck in her car had driven her crazy. She'd tried to call Erik no less than fifteen times, but each time there was no answer. She'd left a voicemail each time, and each one had been more and more panicked.

She looked around her and frowned when she couldn't see Erik's car. Parked near the house was a dark blue sports car. Instinct told her it wasn't Erik's. She doubted it was the housekeeper's. Nerves made her tremble.

She walked to the door of the house and knocked. The door creaked open. She peered inside, unsure whether to go in, or wait and see if someone had heard her. After a few minutes, it became clear that no one was coming to answer the door.

Pushing it open as slowly and quietly as possible, she slipped inside and listened hard. If she could find the housekeeper, then maybe she could find out the other places Erik might be.

She tiptoed across the hall, desperate not to make too much noise. If the car in the drive belonged to Alistair, she didn't want him to know she was here. She didn't like the way he looked at her and she certainly didn't want to be alone with him.

She crept up the stairs, heading for the bedrooms. They'd only left this morning. Maybe the housekeeper was tidying the rooms.

Her heart jumped into her throat when her phone rang, the jaunty tune echoing badly off the thick stone walls of

the house. She fumbled in her bag for it, cursing it as she tried to get her finger over the speaker to dampen the noise. Her heart was leaping about all over the place in her chest. She pulled the phone out and flicked it open when she saw it was Erik.

“Kim? Kim?” he sounded panicked.

She clutched the phone to her ear and whispered, “It’s me.”

“Where are you?” His voice came back loud and she turned the volume of her phone down so it couldn’t be heard in the expansive room.

“Your house. Erik...Alistair...I heard him...he’s going to—” She cut herself off when she reached the top of the stairs and felt something. The hairs on the back of her neck rose.

“Kim? I got your messages. I’m on my way. I’ll be there soon.” Erik’s voice sounded distant as she stared at the wall in front of her.

She felt sick. Her whole body was shaking and her throat was so tight that she couldn’t breathe.

She turned very slowly to face the stairs.

Alistair grinned at her, standing only a step below her.

“Erik!” she shouted down the phone before Alistair knocked it flying.

It smashed into pieces on the hall floor below her. She almost tripped over the step as she backed away from Alistair, fear overwhelming her.

"I heard you outside the meeting room...sneaky little bitch, aren't you?"

She shook her head and struggled to keep on her feet as her knees threatened to buckle beneath her.

Her eyes darted to the corridor on her right. Before she'd even moved a foot to run down it, Alistair's hand was around her throat and he'd slammed her into the wall. He pressed her into it. It was cold against her back. Her hands came up, nails digging into Alistair's arms in an attempt to make him let go.

He squeezed her throat harder.

Tears filled her eyes and she choked. Her brows furrowed and she prayed that he wouldn't hurt her.

"I want everything from him, and until I heard you in the hall, I thought that killing him would achieve that." Alistair stepped up to her, his body pressing against hers.

She wriggled, trying to get away from him. Her body shook and her heart trembled. She kept telling herself that this wasn't happening. Any minute now, she'd wake up, or Erik would rescue her.

"I realised something...you're his too." Alistair grinned, exposing canines to her, and she gasped when his hand rubbed against her crotch. "You stink like him. I think I'll take you from him too."

She shook her head. "Please, no..."

He laughed at her. "What was that? Please?"

She leaned her head away from him when he went to kiss her. Closing her eyes as he licked her neck, she pushed against his chest, trying to force him off her. It only made him shove her harder against the wall. His mouth was on hers before she could do anything. It sickened her and she felt the tears streak down her face as she continued to struggle against him.

“You taste so fucking good,” he breathed the words against her lips and kissed her again, his tongue forcing its way into her mouth.

She frowned and bit down on his tongue at the same time as kneeling him hard in the balls.

He dropped her and clutched at himself, growling in fury and pain. She didn’t stop to check him or even think. She ran the moment he released her, sprinting as fast as she could down the stairs and out into the garden. She could feel him coming after her, had known when she’d attacked him that she’d only have a few seconds to get away. She looked around as she hit the open air and saw the maze.

Running for it, she pushed herself past her limit, desperate to survive and get away from Alistair. She had to buy herself time. Erik would be here soon.

Behind her, Alistair roared.

* * * *

The car skidded on the gravel as Erik slammed his foot down on the brakes. He was out of the door in a split second, not stopping to turn the engine off or even put the handbrake on. He growled when he saw Alistair change as he chased Kim into the maze. Stripping his

jacket off and unbuttoning his shirt as he ran, he focused on getting to Kim before it was too late.

He should've known that his brother was up to something.

Killing him?

Alistair was about to find out that that wasn't as easy as it sounded.

After all, he was the one that was going to die for killing their parents and laying a finger on Kim.

Changing into a panther as he entered the maze, he roared as he left his clothes behind and sprinted after Alistair. He used his senses to guide him towards his brother and Kim. He could smell her more clearly than this brother would be able to.

