



In His Protective Custody

Brenda Williamson

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Email:
raven@LSbooks.com

Editor
Ansley Velarde

Cover Artist
April Martinez

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Chapter One

Lorelei dropped her head back at the exhilarant rush of adrenaline searing the inside of her veins as she played with the vibrator between her legs. Each plunge jerked her in the swivel chair at her desk. She slid down, letting her hips pivot her lower half upward, allowing her to get the vibrator in the full nine inches.

She whimpered as the climax intensified, peaked and culminated.

For a few minutes, she laid slumped in the chair with her panties ringing her ankle. She stared at the papers ready to fall off the edge of her desk. Scooting back into the leather seat, she pushed the stack back. The note clipped to the front of a file folder caught her attention and she picked it up. She didn't even recognize her sloppy handwriting anymore.

Smart, sophisticated and sassy, Lorelei Blackwell eyed the other documents lying on her cluttered desk and wondered when her life had dulled. While she loved her job as an assistant district attorney, she blamed it for her lack of social relaxation. It seemed a bad day when a girl had to imagine a lover and provide her own relief to sexual frustration.

The slip of paper in her hand fluttered to the desk when someone knocked on her office door.

"Hello, Lorelei." Her boss poked his head into the room.

"Charles, what a surprise."

Nervously, Lorelei sat behind her desk with a sheen of perspiration on her face and her red panties still dangling from her shoe. The things she did alone in her office were shamefully self-indulgent, and private.

She slid that foot farther under the desk.

"Can you come to my office for a few minutes? There's something I want to discuss with you."

With her current case lagging because of the lack of evidence, Lorelei didn't need another distraction to keep her from figuring out a new angle. But what could she do, her boss' position granted him the privilege of interrupting her.

"Sure, give me a few minutes."

He nodded and disappeared from her doorway.

She glanced around the small, square space she called an office. It had very little room for standing—no windows, no colors and very little furniture. Nothing to offer a person an open invitation for socializing since filing cabinets and boxes packed every nook. When she took meetings with victims, she used one of the conference rooms upstairs, out of the basement.

"Mr. Vaughn came to our little hole down here?" Mary strolled in carrying the file Lorelei requested.

"Surprises cease to amaze me nowadays." She took the folder and thumbed through the sheaf of papers.

"I know what you mean. Last week I thought I lost my wallet and luckily the janitor found it in the trash can. I must have knocked it off my desk."

Lorelei glanced up from the documents she scanned. "What are you talking about?"

"Surprises." Mary laughed. "It didn't astonish me at all that he found it. That man is

very thorough and it's not the first time I lost something that way."

Lorelei shook her head, finding Mary's babbling all too confusing to figure out.

"This won't help." Lorelei frowned, handing the case file back to Mary. "It's too incomplete. I need information from a litigation that ended successfully."

Lorelei shuffled the scattered mess of papers together on her desk. She tucked them into a worn blue folder. For a legal action, the more dog-eared, finger-smudged and torn the covering, the older the case. "File all of these." She scooped up a stack from the desk.

"What do you think he wants?" Mary whispered, as if they weren't alone.

"I don't know."

"I can't remember the last time he came down here."

"That's because he hasn't been down here before."

"Maybe you're finally getting the bigger office," Mary wistfully sighed. "Oh, how I long to have windows."

Lorelei smiled. "Some sunshine would be nice. It might make these bleak, criminal-laden days appear hopeful for our side."

"Hopeful! Now there's a word that is overused," Mary scoffed. "The day we get through an hour without any violence in the Miami streets will be the day we're all in heaven and the villains are in hell."

"Still, we have to be hopeful, if for no other reason than to feel a little bit safe in life."

Lorelei watched Mary cram the blue folder in the filing cabinet, while holding the others under her arm to return upstairs.

"Well, the only way I'd feel one hundred percent protected in this city is if I had a bodyguard or a special agent to keep a lookout for the bad guys."

Lorelei stood. She glanced down, remembering the panties ringing her leg like an ankle bracelet.

"You better get going," Mary coaxed. "Perhaps you're getting a commendation or promotion."

"I can't get any higher up the ladder unless I kick Charles Vaughn out of his office and take over as District Attorney."

"You go, girl." Mary leaned on the doorjamb without any clear intention of leaving. "It's about time this city had a lady D.A."

Lorelei kicked off the panties and left them under her desk. "Get those files back upstairs right away." She passed Mary and left the office, anxious to find out just why Charles had come to her as opposed to phoning.

Lorelei hurried her pace. She walked along the hall to the stairs. Her shoes clicking rhythmically on the terrazzo floor sounded different from the ping her heels made on the white marble steps. Even the lobby had marble and the taps reverberated with a tune of success on the upper floors.

She stopped at Charles' office door and knocked firmly on the thick glass. Her gaze flitted over the impressive words, *District Attorney*, etched in a fine script with his name below, stenciled in white.

"Come in," Charles answered.

The room had two windows. The brightness made Lorelei squint. Mary was right. They needed a room with a window. Charles' space clearly defined the perks of the job.

"Sit." He motioned to a brown, tufted leather chair.

Lorelei tucked her tight, navy blue skirt under her bottom and dropped onto the seat. "If this is about the Barnes case, I still think we might be able to get the judge to allow the journal into evidence. I'm not going to give up without trying everything."

"Yes, I know." He nodded with an uninterested bob of his head. "That's not what I wanted to talk to you about. Your gung-ho is what I need for another, more serious matter."

His seemingly reluctant expression caught her attention immediately. Lorelei scooted to the edge of her seat.

"It's a very delicate matter and something I didn't want to discuss on the phone."

She tried to stay dignified, instead of drooling like a dog over a juicy t-bone steak that just landed in her path. Prepared to take on anything, she waited. Anytime he asked specifically for her to take a case, goose bumps tickled her arms while she experienced an excited pride.

"A man was arrested for murdering his girlfriend. Evidence is there, but we have a problem with how it was obtained. To make matters worse, there's another ongoing investigation overlapping with a different agency." He sat back in his chair. "It would seem our suspect, Victor Bennington, is under investigation by the ATF. That means we'll take a lot of flack about our interference."

"And just what is their problem with *our* Mr. Bennington?" Lorelei crossed her legs and eased back in the chair, ready to hear more.

"They won't say." He shook his head. "You know how other agencies like to keep all information in-house."

"What do you mean they won't say? How ridiculous. He either deals in bootleg alcohol, tobacco or he's a gun dealer. Do they want us to pick which one like a pea under a walnut shell?"

"I don't know, but I have a witness. He may be the link we need to get the judge to accept the other evidence." He lifted a folder and she rose to take it. "You have until Monday morning to get a better case together. They were going to release Bennington, however we got him under some ... ah ... misplaced files until then."

"Who's the witness?" She sat back down.

She smoothed her fingers over the thin, red cardstock paper, nearly worn through in spots. A new case came with a new folder. What she held had seen better days.

"That's the tricky part, and it's why I wanted you on this case. I need discretion—no leaks—and above all I want someone sharp."

Lorelei shifted, slightly uncomfortable by the compliment. She often felt men gave them to gain ground with her. After taking a few seconds to settle into the idea he really did think she could hold her own, she smiled.

"Who's the witness?"

"He's an undercover ATF agent."

"What has his agency said about this?"

"I don't think he's told them his plans. Seems he's a man with a conscience. He came straight to us and offered a tape recording."

"This Bennington is dangerous, isn't he?"

"You can refuse the case."

Refuse had no meaning in her vocabulary, except where dates were concerned. She spent many Saturday nights sitting home with take-out food menus, a bad movie, and her

folders from work.

"Now why would I want to refuse something this interesting?" She smiled.

"If I thought you would, I wouldn't have come to you in the first place." He fiddled with the tape dispenser on his desk as if he weren't telling her everything.

"You said he offered a tape recording, but what about testifying?"

Charles shook his head. "He's a bit iffy on the testifying part."

That was the dirt he waited to give her.

"We need him to testify." She glanced at the inside of the file.

"He says he can't. You know how closed-mouthed other agencies are."

"Won't it be more like it. I've met some of those ATF boys and they all had egos like they were God almighty himself." She gave pause and read a gruesome bit about Victor Bennington's murders. "But the ATF agent, he called us, right? You said you thought he had a conscience."

Charles nodded.

"Then I'll work on that bad, bad trait I'm sure his superiors aren't overly thrilled about." She grinned.

"You get full cooperation from him and this indictment will be a breeze."

"Well it most certainly should make things easier for the judge to see our position. We go to trial with an impeccable witness such as an ATF agent and we'll have it in the bag."

"It'll only work if you get him to that witness stand." Charles leaned forward placing his elbows on the desk. "He says it would jeopardize their investigation and hoped we could use only the tape. That's why I need you, Lorelei. If anyone can convince a witness to testify, it's you."

Her cheeks heated with another blush of pride to have her skills voiced by her boss. Offhanded compliments were nothing compared to his reason for trusting her to get the job done.

"We can't just use the tape. We have to show how we came into possession of such a thing and if it were obtained through legal means. The witness would have to verify this information personally and when I get through talking to him, I'll have him begging to spill his guts."

"Well, Lorelei, that is your job. The ATF agent's name is Phillip Reynolds. I've talked to him and I can't seem to get anywhere. It's your case, so I'll leave it up to you to convince him."

"You're not using me because I'm a woman, are you, Charles?"

"Just keep your feminist panties in place, Ms. Blackwell."

Lorelei bit the inside of her lip at the reference to her panties. The red silky pair she wore to work lay on the floor in her office. She made a mental note to remember to pick them up. If not, the night cleaning crew would learn a little more information about her than she wanted them to know.

"Reynolds is married with three boys. He goes to church on Sundays, coaches little league for his oldest son's team and is a model citizen. I doubt he's interested in checking out your legs." He cocked his head and gave a look for himself.

Lorelei pursed her lips. "All right, just as long we're clear on that."

"Now when did I ever ask you to take a case because you're an attractive woman?"

"Oh, you don't fool me. I know you have." She shook the folder at him. "You're a

man and if I didn't like you so much, I would have reported you a long time ago for sexual harassment."

"Well, Lorelei, whatever works, huh?" His teasing smile coaxed one from her.

"I suppose." She stood and flipped open the folder again to look at a rap sheet riddled with arrests and no convictions.

At the door, she turned and looked at Charles. She tugged up the edge of her skirt. "What do you think, Charles, another couple inches for Mr. Reynolds?"

She left to the sound of him chuckling over her joke. While she had no intentions of trying to sway a witness by showing him her legs, if he glanced, she'd not hide the weapon at her disposal.

Lorelei carried the information to her office. Surprisingly, Mary returned before her and sat typing away on the keyboard in front her computer.

"Mary, I want no interruptions for the next half hour."

"Sure thing, but aren't you going to tell me what Mr. Vaughn wanted?"

"It's nothing, just a case he thought I would handle best."

"Oh pooh, I guess I really didn't need that window after all. I'd just get distracted," she sighed.

"I need an appointment with Phillip Reynolds." Lorelei read off the phone number on the file. "Get him on the line for me."

She closed her office door, went straight for her desk and retrieved her panties from the floor. Opening her purse, she deposited them inside just as Mary opened the door.

"I have Mr. Reynolds on line two." She gave her a curious look. "ATF, huh, are you taking my advice and getting a Special Agent to protect you?"

"He's business."

"Too bad, he sounds cute."

Lorelei reached for the phone on her desk and waved Mary away.

"Hello Agent Reynolds. This is Lorelei Blackwell. I'm from the District Attorney's office and I'm calling regarding Victor Bennington."

"Come by my office, three this afternoon and don't be late." He hung up before she got another word out.

"Well, he obviously knows who I am and what I want." She put the receiver back in its cradle.

Next on her agenda was to have a one on one with their killer, Mr. Victor Bennington. She made the arrangement through his lawyer. At one o'clock, she waited in the small visitor's room of the city jail. The place badly needed a paint job to cover over the filth of the walls. She tried to imagine how graffiti managed to appear on the old painted block. Continuing down one corridor after another, she examined the traces of coffee, food and maybe even blood interwoven with the scribbling. Prisoners allowed to roam freely concerned her each time she visited the place.

"Good morning, Ms. Blackwell." The familiar guard smiled through the mesh security door.

"It's afternoon, Bill." She took the clipboard to sign in.

"Can't tell that in the basement, there aren't any windows. Could be night for all I know." He unlocked another door.

"I know just what you mean." She stepped through the opening and listened to the key turn in the lock behind her. Bill took a stance at the exit and it made her think of

Mary's sudden obsession with bodyguards.

"Mr. Thomas, I presume." She extended her arm, offering her hand to the man alongside the table.

"Yes, and this is my client, Victor Bennington."

She gave a nod to the man.

Brazenly, Bennington studied the length of her.

"Nice stems," he smirked. "I bet your man loves them wrapped around him while he's poking it to you."

"Mr. Thomas, if your client doesn't wish to have a conversation about his predicament, I can leave this until another time," she commented, not batting an eye at Bennington's crude behavior. It wouldn't be the first time a criminal made sexual wisecracks.

"Victor is willing to cooperate, Ms. Blackwell."

Lorelei pulled out a chair and sat down. She hated talking to the scum of the earth. Somehow, it made her feel dirty being near Bennington. Unfortunately, it came with the job.

Chapter Two

Outside the door to his partner's office, Rafe took a deep breath. The very thought of either of them being seen speaking to anyone outside the agency could be bad news. To have an ADA wishing to compromise everything they had worked toward unnerved him.

He tapped once and opened the door far enough to slip in, as if someone saw through walls. He didn't want a single witness to the meeting. His plan was to talk Phillip out of the stupid idea of becoming a witness for the prosecution. He'd use whatever methods possible to intimidate whoever the District Attorney's office sent over to woo Phillip. There wasn't a man around he couldn't back down with a little imposing stance and a hard glare.

The ATF could handle Bennington.

All Rafe had left to remember was how to handle himself as his mouth hung partly open. Phillip neglected to tell him the ADA was a woman. Before a word fell from his lips, he rethought his plan. While he might be able to scare off a woman, for the life of him he couldn't remember anything he wanted to say as he stared at the gorgeous lady sitting in Phillip's office.

"ADA Blackwell, this is my partner, Agent Rafe Salazar," Phillip introduced.

"Miss Blackwell." He folded his arms over his chest, attempting to gain his edge back.

The strange need not to touch her seemed a mutual decision. He didn't offer his hand and neither did she.

"I prefer Ms.," she replied curtly.

Her hostile tone pushed him deeper into an offensive position. His gaze stayed locked to hers in a showdown, but his usually calm pulse picked up speed—thumping, bumping and drumming against his ribs.

Her perfume assailed his nose and he didn't like the distraction. For a diversion, he blurted out the first thing that came to mind. "You're staring, Ms. Blackwell, and I find it rude."

Her expression never wavered. The beautiful hazel eyes twinkled with humor and he couldn't let it go. Her persistent stare rattled him.

"I'm aware I have a scar on my face, but I'd prefer you didn't gawk like I'm a circus freak."

Her jaw tightened. Finally, the reaction he wanted. Anything to put her off-guard would work in his favor. The gleam turned dark. Her gaze narrowed and he prepared for a shrill scream the way women liked to voice their opinions.

"I apologize." Her lashes lowered with a demure quietness.

Rafe gritted his teeth. She didn't respond the way he expected. Her downward glance even managed to make him feel guilty for his verbal attack. ADA Blackwell got the better of him and he didn't like it.

"You should be." He knew how to push emotional buttons in people and her reserve challenged him.

"Well, I can see now, how utterly pointless it would be to compliment you on your beautiful blue eyes. Arrogant men rarely appreciate the vanity they flaunt." She turned

away and resumed her seated position in the chair across from Phillip.

Rafe felt like an idiot. She won, but he couldn't let it end there.

"My eyes?" he questioned, almost knowingly digging a deeper hole to crawl into when all was said.

"Yes. It's a shame I can't get that color in contact lenses. Women would kill to have the color you were born with, but then I suppose a woman having the pleasure to look at you would find herself lucky. That is of course, should you not speak and ruin the tranquility."

She crossed her legs and his gaze drifted down to watch her skirt ride high on her thighs.

He practically choked on his next words. "I'm sorry. Most people don't realize when they're staring."

He couldn't tell if she had lied or not about not looking at the scar. It wasn't as if it could be hidden from view the way it skittered over his brow, across his eye and landed on his cheek.

"I'm sorry you feel you must mention it. I hadn't thought much of it until you brought it up. I guess I'm not shallow in that sense, Agent Salazar."

She looked away and he forced himself to stop staring beyond the few buttons open on her blouse where he saw inside her blouse. When contrasted with the tan of her breasts, the white, lace-edged bra had an amazing brilliance. Her skin glistened with a velvety sheen of softness he wondered about touching. Easily he could slip his finger into her cleavage and wipe the dampness her heavy breasts created, sandwiched together in the harness of lace.

Rafe jumped when her voice broke the momentary silence.

"So, Agent Reynolds," she spoke to Phillip. "What is it I need do to get you to testify?"

Rafe shifted from one foot to the other when she glanced up at him. The drop of her gaze went slowly over the front of him. With her seated, he wondered if she noted his arousal. Hard as granite, his cock fought the cloth of his trousers in an attempt to get free.

"I assume it's all right we talk about this in front of your partner." She turned back to Phillip.

"Yes, he's aware of what I'm doing."

Phillip leaned forward in his chair. It creaked with the rusty age and lack of use. The two of them hardly spent more than an hour a day in their offices, if even that much. Phillip pushed his fingers into the short curly light brown hair on top his head. Rafe saw it as indecision, giving him hope he could change his partner's mind.

"I don't think he should have given you the tape, Ms. Blackwell. I definitely don't think he should be a witness." Rafe placed his hands on his hips trying to look forceful. "It messes up our investigation as well as puts us personally at risk."

"I hardly think because you're partners, you need concern yourself with what Agent Reynolds does on his own. What danger can there be, other than what you're investigating Bennington for?"

"Gunrunners don't get the death penalty, murderers do, Ms. Blackwell." His erection painfully jolted at the way Lorelei's breasts heaved with her deep inhalation.

"This isn't a game, Agent Salazar." She stood and it brought her too close to him.

"No?" He moved back from her tempting mouth. "Everything is like a game and if

he thinks his life is threatened, he may be a little more ruthless in his endeavors at winning.”

“Look you two, this is my choice.” Phillip rose from his chair and stepped around to the side of the desk with them.

“Right now, we work as a group in an effort to put Bennington behind bars.” Rafe put a hand on Phillip’s shoulder. “You go up against him in court, it gets personal, real personal and it could get ugly.”

“You’re not in this business to see the bad guys get away and neither am I.” Lorelei followed his retreat. “Victor Bennington killed his girlfriend and he should be executed.”

“We were at fault for that.” Phillip’s sad tone made Rafe uneasy.

“No we’re not and you can’t think getting yourself killed will fix how you feel.”

“That girl is dead because of us and I’d rather Bennington go to jail because of that crime, instead of the one selling assault weapons.” Phillip pushed him aside. “Ms. Blackwell, I’ll testify. Angela Beaumont was killed because we convinced her to supply us information about Bennington. I wanted her to come under the witness protection program. She convinced me if she stayed with Bennington, she’d be of bigger help. Unfortunately, I agreed. I wish I hadn’t, but as you said, this is our job.”

“We made that decision jointly, Phillip.” Rafe perched himself on the corner of the desk, aggravated by the whole mess and the fact he had the hots for Lorelei.

“Nevertheless, she’s dead and he should be,” Phillip replied.

“Angela was supposed to let us know if there was a moment she didn’t feel safe. We can’t be responsible for the woman’s death.”

“Regardless of how many agents knew what went on, I still feel at fault. I’ll keep you out of this, Rafe.” Phillip reached over the desk to shake Lorelei’s hand. “Ms. Blackwell, tell me when and how you want to go over this tape.”

“We can do it now,” she said eagerly.

Of course, she would be impatient to rope Phillip into a complete commitment. Rafe stood to protest, but Phillip gave him room to breathe.

“I have a meeting I have to go to.” Phillip looked at a desk calendar. “How about we get together somewhere about nine tonight? Do you know a bar on Main called Dorio’s?”

“Yes.” She jotted down a notation in the hand sized notepad she held.

“You shouldn’t write that down,” Rafe warned.

“Why? Do you think within the next six hours I might lose this information and somehow it’ll get into the wrong hands?” She wiggled her fingers at him. “Ooooo, how dangerous.”

“You’re not very serious where your life is concerned are you, *MS*. Blackwell?” He hated when women were condescending.

“I’m serious where work is concerned, Agent Salazar. I think your attitude about everything is too severe. You should ease up a little on the steroids. I hear they kill brain cells.” She ripped the page from her notebook and thrust it in his hand as she turned her attention to Phillip. “I’ll see you at nine, Agent Reynolds, and if we’re going to get anywhere, I suggest leaving the pit bull behind.”

She pushed past Rafe and exited the room. He followed her out the door. The sway of her hips gave his stiff erection more reason to fight the inside of his trousers. He struggled against the temptation to say anything to her. When parts of his body reacted with disregard to common sense, he knew he was better off remaining silent.

Rafe let out a slow seething breath once Lorelei Blackwell rounded the corner and disappeared from view. He backed into the office while rubbing the ache pushing irritably against the zipper of his pants.

"You can't get a date with her like that." Phillip laughed, and sat down shaking his head.

"I think you're crazy for doing this." Rafe shut the door and glanced at the note Lorelei handed him.

"Forget about why I'm doing this. I've already made the decision to go through with it."

Rafe swore under his breath. The woman knew how to push his buttons and he stared at the memo, irritated she didn't do all the normal feminine things like whine and cry. She got the better of him and she did it on purpose.

"You've been studying that slip of paper for a lot longer than you need." Phillip nudged him. "Is it her phone number?"

"No." He shoved it in his pocket. "I don't think Ms. Blackwell is interested in men."

"You think she's gay?" Phillip's hysterical laughter should have softened the tension he felt, but it just irritated him more.

"The sparks between you and that woman ignited faster than an arsonist can set a fire. You need to stroke the heat, Rafe. Stroke it nice and gentle. Not douse it with cold water. Women respond better to honey, not vinegar."

"I think you're wrong. She just had a way about her that ... well, she's too confident."

"You mean she's a determined lady and goes after what she wants. What's wrong Rafe, a little too independent for your liking?"

"No, of course not, I like smart, well-spoken ladies." He felt trapped by a constant image of her sitting in the chair looking up at him.

Her mouth begged to be kissed and he dampened all over thinking about the things she could do with her perfectly parted lips. He ran his tongue over his lips thinking how sweet she'd taste all over.

"She's quite a looker," Phillip continued, "I may be married, but I ain't blind. Legs from here to there and she knows how to show them off. I also believe she's quite taken with you." He gave a short snort. "That is until you told her to stop gawking. Real smooth, Rafe. You're going to have to get over the fact some people see that scar and others look past it."

"My hang-up. I guess I'll always be sensitive when it comes to people staring at me longer than I think they should."

"You were dead wrong about Ms. Blackwell. I don't think she could have thought up that remark about your eyes that fast if it weren't true." Phillip came close. "You do have some pretty baby blues."

They both laughed and headed out for their meeting. Rafe's hand dug into his pocket and touched the piece of crumpled paper. Lorelei Blackwell had beauty, poise and a special realness he appreciated more in the aftermath of their conversation.

He couldn't keep judging women by one from the past. Nearly six months had passed since his injury and the breakup with a girlfriend of two years. He hadn't thought about dating until the attractiveness of Lorelei gave him a reason to consider the idea.

"Excuse me a minute." Rafe stopped at the men's room door in the hallway. "Go on

ahead and I'll catch up."

He ducked into the small porcelain and tile room. The emptiness appealed to his shaking limbs. He moved into a small stall just in case someone came along, and then he shakily latched the gray steel door.

Carefully unzipping his fly, he worked his erect cock through the gap in his white briefs. He fisted the throbbing shaft and aimed it at the toilet.

Tense with a hard on, he couldn't pee.

"Yeah, she was pretty damn hot, wasn't she, bad boy?" He hadn't felt this aroused by looking at a woman in a long time.

Leaning on the door, he tipped his head back and pumped his hand over the pulsating veins with a new urgency. His mind wrapped around ADA Blackwell. Her lips excited him the most.

Rafe imagined her, that picture of her sitting in the chair gazing up at him. The one involuntary lick of her tongue jerked his hips to force his cock harder into his tunneled fingers—into her mouth.

The capricious fantasy drew his mind farther from the reality of standing in a bathroom stall.

Lorelei sat in a tufted chair and licked her lips again. Her mouth formed an exquisite 'O' as if she were exclaiming excitement at the idea of having his cock wedged in her throat. Her fingers were cool at first when she pumped the taut skin over his shaft. They warmed with the friction and her delicate hand held tighter.

Her tongue flicked over the tip. She kissed the side and swirled the end. Under the head, she hit a dent with an extra wiggle. His whole body jerked in response. It would be like her to know the intelligent fundamentals of giving a blowjob. She had the personality of a well-schooled woman and her persistent tongue, tickling under the rim of his mushroom-capped cock, created tremors he'd never had before.