He turned each corner sharply, growling the whole time, knowing that Alistair would be able to hear him.

He was closing in.

A sharp cry of pain left him as he was tackled hard and fell into the hedge. He kicked back immediately, grappling with his brother and trying to bite him. His brother evaded him, managing to bite down on his front leg. He growled and threw Alistair off him.

Pouncing, he leapt on Alistair's back and bit down hard on his ear, tearing a chunk out of it. Alistair whimpered and rolled, trying to get him off his back. He dug his claws in and kicked his back legs, ripping into Alistair's back and biting the back of his neck.

He shook his head, tossing Alistair around. He could sense Kim nearby and hoped to God she wasn't watching. He threw Alistair and glanced around. They were at the centre of the maze. Kim was nowhere to be seen. He reached out again with his senses and found her further away. She was probably still running.

He cried again when Alistair scratched across his face, hissing as he flattened his ears against his head. Blood was streaming from his torn ear, turning his fur red. Erik hit back, slashing along his back and then leaping on him. He grappled Alistair to the ground, biting him repeatedly and not letting go when Alistair kicked at him.

His brother was weakening.

Pressing his back feet into Alistair's stomach, Erik managed to bite the underside of his throat. He locked his jaw tight as Alistair struggled, his claws slashing down Erik's chest and stomach. Erik clawed at him, his teeth firmly gripping Alistair's throat and strangling him. He bit down again, trying to get a better grip, and blood flooded his mouth. He choked on it but kept hold of Alistair, kicking at his stomach until his brother had gone still.

He released him and shook his head, retching up all of the blood he'd swallowed.

Collapsing to the floor, he shifted out of this panther form and breathed deeply. Everywhere hurt. There was so much pain and the taste of blood made him feel sick. He tried to sit up but found he didn't have the strength.

Lying on his back, his head rolled to one side and he looked at his brother. Tears filled his eyes when he saw

that he was still in his puma form, blood covering him and seeping into the gravel. Alistair had given him no choice. He'd forced him to fight. He'd had to defend Kim and avenge his parents.

Unable to look at his dead brother any longer, he got to his knees and slowly stood. He wiped his mouth on the back of his hand and looked down at his nude body and the cuts covering it. There was blood everywhere, and his stomach and arm were killing him. He was going to take time to heal, longer than he and Kim had before she was no longer in heat.

He couldn't change her if he wasn't at full strength. He wouldn't have enough energy for the mating or enough power for her transformation.

Stumbling through the maze, he was surprised when Kim appeared around one of the corners. She was carrying his clothes and apparently running blind since she nearly ran straight into him. She smiled when she stopped, but it disappeared when she saw the wounds all over him. He smiled through the pain at her, trying to reassure her that he was going to be fine.

"Alistair?" she said.

He shook his head.

Kim didn't say anything. She handed him his trousers and waited for him to slowly slip into them before she used his shirt to wipe away some of the blood on his arms, back and front. Tears spilt onto her cheeks as she cleaned him up. He'd killed his brother and she knew that in a way he'd done it to protect her.

When she had worked her way back around to his front, she used a clean patch of his shirt to tend to the scratch across his cheek.

She frowned when the sun disappeared and then hunched her shoulders up when rain began to pour down, warm against her skin. She looked at Erik, straight into his eyes.

"Erik?" she said, leading him back towards the house at a slow pace.

"Yes?"

She stopped and looked at him again. They were standing at the entrance to the maze, rain soaking them through. It was still warm out, but she heard thunder in the distance.

"I'll do it," she said.

He just stared at her, disbelief visible in his eyes.

"I think I'm ready. Today made me realise that I can't lose you."

"Kim," he said and cupped her cheek. "I can't."

She frowned again. "What do you mean?"

"You're not ready and I can't, not with the injuries. But I'm not going anywhere, Kim. I love you." He smiled and her frown melted away.

He was right. She wasn't ready really. The events of today had panicked her and forced her to make a decision, but she still thought it was the right one.

"I love you." She held his gaze and stroked his cheek, hoping he could see down into her soul the way she felt she could see into his.

She blinked through the rain as it trickled down her face. It was washing all the blood from Erik's body. She slipped his shirt onto him, protecting his wounds until she could get him into the house.

His house.

She looked at it and then back at him.

She wanted to be his too, just like Alistair had said she was.

"When?" she said.

He looked confused.

"When will I be in heat again?" She stepped up to him, drawing the shirt closed over his chest.

"A year, maybe two. Who knows? Whenever the dreams begin again. Until then, you'll have to settle for the reality."

She wrapped her arms about his neck as he kissed her, falling into his embrace and losing herself in the way he made her feel—happy, loved, and safe. It was a passionate kiss that stirred the fire inside of her just like she knew it always would. She'd never stop loving him. Never. It would always be like this—consuming and intense. She moaned against his mouth, tackling his tongue with her own and feeling the rain running down her back. A smile broke onto her lips as he kissed down

her chest and she held him there, clinging to him as she threw her head back and surrendered to their heat.