She moaned and the head of his cock was sucked into her mouth. His veins expanded. Fluid rushed and worked toward the head. She took his erection deeper into her mouth, further into her throat, and swallowed.

"Damn." Rafe opened his eyes, stepped forward in the stall, and put a hand on the wall behind the toilet. He leaned in and locked his jaw to restrain the roar building in his chest.

His sperm jettisoned in spurts.

"Rafe?" Phillip's voice threw him back against the stall door.

"Yeah?" he answered with a gravelly exhaustion.

"Are you coming?"

"Yeah." He reached for the toilet paper.

Cleaning off, he tucked himself back into the trousers and pulled up the zipper. With the flick of the toilet bowl handle, he watched the remnants of his relief head for the bowels of the sewer.

He leaned his sweaty forehead on the cool metal stall door. His heart pounded and Lorelei's face floated into his thoughts. The next time he met up with her, he'd be the one to upset her day.

Chapter Three

The judge entered the courtroom. Voices hushed and Lorelei stood, nervous and distracted by thoughts of Agent Salazar. His face stuck in her head and his sensitivity lodged in her heart. Handsome, strong-minded and mentally hurt, appeared to be a big turn-on for her. She didn't mean to look at his scar, but he had to know it wouldn't be overlooked. It upset her a great deal when he expressed his pain with anger. Something was rotten in the world to have a beautiful man marred by a bad event.

Lorelei shuffled through the papers on the table in front of her and tried to get her mind around the case. If things didn't go right, she didn't know where to turn next. She glanced at Victor Bennington and his smug expression. His stately appearance with a three thousand dollar suit did not impress her. What did was how quickly his day in court moved from the Monday leeway to that very afternoon. It put her in a tight spot and Mr. Thomas' shrewdness should be commended when it came to handling his client. Nevertheless, she couldn't let them see how the events of her day flustered her thoughts.

"Ms. Blackwell," Judge Margaret Beasley said. "Mr. Thomas has requested this hearing immediately based on facts he says have changed. He submitted an application to suppress the evidence on the basis it was illegally obtained."

"Yes, Your Honor. We have become aware of the unfortunate events concerning some of our evidence. However, we have a witness with further evidence that will meet with our needs." She crossed her fingers under the papers she held.

"Your Honor," Mr. Thomas interrupted. "You can't expect my client to stay locked up indefinitely while evidence is brought to the attention of the court, a little here and a little there. At present, they have nothing." He made a short gasped sound of disbelief. "A so-called witness indeed!"

"Excuse me." Lorelei's shoulders bunched up in frustration because she had very little to say until she spoke further with Phillip Reynolds.

Mr. Thomas paced in the center of the room. "We have no justice if a man only accused of a crime must be detained to wait for evidence to be conjured. What if tomorrow, that witness changes his mind and his evidence is found no good?"

Lorelei sighed in defeat by dramatics she couldn't match.

"The justice system gives my client guarantees against being railroaded." Mr. Thomas threw his hands up to punctuate his point.

"I do think the District Attorney's office knows their job." The judge turned her gaze to Lorelei. "However, Ms. Blackwell, Mr. Thomas has a point. Without hearing this new evidence, we cannot simply ask Mr. Bennington to be a guest of our jail for the foreseeable future. Do you have your witness here now?"

"No, your Honor."

Lorelei wanted to input the fact it was five o'clock and argue how this court appearance had been dropped into her lap a second after she walked into her office. However, she was certain the judge would not relent on her decision and she remained silent.

"Then I'm afraid you've run out of fuel, Ms. Blackwell. The charges are dropped against Victor Bennington until new evidence can be introduced." Rising from her chair,

she hit her gavel once and left the courtroom.

Lorelei stomped her foot slightly in an attempt to dispel the rise of her rage. She controlled her outright display of chagrin as Victor Bennington slid out of the courtroom, congratulating his slimy lawyer for a job well done. Back slapping, handshaking and laughter were inappropriate and she fumed inside with exasperation.

She returned to her office and took a place on her short sofa. Shoving files aside, she propped her feet up on the arm of the loveseat and looked over the case files. Everything looked bad. The arrests, the evidence and the time delays were sloppy work comprising of too many departments with too much work. Having found nothing new to focus on, she set the file aside and closed her eyes. A short nap always helped clear her head, and for the meeting at nine with Reynolds, she'd need her concentration keen.

Her immediate thoughts went straight to Rafe Salazar. His sexy good looks added a little something to her day—a zest of excitement, leaving her tingly. As she drifted off, she imagined kissing him. How would he react if she planted her mouth right over his? No warning, no working up to it, just a great kiss on his adorably full lips.

She gave a snort of laughter, envisioning the hard-ass brute spitting on the floor.

Rafe. She fell asleep on the whisper of his name in her thoughts.

The next thing she knew, she was bolting upright on the loveseat. Disoriented by an unbelievable dream about a man she just met, Lorelei looked around the room.

With butter for legs, she got up. The clock on the wall warned she'd slept far too long. She had no time to go home and change her clothes. Smoothing out the wrinkles on her skirt, she picked up her purse and headed out to interview Phillip Reynolds. She needed him to verify the authenticity of the tape in court or no one would accept it.

* * * *

At precisely nine o'clock, Lorelei walked into Dorio's Bar. Reynolds waved to her from a corner booth. As she approached, she saw he had brought his partner and her stride slowed. In the back of her thoughts she had hoped Rafe would be there. Her contemplations of him sexually were a natural reaction to his exquisite good looks. However, her passion ran deeper when she fixated on his eyes. He made her feel he too, suffered loneliness.

Lorelei wanted to close her eyes to the image of the ATF agent stripping off all her clothes and delighting her with animal sex. She wanted to lay naked with her legs spread wide as he breathed his steadfast convictions right into her body while whipping her sensitive areas with his tongue. His blue-eyed gaze would meet hers with that hungry and dangerous stare, and she'd tremble from his stimulating perseverance.

A cooling shiver of apprehension raced a up her back when his glare met hers. Even though she was horribly excited by his presence, she reasoned he came to change his partner's mind.

Lorelei let a wistful sigh ease out of her lungs and hoped to avoid blushing each time she glanced at Rafe. His adamance that his partner not testify had merit. She couldn't fault him for wanting to protect Phillip Reynolds. On the other hand, he had to see the right in her plans.

The closer she got, Lorelei felt the chilling arousal of Agent Salazar's penetrating gaze. Her thighs dampened from lust.

"Sorry, Ms. Blackwell, but this dog has an interest in Phillip's health." Rafe pulled

out a chair for her.

“Oh? I was under the impression Agent Reynolds was already married?” She suddenly thought of how invigorating it would be to have angry wild sex with Rafe—maybe a quickie in the restroom.

His jaw tensed.

She watched him with caution. Was it too much or not enough mockery? Agent Salazar had a stereotypical swagger that exuded confidence. The scar on his face and his deep blue eyes held her captivated.

“That’s enough between the two of you,” Agent Reynolds reprimanded them like children.

Lorelei didn’t care. She liked pushing the boundaries and she loved the way Rafe’s exotic features attracted her. He exuded an elegance both appealing and tempting.

“Ms. Blackwell, if we could get this over with, then I could get home to my wife and kids. As for what Rafe is trying to say, he loves me like a partner, a friend and a brother. I married his sister and he believes that makes him my bodyguard.”

Bodyguard. She recalled Mary’s remark.

“So, you’ve been cursed three times, Agent Reynolds. You have my sympathy.” She turned her glare on Rafe.

His arrogance provoked her and he crawled under her skin like a bug, unnerving her every time he commented. She’d never get what she wanted from Phillip if Rafe had his way.

“Phillip, I’ll wait outside. That way you and Ms. Blackwell can get right to the point of this meeting, and I won’t be a threat in her quest to railroad you right into an early grave.” Rafe finished his drink in one long gulp and left.

“Don’t mind him, Ms. Blackwell,” Phillip said. “He’s a bit on the overcautious side ... all the time.”

“Doesn’t he understand how important it is we convict Bennington? The man has more reason to be in prison than anyone I know.”

“Rafe’s problem is he does things by the book.”

“His book I presume. I’ve met people like him before. They have a set of rules they think everyone should follow.”

Phillip took a drink and sat his glass down on the table. “How is it you’re going to work this out?”

“Well Agent Reynolds...”

“Call me Phillip.”

“Lorelei,” she replied, knowing a first name basis would give her that edge of familiarity needed to persuade him to do everything she required.

Lorelei told him of the events earlier at the courthouse and wasn’t surprised he already knew of Bennington’s release. With the ATF’s investigation, they’d be well aware of all events concerning Bennington’s every move. She put the headphones on and listened to the tape, asking pertinent questions about Phillip’s recollections as to the time, the day and everything that might be brought up in court. When they were through, she looked at her watch and couldn’t believe they’d been there a whole hour.

“Agent Salazar will no doubt have something to say of his long wait,” she commented as they emerged from the bar.

“Don’t hold it against him, Lorelei. Rafe likes you.”

"Did he say that?" She stole a glance at Rafe leaning on the brick wall of the building. He appeared exceptionally cute with his pout.

"No, sorry, I can never get him to admit anything, but I know him. However, I can say this. He's the meanest with the people he likes." He grinned walking up to Rafe. "Right, Rafe?"

"You took long enough. Carolena isn't going to be happy about this." Rafe's disgruntled gaze went to Phillip as he ignored the joke.

"See," Phillip repeated to Lorelei. "Mean as a hornet. Rafe, say goodnight and I'll go start the car. Goodnight, Lorelei."

"Goodnight, Phillip."

When she turned to Rafe, her first thought was how did she say, *come home with me*, or maybe, *you can do me in the alley*.

"Here's your shopping list." He held the wrinkled piece of paper out to her. "I wouldn't want you to blame me for forgetting your milk."

"Why Agent Salazar, thank..." A rapid succession of gunshots cut off her sentence.

In one swift movement, Rafe threw her to the ground and dropped his hard lean body over her. If they were falling into a bed, she'd have been ecstatic, but the rough sidewalk pained her.

She jerked against him, startled by the chips of brick raining down from the wall Rafe recently leaned on while waiting for her and Phillip.

"Stay down." His voice, harsh and sweet, heated her ear.

He drew her head further under his jaw. She closed her eyes and buried her face against his clean-shaven neck. The soft skin had a nice fragrance of him and his cologne. The male scent lured her to burrow tighter.

Lorelei's misplaced thoughts roamed from the danger of the gunshots. Maybe shock forced her mind to deviate from reality as Rafe's body nestled against hers. Yet as his steely frame safely cloaked her, she remained reassured of safety by the position.

"Are you all right?" He lifted his head and his fingers swept over her cheek.

She blinked in response to his touch. The caress drew her thoughts back to kissing him.

She nodded and an odd whimper from her brought his thumb to her lips. He brushed them gently and she closed her eyes, inviting him to kiss her. The moment he rose and relieved her of his comforting weight, the short-lived euphoria dissipated. The squeal of tires and the screams of people were surreal moments of confusion. They awoke her to the danger.

"Are you sure you're all right?" Rafe took her hands and pulled her up.

"I think so." Her dry throat croaked the reply.

His one hand slid over her hair pushing it back out of her face. The other hand cupped her cheek as his gaze flitted about for his own inspection. Her insides held onto the mangled mess of nerves. His heroism captured her beyond the normal lusting. Rafe Salazar became more of a man in that very moment, than she could ever imagine any man.

She swallowed down the dryness and blinked again, focusing on the events. Lifting a hand, she pushed him away.

"Are you sure you weren't hit by a bullet?" He repeated the question. "Shock can stun a person not to notice something like that right away."

He held her face and his thumb caressed circles over her cheek.

Caught in a time warp, Lorelei knew the severity of what happened around them and ignored it. Rafe's hand slid over her head, loosening the brick dust.

"He's been shot!" someone yelled.

Lorelei stepped farther back to break from Rafe's sensitive hold. He turned his gaze toward the shout and a second later, he ran to the body lying in the street. She followed him and looked in horror at Phillip's twisted form oozing with blood.

Fully alert, Lorelei took a cell phone from her purse and quickly dialed nine-one-one with her shaky fingers.

"This is ADA Blackwell." Choked up, she coughed to clear her voice. She gave the details and hurried to kneel down with Rafe and try to help save Phillip's life.

"Come on, Phillip," Rafe urged. "Carolena won't be happy if you go and die on me."

Lorelei willed each breath she took to go into Phillip. The distraught strain tugging the muscles of Rafe's face into a contorted anguish bespoke the love he had for Phillip.

It was then that Rafe became more than a job to her. Humanized before her eyes, she felt things for him she shouldn't have after only two meetings. Her mind skipped like a flat rock skitters the surface of a pond—lust for the body, passion for the soul and companionship to fill the lonely minutes of her life moved to her upper thoughts. It made her wonder if love at first sight really existed.

Rafe pressed over the wound in Phillip's chest. The blood oozed profusely up between his fingers. The expelling breath Lorelei heard, sounded like Phillip's last. She bent down, listened and administered CPR. Head back, nose pinched, breathe in, take air, breathe, air, breathe, air. Press chest. One ... two ... three.

"Phillip? Come on, Phillip?" Rafe's voice shook.

Lorelei's eyes blurred with the strain of tears. Blood seemed everywhere. Her hands dripped of it, as did Rafe's. How could there be so much? Her brain froze on the lifelessness of Phillip.

She tried not to think of the tears rolling down Rafe's cheeks. It broke her heart to see him in pain. She didn't know him, and yet the empathetic strain overwhelmed her with a flood of tears streaming down her own face. Rafe's boast of keeping Phillip healthy was the honest truth. She felt doubly bad for misjudging his concern for egotism.

The approaching shrill sirens didn't slow her full attempt to keep Phillip alive, but five minutes later, the paramedics took over and after their efforts, they pronounced him dead.

Lorelei put a bloodstained hand on Rafe's arm.

"I'm sorry." She didn't know what else to say to offer her condolences.

His head raised and a shiver ran down her spine with the cold contempt aimed out from his beautiful blue eyes.

"I hope you're happy. You took one nice guy and made him a dead man. I warned you, didn't I? I told you Bennington was dangerous." He ran a bloodstained hand over his head. "Now thanks to you I have to explain to my sister and their children, why Phillip isn't coming home."

Lorelei jumped to her feet, ready to run. His words stung. They hit her hard, like a punch in the stomach. If she hadn't practiced being tougher than nails in front of men, she would have fallen apart. Instead, she lashed out, hardening herself against the silly sentimental emotions she let creep in on her better judgment.

“You sanctimonious, son-of-a-bitch! Go ahead and blame me if it makes you feel better and that’s what gets you by. But it was Phillip that came to the District Attorney’s office with this information. He wanted to do something to help and it’s my job to do it. I don’t make a habit of running witnesses off.”

“You could have just taken the tape!” Rafe growled back at her.

“I think you’re angry at yourself for not being more like him. For not having a soul and a heart that cares about anything except how it affects you. He knew what was right to do and he did it without your overbearing permission. I feel sorry that you think the law can work like some machine, a vacuum that sucks the bad guys in without the blood of an honest man or the work of a woman.”

She pivoted to leave and then wheeled around to come back at him, incapable of letting go of her anger. She poked his chest with her finger, unable to let him place blame on her as if she were a monster.

“Admit that you’re a coward and this isn’t the job for you. Everyday we get up in the morning and go to work carrying a gun. It’s another day we put our lives on the line for justice and to serve the people. All of them, not just the ones we think it will be safe for us to protect.”

Shaking, she walked to the opposite side of the street. She moved into the shadows of a doorway and cried—for Phillip, for Rafe, but mostly for herself. She’d built a whole fantasy of attraction around a man clearly not meant for her.

Lorelei remained in the darkened corner until she had her eyes dry and a little control of her emotions back in her grasp. Rafe went to his car. From the shake of his body and the slump of his shoulders, she felt his pain.

She tried to hate him, but couldn’t. He’d had his legs knocked out from under him exactly when he least expected it. Unfortunately, human frailties of fear and depression sometimes ruled impulsive reactions without care and she hoped he’d eventually lay blame on whoever murdered Phillip.

Go home. She mentally urged him.

He wouldn’t go. His frosty exterior backed him into a corner. They were alike in that respect—hiding emotions and putting up a staunch front for others.

The police arrived and Lorelei gave details of the events to the detective in charge. Afterward, she took her last glimpse of Rafe. The lack of callousness in his nature when he examined her face after the shooting, gave pause to her judgment of him. Phillip had been right about his brother-in-law. He was mean, but was it always to people he liked?

Chapter Four

Rafe watched Lorelei walk away like the tail end of a tornado. She had twisted a cyclone of anger and guilt around him and it took his breath away. He should have gone after her, made apologies, let her know he didn't blame her—not really. He promised his sister years ago he'd look out for Phillip and when Phillip wanted to turn the tape over to the District Attorney, Rafe should have been the one to take the risk. He knew the same things Phillip did and he could have agreed to testify. Phillip would have been safe and he would be the one lying in the street in a pool of blood. That would have been right. He had no wife, no kids. His death would have made a far less impact on his sister's life.

Rafe truly regretted the way all his emotions rushed out at Lorelei. His world crashed and unfortunate as it was, she got in the way of his hurt. He took a moment to let it out at his car and headed back to the police officers to deal with the situation.

He looked around for Lorelei, but she was gone. She had a strength about her that just overwhelmed his weakness right when he needed to be in control and for the second time in one day, he proved himself a complete idiot in front of her.

"Sir, we need you to move back to the sidewalk." A young, uniformed police officer told him.

Rafe took out his badge and showed the man. "He was my partner."

"Yes sir, but I need you to move back."

"Look, officer..." He leaned to read the man's name tag. "I'm a witness and it may be just my department, but generally witnesses are not ushered out of the way."

"I'm sorry sir, but those are my orders."

"And what dumb-ass gave you orders to run off your best witness?"

"That would be me," a voice said from behind him.

Rafe turned around.

"I'm Detective Patrick Morales and who might you be?" His gaze ran down the length of Rafe covered in blood.

"Agent Salazar, with the ATF." He handed the detective his badge. "The man they're taking away was my partner."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Agent Salazar. Can you tell me what it is you saw tonight? I've talked to ADA Blackwell and she said she didn't see anything. How about you?"

"I didn't see anything either. Is she all right?"

"As near as I can tell. A bit shaken, but she said none of the blood was hers. I reckon she'll be fine. The lady has a good sense of balance when it comes to the gruesome details. She's a right fine Assistant District Attorney."

Rafe's mouth had a dryness that wouldn't allow him any saliva to spit the taste of blood away. He swallowed and looked again for Lorelei, thinking she wouldn't leave, actually hoping she hadn't.

"Can you tell me what you saw or what you were doing when the shooting occurred?"

"Phillip and Ms. Blackwell came out of the bar. Phillip went across the street to the car while Ms. Blackwell and I were saying goodnight."

"Are you and she involved?"

“No, I just met her this afternoon.”

“All right, and then what happened?” He jotted something on a pad.

“I heard gunfire and dropped to the ground taking Ms. Blackwell with me.”

“I thought you just told one of my officers you were one of my best witnesses?” His brow rose. “Do you think this could be related to any case you’re working on?”

“What did Ms. Blackwell say?”

The man’s mouth cocked to the side. “Come now, Agent Salazar, you don’t expect me to help you and Ms. Blackwell hide the fact that this was an outright contracted hit. She told me I should speak to you. That in itself tells me the two of you are working on a special case together. I need names to do my job.”

“As far as I know, this was just a random drive-by shooting, Detective Morales. I have nothing in my agenda to relate the shooting to.”

“Oh, and why is it that the town’s top ADA was meeting with two ATF agents?”

“Drinks.”

“You said you just met her.”

Rafe looked at his wristwatch with a momentary hesitation due to the blood smeared on it. He couldn’t think and in his condition he shouldn’t answer questions.

“It’s after eleven o’clock, Detective. Can’t a person have a social life?”

“Social yes, only I think you and she are not as socially oriented as you might want one to believe. You’ve referred to her as Ms. Blackwell in our conversation and she called you nothing but Agent Salazar. People generally getting together for drinks usually speak of a friend using their first name.”

“Or we respectfully discuss them with someone we don’t know, using their title,” Rafe challenged. “Lorelei, Phillip and I had a drink. There, satisfied? I used her name.”

“Very well, Agent Salazar. If you should have anything further to add, please give me a call.”

Rafe nodded. He looked down at his blood-stained fingers and then he searched the area again for Lorelei. Details were scarce—facts weren’t, and he pulled his cell phone out, quickly punching in the number of his office.

“Hello, Agent Frazier,” the soft feminine voice answered.

“Diane, it’s Rafe.”

“Well, the day crew does keep night hours,” she joked.

“Diane, Phillip is dead.”

“Dead,” she repeated. “How? Where? When did this happen? Oh, Rafe, I’m so sorry.”

“I’ll give you the details later. Right now I need you to do me a favor. I can’t get in the office tonight, but I need you to get a judge out of bed.”

“Sure, Rafe, what is it you need?”

He looked down the street where his gaze caught the slender frame of Lorelei getting into a car. He opened his mouth to stop her, but he was too late. She disappeared into the vehicle and pulled away. In the end, it seemed better. He didn’t really have the nerve to face her.

“Rafe? Rafe, are you still there?” Diane’s voice chirped from the phone.

“Yeah, I’m still here.”

* * * *

The night stretched on for a long time. Rafe sat in the office and listened to silence on headphones. Against everyone's better judgment, he took over monitoring the incoming and outgoing phone surveillance calls on the Bennington estate. He had more reason than ever to catch the man responsible for Phillip's death.

He leaned back in the chair and picked apart his concern for Lorelei. Inadvertently, she stirred a hornet's nest. Her long, gorgeous legs walked her into a war with a gunrunner that killed. If Rafe didn't do something soon he would hear of her death before Bennington's next trial.

Lorelei's legs stuck in his mind. The lady had rubbed them on his as she'd laid under him on the walk. In the heat of gunfire, he got a wickedly hard erection. Actually, thinking of her made his cock ache to explore the depths of every orifice she'd let him penetrate. She had to have one sweet ass from what he saw sashay out of the office on their first meeting.

He rubbed his cock as it swelled to every detail he savored of Lorelei. Closing his eyes, he dreamed up all the wonders he'd find if given the chance to peel her clothes away and explore her smooth, silky body.

She'd like him to know every intimate feature because she was a stickler for detail. Therefore, he'd have to take his time.

The phone rang and Rafe sat up straight. He shook off his fantasy and listened into the headset he wore for the tap on Bennington's phone. He didn't want to hear another conversation between the maid and her abusive husband. Nor did he want to know the day's grocery order to the local market.

"Yeah," the voice answered, at the Bennington estate. "You're five minutes late."

Rafe didn't recognize the speaker.

"Hey, you know I got things to do," the other man replied. "So when do I get my money?"

"Just as soon as you handle one more piece of business. Bennington will pay you double for this one if it's done by tonight."

Rafe looked at his watch. Six a.m. Saturday.

"Double, huh, who's the job?"

"ADA Blackwell. He wants the bitch dead."

The phone went silent and Rafe noticed the light blink on the other line. He switched over to listen in on the call.

"Hello, Lorelei Blackwell speaking." Lorelei's sweet voice filled his ear.

"I got your number, sweetmeat. You best put your affairs in order today."

As soon as Rafe heard the threat and the click of the phone, he dialed Lorelei's number on his cell phone. On the first ring, he left the office and ran down the corridor to get to his car. Each subsequent ring, he reminded himself the killer wouldn't get to her before he did, but he wasn't going to take any chances.

* * * *

Lorelei's heart rattled at the rush of adrenaline streaming through her veins. She'd been threatened at least a dozen times a year for the past three years working in the DA's office. Those other times never gave her a fright such as this call did. Then, she hadn't been witness to someone dying beneath her hands within twenty-four hours of a threat either.

The call, too short to trace, spooked her. When the phone rang again, she jumped and tapped a hand over her thumping chest. The shrill ring persisted. She let its peel repeat four or five times before she found her courage. She snatched the receiver too fast and clumsily it fell on the table with a loud clatter.

Angry at herself for letting a bully scare her, she shouted into the phone. "If you think you can threaten me and I'll just hide, you have a surprise coming."

"Ms. Blackwell, it's Agent Salazar."

She put a hand to her mouth to hide the nervous catches in her breath. The pause allowed her time to reclaim her insane loss of control.

"Ms. Blackwell?"

"Yes ... yes I'm here, Agent Salazar, what can I do for you?" She closed her eyes, praying he didn't lay into her again about how Phillip's death was her fault. Her night was fraught with a vivid enough rehashing of the events and her role in them.

A bitter taste of humility left her upset. She pictured Rafe from the night before and it had shaken her to see him vulnerable. Her pulse pitter-pattered in her chest with the attraction firmly rooting to a vacant place in her heart.

"It's what I'm going to do for you," he replied. "The call you just got was from Bennington's estate."

"How did you know I just had a phone call?" She lowered in the chair next to the door with the realization before he said it. "You bugged my phone?" She didn't like that her privacy was as susceptible as any criminal's. Her legs wobbled and her ragged breath came even shorter. Hyperventilation seemed inevitable if she didn't calm down.

"Can we meet? Say fifteen minutes in the lobby of your apartment building?" he asked.