Thunder rolled overhead and the rain came down harder, but she didn't care.

Erik shifted her in his arms, wrapping her up in them and holding her tight. She giggled and kissed him, pouring out her feelings so he knew how much she loved him and hoping that he wasn't hurting himself too much.

He'd once told her that the best was yet to come and what they'd shared were only dreams. While those fantasies had been powerful, it had been the reality that had made her fall in love with him.

It was that love that made her want to be with him always, to surrender her normal life and become like him. It was only a matter of time before she was in heat again and when she was, she was going through with the change so this new dream of theirs would be complete.

For now, they had one half of their dream—they had each other.

But soon, they'd have the other half.

They'd have forever.

The End

About the Author:

Felicity Heaton is a great believer in love at first sight and the romantic ideal. Having grown up reading extensively, she developed a deep love of classical literature, ranking Jane Eyre, North & South, and Persuasion amongst her all time favourite reads. The most romantic moment of her life was when her husband got down on bended knee on the steps of Sacré Coeur, Paris, at night in front of several hundred spectators and proposed. She was too drunk on love, and subsequently champagne, to care about the audience. All she could see was the man that she loved. A writer of emotion and life, she always strives to touch a chord of familiarity in her readers and give them characters they can love and a read to remember.

To see her other novels, visit:

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Other paranormal romance novels by Felicity Heaton, written as F E Heaton:

Prophecy: Child of Light [book 1]

A girl unlike any other girl, a vampire unlike any other vampire, Prophecy lives life in the dark until the night she breaks the rules. Leaving the family mansion to hunt for the first time, she encounters Valentine, a vampire from her family's enemy and a man who will change her life forever.

Suddenly at the centre of a prophecy, she is kidnapped by Valentine, the man who should have been her executioner, and forced to run with him in order to save herself. Required to work together, the tension between them builds as a dark evil threatens to destroy the world, their families and the Law Keepers attempt hunt them down, and Prophecy discovers that her feelings for Valentine control her new found power.

When the truth about her is revealed, will Prophecy be strong enough? Will they discover a way to save the world from Hell? And will they finally see past the hatred bred into them by their families and surrender to their love?

The first of the Vampires Realm novels being written by five star author F E Heaton, *Prophecy: Child of Light*, is part one in an epic tale of love and war that is sure to capture your heart and leave you craving more.

Prophecy: Caelestis & Aureora [book 2]

The final battle draws closer. Prophecy's world becomes darker and more dangerous, pushing her to the limit and testing her strength and her heart, almost breaking her. Old friends turn their backs, leaving her to fight with the help of an unlikely ally and forcing her to call on the devastatingly seductive and powerful Lord Hyperion for assistance.

Struggling to rescue Valentine from the malicious hands of her blood brother, Arkalus and the lord of Aureora, Kalinor, Prophecy discovers just how powerful she is and how far people will go to stop her from fulfilling her destiny. Lives are lost, battles are won, and the scroll foretelling the prophecy is finally completed, but nothing can prepare them for what lies ahead.

When her visions show her the path that must be taken, will Prophecy be able to do what is necessary? Are Prophecy and Valentine ready to command the power they'd never thought would be theirs? And are they strong enough to fight the evil of their true enemy?

Following on from *Prophecy: Child of Light*, the tension rises and love grows in *Prophecy: Caelestis & Aureora*, a thrilling second part to this story that draws you into a dark, dangerous world of vampires, magic and the war to end all wars.

Prophecy: Dark Moon Rising [book 3]

An enemy with unimaginable power and bloodlines with centuries of hatred bred into them, two things that threaten to tear Prophecy and Valentine apart as they fight for their lives and their future together. Their vain attempt to join their houses into one army drains the last of their strength, leaving them more vulnerable than

they've ever been. The tension escalates between the bloodlines, and, more dangerously, between Valentine, Prophecy and Venturi.

As everything crumbles around them, defeat seems inevitable. In one decisive move, their enemy turns the tables against them, taking what is most important to Prophecy and leaving her to fear that the terrifying visions she's been having are coming true. An enemy becomes a friend, guiding her in her time of need, and a friend becomes an enemy. Death, destruction and danger surround her, but the help of an old ally brings her the army she needs and the dark moon brings her the power to fight the legions of Hell.

When the time comes, will Prophecy be able to do what's necessary or will the sacrifice she must make be too painful to go through with? Does she have the strength to stop Hell from being unleashed into the world and save the ones she loves at the same time?

The dramatic conclusion to the *Prophecy* story, *Prophecy: Dark Moon Rising* is a gripping tale of love and war that will take hold of you, set your heart racing and not let you go until the very last page.

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