"How long has my phone been bugged?"

"Since about midnight. After Phillip's death I got a judge to issue a wiretap order on your phone and Bennington's estate."

"Why?"

"I heard the call to you, Ms. Blackwell. I think it would be obvious why I had surveillance set up on you since the shooting."

"You're working, after what happened?"

"Especially after what happened."

"No one would blame you for taking time off."

"I highly doubt Bennington plans on vacationing from the mess his life is in right now. Until he's in prison, I'm on duty, overtime. Besides, someone has to protect you."

Lorelei bit her bottom lip. "And no one else can do that?"

"I have a vested interest in seeing you stay alive."

"Was it Bennington that made the call?"

"No, but he's no doubt giving the orders since they used his telephone. Now meet me in your lobby in fifteen minutes. Not before."

Lorelei hung up the phone and looked at her watch. In many circumstances, fifteen minutes would be an extremely short time.

"Fifteen minutes," she muttered, and paced the room.

She checked at her watch again, tapped the glass and wondered if the battery needed to be changed. The seconds dragged around the dial. She went to the elevator at ten minutes and pushed the button. The doors slid open and she stepped back in surprise.

"You would have been early." Rafe got off the elevator in her hallway. "Which is your apartment?"

"How did you get up here?" She led him back to her door.

His hand warmly fit to the small of her back and she took her time putting the key in the lock.

"This is supposed to be a secure building," she informed him, as if he wouldn't know. "You have to be buzzed in and have a key for the elevator."

"Or meet a woman that believed my badge was real." He gently pushed her into the apartment. "One of your neighbors not only let me in, but also used her key to let me up in the elevator."

His hand moved away to close the door. The warmth left and she turned around to seek it out another way. Her head buzzed with the fact she had him in her apartment. His lack of sleep was evident in the tousled hair and sleepy blue eyes. Even with all that, he came to protect her and that made him twice as sexy.

With an inquisitive turn of his head, he examined her apartment. She looked at what he did. The pictures of her family and friends, the used furniture she found comfortable, and her bedroom door. He actually stared the longest at her bedroom door. A hot flash singed her cheeks. Way too young to experience a real change of life sensation, she went with the idea that it was sexual enthusiasm burning her insides.

"Come on." His hand glided down to the small of her back and almost to her ass.

"A little in a hurry, aren't you?"

He reached past her with a brush of his arm to the other side of her body. When he leaned forward, it put his solid chest against her back. He touched the bedroom doorknob and the heat of him, surrounded her. The masculine scent caressed her nose, clung to her lips and her tongue licked the air.

"I don't think we have to rush." Her voice dropped to a sultry tone she didn't recognize.

She held her breath with the peculiar exhilaration. She had lived in the apartment since the beginning of her job and astonishingly, in the three plus years, she'd never had a man in the bedroom. All her sexual activities took place outside the home—in motels, cars and just other locations. Once again, she felt like she led a whore's life.

"I don't think we're moving fast enough." His whole body pushed her across the threshold.

"Sorry for the mess," Lorelei said, unable to keep quiet. "I wasn't expecting company and I keep pretty busy to do much cleaning up after myself."

She glimpsed one of her bras on the floor at her feet and discreetly kicked it under the overstuffed chair.

"I'm not here to inspect your habits."

"I don't have bad habits!" She charged. It sunk in right away that she was the one who had termed them *bad*.

"That's nice to know. I was beginning to think it was a genetic flaw of your personality that makes you snap at me each time I speak."

The door clicked shut and she turned around to look at him. Propped against the wood by his shoulders, Rafe's sexy stance made her knees weak. Her insides boiled with desire. She stood waiting for him to make the initial contact.

With nipples hardened under his stare, she tried not to stare at his hips in the thrust

forward position. The front of his trousers had such a prominent bulge, it made her think of bringing up the joke about a rocket in his pocket or some other lame icebreaker. Only the serious expression on his face didn't allow her any comfort zone.

"What is it you think you can do for me?" She forced him to continue making all the first moves.

She set her purse on the dresser next to the overstuffed chair and kept a foot covering the fact her bra wouldn't totally wedge under the low piece of furniture.

"Keep you from getting killed." He pushed away from the door and walked to the window. "So you need to get packed."

"Packed?" Her voice made a squeaky sound that turned him from his glance out the window.

"I've just shown you how your apartment isn't secure. Last night is enough to know how easy it is to be killed on the street. Today isn't your day for dying if I can prevent it."

Lorelei huffed with indignation. He led her to believe he brought her in the room for something entirely different. A new sensation snaked from the pit of her nervous gut. Rafe had the hots for her, yet his stubbornness wouldn't allow him to do anything about it. When he made the manly move of shifting his pants and adjusting his cock, she turned away. Too much of him made her twitch inside.

After the phone call, her first thought was to get a police squad car to make frequent checks of her street. Mary's suggestion seemed much better.

"Do you plan on being my personal bodyguard, Agent Salazar?"

She wanted to smile. The silliness to the suggestion he would care, prevented her mouth from venturing out of the expressionless position she had it locked in. Especially since he made it clear he blamed her for Phillip's death.

"It's not as personal as you think," he answered. "The AFT is going to put you in a safe house."

"Oh, I don't think so."

"It's for your own safety, Lorelei."

She froze at the sound of her name on his lips. Her fingers curled into fists and she dug her nails into her palms to remind herself to think. His gaze ignited flames in her veins. The beautiful blue eyes set just right in his handsome face, trapped her soul.

"I don't ... I don't plan on hiding out," she stammered. "I highly understand he may have had something to do with Phillip's death, yet there is no proof. The gunman last night could have been from another case of yours. Bennington's man could be trying to just scare me." She picked up her purse. "I don't panic easily and I'm late for work."

She had to get away from Rafe and resume her routine as if no one wanted her dead.

Rafe grabbed her arm and she spun to face him.

His other hand held her shoulder and he rubbed her arms. He lovingly soothed the tension from her shivering skin and she didn't want him to turn her to a puddle of mush with his attentive care.

"It's Saturday, Lorelei. You don't have to go to work," he said softly.

She wanted to melt into his embrace, to feel his strength wrap around her. Only once there, she'd not let go and that would be highly embarrassing.

"I can work on Saturday if I want to. I can do anything I want."

For a minute, her mind numbed and her imagination ran wild.

Rafe's head lowered over her face.

Her heart raced with an unmerciful speed. His hand floated up near her cheek. The tingle of his fingertips on her skin actually startled her, even though she saw it coming. His head lowered more and she shut her eyes to relish the feel of his mouth coming into contact with hers.

Instead, he missed the target. The kiss landed on her jaw. He nudged her face and his lips perused her neck, her earlobe and downward. Slowing at her breasts, he nipped her perky nipples right through the cloth of blouse and bra.

He went to his knees before her and without any hesitancy at all, he pushed her skirt up. Kissing her legs, her hips, he squeezed her bottom as part of the exhilarating foreplay. Her wet panties traveled to her ankles where she stepped out with one foot. He was an animal with a rapacious thirst and she didn't fail in gushing to the first intrusion of his tongue licking her insides.

He sucked on her hard, burrowing his nose against her clit. His tongue flickered quickly for a long time right on the tip. Then he rose in front of her.

"Lorelei?" Rafe shook her.

She blinked rapidly and jerked away from his hold.

"You can't make me go into hiding," she blurted, trying to forget her imaginings.

Chapter Five

The emotions Rafe buried with his break-up from Andrea, surfaced desperately fast and he couldn't stop them. Everything drew him to Lorelei.

He stared at her. Stubborn, willful and sensuous, he understood her not liking to run from a fight. Nevertheless, she couldn't keep him from protecting her with his life if need be.

"I believe I can. It's called protective custody."

With a mission to keep on track, he backed from her pouting lips. They took on a hint of kiss-puckered and he dreamed of them being ready and willing to attach to his. Women with her looks got dates with men, any day of the week. Yet, she appeared as desperate as he felt.

He went to her dresser and opened the top drawer. Inside, he found the cherry of all undergarments on the top. He took out bras, panties and stockings without a clue as to what she'd want. Yet, he had to start somewhere.

"What are you doing?" She grabbed her clothes from his hands. "Is this some perverted fantasy of yours to go through my underwear?"

"If you won't pack, I will. Though, I do suggest you might have more of what you want if you do this yourself." Her bra strap caught on his watch and she tugged for it to come free.

Rafe slapped her hand from pulling on the red lace he had grabbed first from the drawer. "Let me unhook it before you ruin it."

"Like I should care about your stupid watch."

"I meant your bra."

With an impatient groan, she let him carefully free the garment. Pinching it between thumb and forefinger, turning it slightly with an appreciative smile, he held it out to her. Her face almost matched in coloring as a scarlet blush seared her cheeks instantly.

"See, a little less fight and things will work out all around."

She pretended to ignore him and put the bra back in the drawer. When he stopped watching her, she moved about more willingly assembling clothes.

"I liked the red one," he commented, realizing the way to chisel away Lorelei's hard exterior was through embarrassing discussions about her underwear.

"No doubt, but since I don't intend on modeling it for you, I'll just leave it here."

"Too bad, I bet you look real good in red lace." He looked down. "White's nice too."

She followed his stare to a bra on the floor half under a chair. Another blush of scarlet swept up her lovely neck and met the one still tingeing her cheeks.

"Just how many days will I be on this little odyssey?" She got down on her knees and took out a small black canvas satchel from under the bed.

Rafe picked the bag up and set it on the mattress.

"I'd guess at least four or five ... months." He was quicker than Lorelei as she grabbed to put the suitcase back under the bed.

Her hand landed on his and she tried to pry his fingers away.

"You can't be serious. I have a job, bills to pay—a life."

Rafe picked up her hand. His thumb circled over the lines in her palm. She had

beautiful skin.

“You won’t have a life if Bennington has you killed.”

He stared at her, waiting for something in her expression to react to his caress. Her hazel eyes were bright and he liked the cinnamon hair that outlined her oval face. His fantasies of Lorelei peaked to a point he let his imagination cross to reality.

“It was only a threat.” Her voice came low, like a whisper she might not want heard.

Rafe tried to keep his concentration on his reason for being there. A hard feat when Lorelei smelled so nice. The fragrance had a flowery scent like a bouquet he once bought.

“I’ve had death threats before and no one did anything.”

“Before that call was made to you, another was made to someone else.”

“Did they threaten them too?”

“No. The message was to kill you. There’s a contract out on you and you’re supposed to be dead by tonight.”

She didn’t say anything as she sat on her knees staring up at him. Her lips moved and he lost his hearing as if he went brain dead. Her provocative position continued kindling his desires.

“What?” He forgot the question or maybe he didn’t understand it.

“I can’t pack if you don’t let go of my hand.” She tugged her warm fingers and he tightened his hold of them.

“True.” His palm itched from the tickling brush of her fingertips.

He took in everything else he hadn’t noticed before. He wondered what she looked like with her hair undone from the ponytail. Every time he saw her, she had it pulled back from her face. It gave her a no-nonsense appearance one expected from a schoolteacher or a judge. The more he thought about it, the look even fit an Assistant District Attorney.

Lorelei Blackwell knew how to dress for her position. It was probably why she was good at her job. He had gotten all the information he could on her to be sure Phillip would be in good hands when it came to her getting a conviction on Bennington. Her competency had no flaws. The shame came in the circumstances changing minute by minute.

“Where will we be going?” She finally jerked hard enough to pull her hand from his.

“You’ll have to trust it’s safe.” He turned from her as she got up from the floor.

He examined the room, the walls, the ceiling. When he glanced back at Lorelei, he found her watching him.

“Do you think my apartment is bugged?” she whispered, following his look at the artificial plants, the light fixtures and picture frames.

Rafe shrugged. “It’s possible.” He put a hand on her arm when she shivered. “It won’t matter.” He gave another one of his caring caresses. “They’ll be listening to silence soon.”

Lorelei went back to gathering things from the bathroom and dumped them in on her clothes. He watched the inventory of toothpaste, hairbrush, deodorant, shampoo, makeup and without any hesitation to his presence she put in her maxi pads and tampons.

“Is this going to take you all day?” He coughed, clearing his throat.

“Well you won’t tell me where we’re going or for how long, and I don’t want to be without anything important.”

Her selection of clothes went with a slow, indecisive perusal of every garment she owned.

“Ms. Blackwell, you’ll be sitting around a house all day, not going to a ball. Simple, comfortable clothing would be the best choice.”

“Why are you really doing this? She finished putting items in the suitcase and zipped it closed. “To punish me for Phillip’s death?”

“I might have said some things I shouldn’t have.” He retrieved the bag.

“Might have? Apologies don’t come easy for you, do they? Or maybe you don’t feel sorry about anything you do?”

“I apologize when I’m wrong and I do feel sorry for things I say or do. I thought I was expressing both just now.” He picked up her purse and took out her cell phone. “You won’t need this.”

“Is nothing of mine sacred? A woman does like to think her purse is private, even if you don’t find it extremely rude to rummage through my undergarments.” She snatched the small leather handbag from his hands. “And you have a poor concept of what an apology should sound like.”

He grabbed her arm as they went out the door into the hallway. “Lorelei, I’m sorry.”

“Agent Salazar?” She looked back at him. “My apartment door? Do you think you could shut it?”

She pushed the elevator button. His thoughts unraveled every second he spent with her. They rode down to the lobby in silence. It seemed a long ride and he considered his options. He didn’t like to stray from how he worked. Lorelei had become a legitimate part of the witness protection program. That meant personally she officially became hands-off. If only his body understood the rules better, he’d not have to walk stiffly and his mind wouldn’t wander.

Before they reached the first floor, Lorelei pushed the emergency button and stopped the elevator.

She said nothing and turned to him. Her hand rubbed the front of his trousers. A teasing voice in his head yelled, stop her. Another shouted, kiss her. He did neither. The only part functioning on him demanded he keep his brain out of it.

She caught the zipper and yanked it down. He wished he didn’t have on underwear, but it didn’t appear to be a problem for her. She dove right into the waistband of his briefs and twisted his cock free from the white cotton encumbrance.

Without delay, her lips stretched over the head and took him in to the moist cavern of her mouth. Her tongue swirled around the shaft as she moved her silky lips back and forth. He read an article once about how to give a man a perfect blow job. It was a bunch of instructional crap he didn’t agree with. All a woman had to do was suck in whatever way made her happy. Because a man, in his position right now, would be so far beyond ecstatic to notice any of the finer details.

Lorelei pushed him back against the wall of the elevator. He put a hand to the side to hold himself up and for a long time, she twisted and sucked until he felt the explosive juices building pressure.

Rafe put his head back. His fingers flexed and raked the wall. It neared time and he didn’t know if she wanted to be warned. Just as he thought his sperm would shoot out, she grabbed his balls. Her vise-like fingers clamped on him as well as the fabric covering his swollen scrotum.

Her mouth came free and the cool air made his semen retreat.

“Don’t stop.”

“What do you mean, ‘don’t stop’, we’ve reached the ground floor.” Lorelei bent to grab the duffle bag from the floor of the elevator.

Rafe snatched it up and shuffled her into the lobby. He gave a nod to the woman holding groceries they passed and he smiled.

“Come along, Ms. Blackwell. I have a car outside.”

He walked her to a car he had two men guarding. After his call to her, he had ordered backup. One nod from him sent the men to the car parked behind his.

“Here you go.” He opened the door for Lorelei to get in the front seat.

Her breasts brushed his arm. She stopped with them still touching, her gaze lifted with a shyness he didn’t expect. He wanted to forget his job and have a wild fling with the beautiful woman.

“You won’t tell me where we’re going, how about how far?”

“You’ll see soon enough.” He raised a brow at the nice view he had into her cleavage.

“And I think you’ve seen enough.” She buttoned her blouse further up toward her neck.

She slid onto the seat and swung her legs into the car. Rafe shut the door. He surveyed the area, noting traffic, pedestrians and searching for anything suspicious. Each car that went by, he memorized for a reoccurrence in sighting he might have on their trip. He walked around the front of the car and glanced in the window. Lorelei had the visor flipped down, her mouth stretched and moved to the lip gloss she smeared on generously.

He got in the car, tossed her bag to the backseat and saw it wasn’t only lip gloss she worked on applying. She brushed powder over her cheeks. Once that instrument went in her purse another came out.

“You do realize it’s not necessary to paint your face to sit and watch television, don’t you?”

“Uh-huh.” She wiped a small wedge-shaped sponge over her forehead.

“Okay then. I guess we’ll get on the road.”

He continued to watch her enhance every lovely thing about her face.

“Are we going?” She paused from putting the make-up on.

“Yes. Yes, of course, if it won’t disturb your ... oh hell,” he grumbled, and started the car.

He couldn’t let her distract him. He had a job and she’d just have to adjust he reminded himself.

The car started and he pulled out into a clear lane. He lifted his gaze to the rearview mirror and made sure his men were right behind.

“I should have put on a t-shirt and jeans.” She flipped up the visor. “Then I wouldn’t feel it necessary to fix my face.”

“I didn’t see where you needed to fix anything.”

He kept his gaze forward, but a glance in the rearview also gave him a peripheral view of the curve of her mouth.

“I visit my father in the hospital everyday around lunch time, will that be a problem?” She pulled the elastic band from her hair and the silky mass fell to her shoulders. Raking a hand through it, she re-gathered it and put it back into the familiar ponytail.

“No problem, since you won’t be doing that for a while.” Rafe turned down a road to

take them out of town.

"I have to!" She twisted sideways on the seat. "My father is terminally ill with cancer and I have to spend at least an hour with him everyday. He expects me."

"All business, family, and friends, Ms. Blackwell, those are who we break ties with and you know it. You're aware of how the witness protection program works. Not only would you put yourself in jeopardy, you'd put the people closest to you in unnecessary harm's way as well." He stared straight ahead with an intent resolve not to look at her and get caught up in her feelings.

"But my father's dying. He could go any day. Someone killing him would be a merciful thing. He's been in pain for months and if I could, I'd pull the plug on his ventilator and let him go. However, he prefers to stay alive and has the final say in what happens."

"Your father wants to live and you want him dead, very sweet of you." Rafe stole a glance.

"You don't understand what its like for him. He'd go in an instant if it weren't for me. My mother died a long time ago. I have no family aside from him and he's afraid to leave me alone. He fights to stay alive *for me*. We both know his time is soon and it hurts worse to see the pain he's in. He refuses medication, making it a slow, miserable death he's chosen, all because he loves me too much to let me go on without him."

"I'm sorry. I guess if it were me, I'd not want to leave you either."

Silence filled the car. He didn't mean to say his thoughts the way they sounded, and yet, they came out just the way he felt them.

"You still haven't told me how far we'll be from the city."

"It's about an hour," he replied. "And about your father, I can't let you go see him, but you can use my cell phone to call him everyday for three minutes, no more. Bennington may have a hard time tracing the call, but technology does have ways of narrowing down the location of a cell phone."

"Do you think he really has that kind of power?" She folded her arm over the back of the seat and remained facing him in her sideways position.

"Yes. I just don't know the extent of his operation. He obviously has something going for him. Some system to have organized that hit on Phillip when you and he set up a meeting, only hours earlier."

"Maybe I was the target all along." Her stare rattled him. "Killing him doesn't solve his problem as much as getting rid of me would."

Glancing sideways, he saw the soft glow of fear in her gaze. He had the urge to wrap his arms around her and promise more than just his protection.

Chapter Six

Lorelei listened to the hum of the engine. Rafe didn't say anything and the silence engulfed them like a heavy cloak of gloom. She considered all aspects of the shooting, including they wanted to kill her. The day couldn't be more depressing.

She shut her eyes to block out all the bad. A needed sleep claimed her fast and when she grabbed his arm in the dream, she woke.

"Sorry, I was just locking your door." He looked straight ahead. "You were sleeping restlessly and I didn't want you to fall out of the car."

Lorelei accepted his excuse and let go of his hand she held against her bare thighs. She stared out the side window. Her mind quickly foraged for a topic.

"How's your sister?" She wasn't sure if it was a better subject or not.

Rafe's shoulders stiffened. Was she being nosy or insensitive? She did have feelings regardless of whether Rafe understood or acknowledged them.

"She's upset, but because of the boys, she'll hold up. She's a strong person that can deal with whatever life hands out."

"You should be with her."

"She and the boys have gone to Daytona where Phillip's parents live. Phillip is going to be buried there and she'll be staying with them. She wants me to find the killer or whoever was responsible."

"When's the funeral?"

Lorelei wished she could go. It wasn't her fault Phillip was dead, nevertheless, she felt guilty.

"Tomorrow." He turned off the highway.

She watched the city fall behind as the road led them into the country. Scrub pines and wild palms covered miles of open ground. If ever she retired, the suburbs had a good argument for peace. The smog, the noise, and the hectic days—she'd have no trouble turning her back on the city.

"The men following, will they be my jailers?" She twisted her head and looked out the back window at the car behind them. "You might have introduced them before we left."

"They know who you are. The tall, older one with the salt and pepper hair is Mac Dorsey and the other one is William Fitz, he goes by Fitz."

"Thank you for the formal introduction."

"You're welcome." His chuckle actually did wonders to ease her tension. A man that could laugh with genuine amusement could not possibly hate her.

"How did you get the scar?"

Lorelei saw no easy way to ask questions. His defensive manner surfaced no matter what they talked about. She decided his momentary lack of a grim expression gave her an opening, yet he didn't answer.

With no reason to pussyfoot around the subject, she went right for the jugular.

"Well? You seemed all too touchy about it yesterday to have forgotten."

"It's none of your business."

"Maybe not. Then again, my underwear isn't yours, except it didn't stop you from

rummaging through my panties and bras.”

“I don’t feel like talking about it, okay? Five more miles and we’ll be at our destination.”

“Great, then I can bore myself with something else? I don’t think so. I want to hear how you got the scar. I want to know now, while you’re trapped in this car with me. I’ve met people like you before. If we were at the safe house you’d walk out of the room. You and your vanity would just take a hike thinking I’m being insensitive.” She took a breath. “Besides, maybe I should know just in case it has to do with your competency in protecting me.”

His glance went darkly disturbing. She’d hit home in a way she should have backed from and yet, as a freight-train headed for derailment, she couldn’t slow down the accident.

“Is it a secret that if it gets out, will ruin your reputation for being human? Maybe you need a second opinion. Go on and spill the story and I’ll give you an objective view.” She teased foolishly.

A grizzly bear with his emotions, she continued to taunt the devil with her royal bitchiness. The lightness in which she goaded had room for error. Rafe slammed on the brakes and she grabbed the dashboard in a wide-eyed panic.

The car skidded to a stop on the side of the road. His head swung to the rearview mirror. Apparently, he had forgotten about the car following them until a loud screech came from behind.

Apologize. Plead insanity. Hold him until all the pain fades from his darkening eyes. Those were her thoughts. Unfortunately, they never matched her words.

“Touchy subject?” She taunted with the same shield of harshness that managed to get in the way when she didn’t know how to handle her feelings.

He wasn’t huffing or puffing, but he breathed with irregularity. She remained still and stared back with equal vehemence. What other defense did she have than to pretend she wasn’t shaking inside?

“Oh, you can turn off your death-ray stare, Agent Salazar. If you don’t want to tell me the truth, you could have lied, like saying it was a car accident.” She sat stiff-backed against the seat. “I think you like to get angry with people. Then you have a reason to feel sorry for yourself. You’re handsome and the scar doesn’t take that away. You have the looks to melt a woman’s heart and with a little work in the charm department, you probably could talk one into doing anything for you.”

She folded her arms in protest of his continuing glare.

The thickness of the apprehension filled the car. He still didn’t say anything. The quiet broke to the rapping of knuckles on the window. She could have leapt from the seat if a seatbelt hadn’t controlled her moves. Pushing the button for the car window to go down, she looked at the man called Fitz. Mac stood behind him.

“Sorry, fellas. Everything’s all right here. I just dropped the lighter on the seat. You can go on back to your car.”

“Rafe?” Mac bent slightly to look past her.

“Yeah, things are fine,” Rafe answered, staring ahead.

Lorelei pressed the button and shut the window. She tapped the armrest and waited for Rafe to speak. After all, he had stopped the car in a rush to do or say something.

“See how easily a simple lie ends a topic?”

“You know, you’re probably the most exasperating woman I’ve ever met.”

“I’m forward, opinionated, direct and a high-class pain in the ass.” She turned a flashy smile at him. “With that information, Agent Salazar, you’ve learned just what to expect from me. If you’re even half as intelligent as I think, you’ll know how to avoid or even thwart my efforts at antagonizing you.”

His grunt proceeded another long period of silence from him as he resumed the drive to the safe house.

“This is the place,” he announced ten minutes later.

The car stopped along a curb. The quaint neighborhood and the pretty house made her smile.

“Picket fence, blue shutters, a chimney proclaiming a fireplace. This doesn’t look as bad as I thought it might be.”

“No? What did you think when we left the city and headed for the country, a tent in the woods?”

“All the safe houses I’ve seen in the course of my job were cold impersonal buildings, often tacky, cheap and rundown. They were slummy hotel rooms, empty warehouses and dank basements. I have to admit, the ATF is generous with their version of a safe house.”

Lorelei opened her car door and got out before Rafe could get around the car. She watched him retrieve her duffle bag from the backseat.

“After you, Agent Salazar.” She bowed for him to go first up the walk.

She liked to check him out from behind. He had a cute butt and a firm one from the looks of it. Something about the guy made her want to do all sorts of naughty, kinky and wondrous things with him.

He unlocked and opened the door to the house.

“Ms. Blackwell.” He held the screen door wide for her to step over the threshold first.

“The ATF sure knows how to put a girl up for the night.” She smiled at him over her shoulder. “Or for a few months,” she added.

Lorelei trailed a finger over everything. Pictures, figurines, vases, furniture and then she stopped at the picture of a young boy. Adorably attired in the sailor suit for Easter, he held a blue bunny snug against him. He appeared very happy.

“What’s your real opinion about this place?”

“I adore it. Whoever lived here had a lot of love over the years; the mementos and pictures.” She walked over to stand in front of him. “The owner is away?”

“He died and the house is in probate.”

“How sad.” She picked up the picture of the little boy. “I’ll be sure not to break anything. You don’t mind if I take this to my assigned room do you?”

“No. Do you like children, Ms. Blackwell?”

“Yes, I suppose so. I don’t know any personally. I meet them in cases and they impress me every time. I wish I didn’t have to see any of them in court though.” She rubbed her fingers over the framed glass. “Don’t you think we could drop the ‘Ms. Blackwell’ and ‘Agent Salazar’ part of our conversations?” She flopped down in the overstuffed chair and hugged the picture to her bosom.

“I like doing my job with a moderate amount of formality.”

“You’ve already called me Lorelei on several occasions and as for procedure...”

His hands perched on his hips while a blend of vexation and amusement twinkled in his eyes. Stubbornness obviously wouldn't let him drift from his book of rules and she vowed to work on that aspect of his personality.

"If there's nothing else, I'll be on my way." Rafe moved to the door.

"You're leaving, already?" She rose quickly.

"I have a flight in a few hours."

"Right, the funeral." She put the picture back on the table. "I shouldn't have moved this. It looked perfect where it was."

She shivered at the thought of him leaving her there and didn't know why.

"I'll be back tomorrow night." He put his hand near her face and then dropped it before touching her. "Try not to give my men too much trouble."

Rafe went halfway down the sidewalk by the time she focused on something other than the way she already missed him. "My phone call?" She rushed outside to him.

"I forgot about that." He took his phone out and walked back, handing it over her shoulder to Mac. "She gets one phone call today and one tomorrow. No more than three minutes, understood?"

"Got it." Mac put the phone in his pocket.

Lorelei watched Rafe jog to his car. After opening his car door, he turned his head. The sun enhanced the whiteness of his scar on the tanned face.

"Ms. Blackwell, would you please go back in the house and stay out of sight?" He appeared mean and hard-edged, yet his stern tone didn't ruffle her in the least.

She returned to the stoop and stopped in the opening of the door. Rafe gave a wave and got in his car as if it were a normal, everyday thing he did. It gave her a strange feeling in the pit of her stomach. She felt like a wife, watching her husband leave for work and a giggle twirled her around.

Lorelei gazed at the two men she didn't know.

"Mac and Fitz is it, well I hope since we'll be spending time together you won't mind calling me Lorelei. It would look highly strange to any solicitors for me to be living with two handsome men calling me Ms. Blackwell. They're apt to think I'm a country madam." She bent to pick up her duffle bag.

"I'll get that for you, Ms..." Fitz smiled. "Lorelei."

"Thank you. Let's check out the rooms in this house and see which bedroom suits my fancy."

She looked in one, then another and finally a third. The thing to do would be to take the master bedroom. It had the attached bathroom, but she went back to the middle room. It had an inviting feel to it. "This is my room."

"You don't want the bigger one?" Mac stuck his head around the door.

"No. Size isn't everything, fellas." She winked. "Besides, I'd feel safer with one of you on each side of me." She laughed. "How about food? Agent Salazar failed to let me have breakfast and I'm starving."

They all went to the kitchen and checked the fridge, the pantry and the cabinets. Food abounded for someone that cooked and that just wasn't her strong point.

"I don't suppose either of you know anything about turning on a stove, do you?" She watched them shake their heads.

"Rafe said there were a few places that delivered. The menus and phone numbers should be around here somewhere." Fitz searched near the phone.

“There,” Mac pointed to the letter holder on the wall. “Looks like some take-out menus.”

Lorelei reached past Fitz and pulled out the worn cards. “We have Chinese, Italian and Ma’s Diner, that’s the one that has breakfast.

She wrote down what they would each have and then called the diner. She gave the address she found on an old piece of mail marked occupant. Luckily, they didn’t ask for directions since she had no idea where the delivery guy would be coming from and she hadn’t paid a whole lot of attention on the drive there.

“Do you think I could make that three minute call Agent Salazar was so kind to let me have?” She held her hand out to Mac.

He placed the phone in her palm.

“This is private.” She shooed both men away with a flick of her wrist.

On the second ring, a woman answered.

“Hello, is this Henry Blackwell’s room?” Lorelei asked.

“Yes, but he’s unable to speak to anyone. Who’s this?”

“His ... a friend,” she answered, uneasy about the stranger on the other end. “I was calling to see how he’s doing.”

“Not well. The doctor was in a short while ago. I shouldn’t really be telling you this, but he’s been asking to see his daughter and we’ve been unable to contact her. The doctor doesn’t think Mr. Blackwell is going to make it through the night.”

Mac came to the doorway and tapped his watch.

Lorelei didn’t need any longer.

“Thank you.” She snapped the phone shut and handed it to Mac. “I’ll be in my room. Call me when the food arrives.”

She had no intention of being there for their ordered breakfast. Changing her clothes, she locked the bedroom door and checked the window.

“Thank God for first floors,” she muttered, lifting the sash.

It groaned from lack of use and she stopped, turning toward the door to see if anyone heard. Would the darling duo in the living room hear or suspect she wasn’t staying? No, she thought not. Even if they heard a noise, they would guess she was unpacking.

She put one leg over the sill and then the other. A meteoric rush of excitement rooted with misplacement in her quest. She smiled, thinking how much it reminded her of climbing out a boyfriend’s window.

The yuccas below didn’t appear appealing for her landing. She pushed herself as far to the side as she could and missed most of the plant. Only two pointy razor tipped spears jabbed her in the leg.

“Damn!” She hopped away rubbing the sting.

At a quick pace down the road, she headed in the direction they had come, knowing she’d seen a store. She thought about Rafe and how angry he’d be when he found out she’d left. If he understood the loss of family, as he should, he’d understand she needed to be with her father.

Three blocks and one turn later Lorelei found the convenience store. It didn’t have a payphone, outside nor in. Eyeing the teenage boy behind the counter, she put on her best smile.

“Can I use your telephone?”

“Sorry, store policy.” He tapped a sign on the counter without looking from the

comic book he hovered over as if he were five.

"I know, except it's really important." She snapped the magazine out from under his face. "I only need to call a taxi. My car broke down and I'm not from around here. Don't you think I could make one tiny little call?"

"If my boss finds out, I could get fired." He looked around as if he couldn't remember they were alone.

"I don't know what I'm going to do." She unbuttoned her blouse partly and fanned her face with the comic book. "It's hot out there today and I don't think I can walk any further."

The boy gulped as she leaned forward on her arms. He didn't have the intelligence to not look directly down her cleavage.

"I see you have a phonebook." She pointed to the shelf behind him. "Do you think I could look at it?" She pressed her breasts on the counter to push them up.

"Uh huh." He nodded and reached without diverting his gaze. He fumbled over objects and then once he had a grip of the book, he put it on the counter. "Here you go, ma'am."

"What's your name?" She thumbed through the yellow pages looking for cab companies.

"Joey."

She wanted to ask if he didn't think he'd go blind staring as hard as he was, but she let the matter drop as she memorized the number of the only cab listed.

"You can have this back." She lifted the book and put it in his hand. "Now would you hand me the phone?" She pulled the band from around her hair and let her curls drop with a shake of her head.

Joey lifted the phone and sat it on the counter. "Can I get you anything else, ma'am?" His mesmerized stare remained trained on the movements of her hand rubbing her breastbone slowly and methodically.

"No, this is all," she shamelessly flirted.

Lorelei made the call and fifteen minutes later, she sat in the cab heading away from the area of Rafe's safe house. Three hours of travel put her in the hospital which had an eerie quietness about it unlike the city. She'd grown too used to noisy police stations and dramatic courtrooms.

Mentally, she felt far from her father and hated to think intuition might try to warn her he had already died.

She moved smoothly through the hospital and the emptiness of his room threw her into a panic.

Chapter Seven

Rafe stared at the city with dread. He watched the planes spaced out, single file in the sky. One right after the other left the airstrip bound for different destinations. His would soon be one of the silver specks in the sky. Phillip had already departed in a casket on an earlier flight that morning.

His mind remained constantly on Lorelei and whether he should leave her or not. His sister had insisted he didn't need to go to the funeral if a minute away from the case would lose an edge over finding the killer. She was adamant about there being nothing for him to do for her or Phillip more than doing his job. Rafe knew it wasn't her only reason. She knew the emotional scars he carried with the one on his face. For a time after he was injured, he didn't want to go back to work and Carolena's unexpressed fear was that it was happening all over again. It was the very reason he had to leave Lorelei and see his sister, to let her know he would be fine.

Besides, Lorelei was safe with men he trusted. He'd attend the funeral and return to her as quick as possible. The very idea of actually missing the sharp-tongued woman made him smile.

The first sight of Carolena in the airport gave him mixed feelings—trepidation for not protecting Phillip and happiness to see her smile.

"Rafael." She cupped his face as he bent down to her petite frame.

"Did he get here all right?" he asked about the casket with Phillip.

"Yes. He's at the funeral home." She kissed him on the cheek and wrapped her arms around his neck.

"I'm sorry, Carolena."

"I want you to tell me everything," she insisted. "Don't leave out a single detail. I need to know just what happened and why."

"No you don't. Remember him as you last saw him."

"No. You tell me, Rafael. I can't put it behind me without knowing. I don't want to picture things that didn't happen or have nightmares my imagination distorts because of the lack of information."

Carolena's demands wouldn't disappear by ignoring them. She didn't like to be left out of anything. Phillip would have told her most of the information about the case anyway.

Rafe took her hand and led her to a quiet table in the airport lounge. He found it hard to go over the very last minutes of Phillip's life. It brought painful memories to mind and reminded him how Lorelei's life could end as quickly.

"And this woman, she's pretty?" Carolena asked with a twinkle in her eye when he finished telling her everything except the gruesome part.

Amazing. He described everything that happened to Phillip and his sister held his hand, curiously wanting to know about a woman he'd met.

"Why?" He picked up the cup of coffee and took a sip.

The airport lounge made bitter coffee. From the night before until then, he'd only slept for a few hours.

"You've mentioned three times how Phillip said she had long pretty legs in the

course of the day.” She reached over and rubbed his arm. “He liked to look at women, except he only made comments with purpose. Now why are you avoiding the question?”

“Because I think you asked to avoid thinking about Phillip. You don’t care what some woman looks like. You know, no one would have ever attracted Phillip’s eye when he had you.” He turned his hand over and held Carolena’s.

“I’m well aware Phillip loved me and would never stray. I just think there is something you left out about this beautiful woman.”

“I haven’t said she was beautiful.” He pulled his hand back and leaned in his chair.

“No, you’ve refused to describe her ... other than the long legs,” she laughed. “Is it a giant ostrich that has caught your eye?”

“She’s not a giant, she’s average in size, and her legs ... well she showed quite a bit of them in the outfit she wore so I noticed.”

“Rafael?” She gave him a stern glare.

“Okay, she’s very beautiful and she’s in trouble. The same man that put the hit out on Phillip is out to kill her as well.” He lifted the cup and sat it back down, unable to take another drink of the bitter liquid.

“Then why aren’t you there protecting her?” Carolena stood and produced money to leave a tip on the table. “You have to go home instantly and make sure nothing happens to her.”

“She’s fine. I have her in protective custody in a safe house ... actually I have her in Uncle Milton’s old place.” He got up and pushed the chair in. “Maybe I should call.” He touched his pocket and remembered he didn’t have his phone.

“Yes, call and then you go to her.” She dragged him out of the lounge and down a hall that had payphones on the wall. “How could you leave the lady when she needs you?”

“Carolena, she’s going to be fine. Besides, we don’t get along very well and she probably likes it better that I’m not around.”

“You still call.”

“I came here for you, the boys and Phillip’s funeral.”

“He’s gone, Rafael. You can do nothing for him here.”

“There’s you and the boys.” He cupped her face.

“The boys are with their grandparents and I’m too busy preparing the funeral.”

“I can help.”

“No. You like this woman. I see it in your eyes. You’ve been sad for a long time and it makes me happy to see you finally thinking about women again. Now call and we’ll get you right back on a plane.” She looked sadly at him and her eyes brimmed with tears.

He punched his cell phone’s number. It rang once, twice, and on the third there was a response.

“Lorelei?” Mac answered.

“No, it’s Rafe and why did you ask if it was Lorelei?” He stared at his sister as he listened to a short story about the girl that got away. “You idiots! I’m in Daytona and she could already be dead.” He slammed the phone down on the hook.

“What’s happened?” Carolena grabbed his arm.

“Lorelei’s father is dying and she left the safe house to go to the hospital to see him.” He rubbed his forehead feeling the headache starting. “She’ll be an easy target there.”

“Then go.” Carolena pushed him in the direction of the ticket counter.

"The funeral."

"I don't need you to be at the funeral." She pushed. "I need you to help this woman."

"Carolena, I can't leave you."

"No arguments. You care what happens to her. I heard it in your voice every time you mentioned her. You go back to Miami and help her. There's nothing that can be done here that I or Phillip's parents can't do." She led him to the counter.

Rafe found a plane leaving right away.

"You call when you can. Don't worry about me." She hugged him. "And if you like the lady, you try to let her know. It would be good for you to be in love again."

"Are you sure about this, Carolena? I don't have to go. Mac and Fitz can handle the problem." He stroked back her dark brown locks of hair. "Maybe I could see the boys and then go."

"No, now get on your plane. She needs your help." She kissed him on the cheek. "Go on now. I'm fine. The boys are fine. I prepared for this day. I'll cry some more tomorrow and for the many months ahead, right now I'm too busy." She gave a wave and blew a kiss to him.

Rafe waved back as he walked away.

"I love you," he called, hurrying to board his plane.

He heard the faint words ricochet back from her and wondered what it would feel like to hear them from Lorelei.

* * * *

A hand grabbed Lorelei from a doorway and she swung to clip the assailant in the jaw. Unreflective of where she was, she hadn't given one consideration to it being someone that worked there or possibly a patient.

"Sweet mother of ... lady, you really try a man's patience." Rafe hissed rubbing his jaw. "I could have been hospital security or a nurse."

"I don't care. No one has a right to put their hands on me." She tugged her arm still locked in his grip. "I'm not your prisoner, Agent Salazar. My father is dying ... he may be dead and I have to see him."

"He's still alive." He put a hand lightly to the small of her back. "He's in I.C.U."

"Intensive care?" She hurried for the elevator.

Rafe pushed the down button and folded his arms together in front of him to wait. Lorelei tapped the button again and paced in front of the doors.

"You'd think this would move faster when it means someone's life," she grumbled. "What are you doing here, where's Frick and Frack?"

"Fritz and Mac are still at the house." He laughed. "That's cute, by the way; Frick and Frack. I think it would go over most people's heads though."

"Whatever are you talking about?" She jumped in the elevator, afraid it would take off if she gave it an instant of hesitation.

"You don't know where the phrase comes from, then?" He stepped on and took her fingers from the persistent poking at the number three on the panel.

"Why won't these doors close?" She jerked her hand free, stomped a foot and pushed the button again.

"Patience, Ms. Blackwell." He pulled her hand away again. "Those that have patience find it rewarding."

“Those same people also get left behind, caught in the cold and stuck out of the loop. I prefer to take charge.”

She reached for the button with her other hand at the same time the door began its slow glide to close.

“Finally.” She heaved a sigh.

She looked at her hand in his. The warmth of his palm connected with her damp one. The comfort and compassion brought her closer to him. She touched the front of his jacket and looked at his tired face. She wanted to be held and he released her fingers as if he touched fire. She stepped away and the elevator doors opened. It gave her the opportunity to get farther from his coldness.

He trailed like a prison guard instead of a bodyguard. He walked close and she inhaled the scent of his cologne. At the door to her father’s room, she stopped and took a breath. It tore her up inside to see the man she once knew as strong, looking thin, weak and frail. Rafe could have pushed her with his abruptness, except he didn’t. He became an amazing strength at her back. His hands folded over her shoulders and gave her a reassuring rub before she proceeded into the cold, impersonal hospital room.

“I’m here, Dad.” She pulled a tissue from a box and wiped the spittle drooling from the corner of his mouth. “I’m sorry it took me so long to come today.”

“Baby girl,” his raspy voice whispered.

“Yes, Dad, it’s your baby girl.”

Rafe pulled a heavy chair over close to the bed for her and she sat without looking back.

“You’re troubled?” her father whispered.

“Me, never, you made me out of gum and rock, remember? Nothing can hurt me and nobody can scrape me aside because I stick to my principles.” She laughed. “I’m a Blackwell and I’ll always make you proud.”

“Your man?” Her father’s gaze rolled up to where Rafe stood behind her.

“Yes.” Rafe put his hands firmly to her shoulders. “I’ll take care of her.”

Tears sprang to Lorelei’s eyes as Rafe gently squeezed her shoulders. Her father’s nod came like a blessing and a curse. He would think she had someone to take care of her and he would die in peace, but she didn’t want him to go. Air sputtered into her lungs as she sucked back a sob. She put her hand up and touched Rafe’s. Her skin tingled with electricity and the sparks made her heart jump when he gripped her hand reassuringly. Their fingers laced and he waited with her for a long while before he left the room.

“Tired,” her father said, and closed his eyes.

“Then get some sleep, Dad, and I’ll be here when you wake.” She sat quietly for a few minutes, knowing the beats of machinery could put anyone to sleep quickly with their constant hum.

She went into the corridor where Rafe leaned on a wall.

“We have to go,” Rafe told her.

“I’m not going anywhere, Agent Salazar. You did something very nice by lying and I thank you.”

“It wasn’t a lie. I don’t plan on letting anything happen to you and that’s why we need to leave.”

“I’ve no wish to argue this. However, I won’t leave my father when I might have only a few minutes left with him.”

“What if it’s days?” He gripped her shoulders. “Your life is in danger. If you’re tracked here, then who knows who else will get hurt in the process of them getting to you.”

“Very compelling speech, except I’ll take my chances. Maybe I forgot to mention I’m selfish.”

“Yes, gum and stone. I heard. Only stone can be crushed and gum can be worn away with time, I want neither to happen to you.”

She thought he would kiss her when his gaze dropped to her mouth. If wishes were granted, she’d be in his arms, letting him hug her and make her believe he’d chase away everything bad.

“I’ll give you a few hours.” He stepped back and his gaze dropped to the floor.

“If you think I’ll thank you, I won’t.” Frustrated, she turned to go into the room but stopped at his touch.

His fingers slid over her arm and rubbed gently. The compassion he instantaneously offered made her shiver.

“I’ll be here if you need me,” he whispered close to her ear.

She nodded, not trusting her voice to come out evenly enough with an appreciation for him. She’d withheld the thank you before, because he seemed to be trying to fish it out of her. Now, as she resumed her seat at the bed, she knew she was wrong.

Lorelei sat staring at her father. She didn’t quite know how to feel about Rafe turning up as he did. She figured it had to do mostly with his job. When he came back to the room a short while later, she gave him the warmest smile she could.

“Here.” He handed her a cup of coffee.

“Thank you.”

“I thought you weren’t going to thank me?” He raised a brow with his obvious tease.

“You do a splendid job at riling people, don’t you?”

He put a finger to his lips and nodded toward her father. Her father was awake and watching them. Whether it was with awareness or a dazed mind, she didn’t know.

“Hey, Dad, it’s only been fifteen minutes. You should try to sleep more.” She looked for a place to set down the cup and found Rafe’s hand came readily to the rescue.

“I’ll be out in the hall.” Rafe bent down and let his words murmur softly near her cheek.

Before he rose, a machine in the room buzzed. Another met it beep for beep down the corridor at the nurse’s desk.

Lorelei jumped out of the chair and backed into Rafe. He held onto her as a nurse rushed into the room.

“Please wait outside,” the nurse ordered.

Rafe pulled Lorelei from the room. From the corridor Lorelei didn’t look at the people with her father, she watched the machine instead. A blue line zigzagged and leveled out flat on the panel. Another alarm reverberated around her. It drained her thoughts to remember she had at least been with her father his final moment.

She didn’t have to hear the words *he’s gone* from the nurse. The machine already told her that.

“We can go now.” She walked away.

“We can wait.”

“He’s dead, Agent Salazar. I won’t make you stay any longer.” She took long strides

hoping the breeze she created would dry her eyes.

"Lorelei, wait." Rafe reached to hold her.

She backed from him, refusing the comfort, afraid she'd breakdown. The elevator doors opened just as they came to them and once Rafe and Lorelei were inside, the doors rushed to close as if they realized she needed to get out of there as fast as possible.

"We can stay a little longer, Lorelei."

She shook head. "I don't want to be here. I've spent a lifetime in a hospital." Her hungry stomach growled and echoed in the tight enclosure.

"Candy bar?" He took one from his pocket and offered it to her.

"Thanks, I'm starving. I probably should have waited until after that breakfast I ordered, before taking off from your safe house." She tore open the wrapper and took a bite. "Frick and Frack, you were going to tell me something about them."

"What's to know? They're ATF agents like me."

"No, they were people, this Frick and Frack?"

"Yes."

She rubbed a hand over her eyes.

"Lorelei, are you all right?"

"Please, Agent Salazar, just talk." She chewed the candy quickly and listened.

"They were famous Swiss skaters that did comedy in the Ice Follies. Their real names were Werner Groebli and Hans Mauch. They used the names Frick and Frack as stage names. They were together for so long that the names became associated with people being very close."

"I'm not being very polite, huh?" She held the candy to his lips.

His hand covered hers and he took a small bite.

"That's sort of interesting. How did you know that? Are you a trivia fanatic?" She stepped off the elevator in the lobby.

"I had a grandmother who was a professional skater." He took her elbow while holding the main entrance door open. "I'm parked across the street."

"You'll miss the funeral by being here, won't you?" She felt a new guilt heaped in her. "Mac and Fitz should have handled the problem with me themselves, instead of bothering you."

"They didn't call me."

"You called them for a report, it's the same difference."

"I was already coming back."

"You were?"

His paced quickened and she followed his gaze across the street to the tow truck.

"Hey!" Rafe yelled.

"Great. What'd you do, park in front of a fire hydrant?" She hurried alongside him as he held her elbow and towed her along to cross the road.

"No, it's an emergency lane for ambulances. I didn't plan on being here this long."

They waited for another car to go by.

"Come on, fella, I'm here to move the car," Rafe shouted.

The guy shook his head and pushed the lever to lift the car. A second later, an explosion blasted the car into the air. Rafe jumped on Lorelei. She started to cry, not hysterically, but the kind that made her body rack with sobs. She squealed at the suddenness of the second loud detonation.

Rafe drew her tight and covered her head with his arm. When the sounds of crashing debris ceased, he lifted his head.

"Damn." He looked around to where his car had been parked. "Are you all right?"

"Yes."

He got up quickly and hauled her with him. "Come on then."

"Why are we running?" She sniffed up her tears. "Shouldn't we wait for the police?"

He dragged her down an alley between hospital buildings.

"Rafe, someone just blew up your car."

They rounded the corner of the back of the building, went behind the main hospital and down another alley before he stopped.

"What are you looking for?" She watched his study of the area while she wiped more tears from her face.

He flipped open the lid on a dumpster and looked inside.

"What are you doing?" She held a hand to her mouth and turned, afraid for her life.

He turned over a plastic crate and scooped her up.

"Rafe!" She squeaked a stunned sound as he deposited her inside the large dumpster with no care as to what she might land on.

"It's called laying low." He climbed over the side and pulled the lid shut. "Police will be here in about sixty seconds and I have no idea if the bomber is watching."

"Oh, this is gross." She wiped her hands up and down on his jacket.

In the dark, they couldn't see what was what, but she felt the hardness of his body and her insides reacted. An instant attraction left her fingers on him with a lingering touch.

"Aren't you through cleaning off yet?"

"Only if you don't make me move so I touch anything else slimy." She shifted and fell against him. "I think something is soaking into my skirt, but heaven forbid we get out of this stinking can." She tried directing her fears into that hard shell she had maintained until this very bad week started.

"It's not safe and besides, this was your idea to leave the comfort of my home."

"Your home?"

She leaned her head on his arm not wanting to fight with him. Tears continued to trickle down her cheeks and her nose turned into a leaky spigot. Rubbing it against his shoulder, she dried her face.

"It's a secret, but yes. I don't live there, however my uncle left it to me."

"It's a nice place. Were you close?"

"Not particularly. I'm just the only relative he knew."

"How much longer will we have to sit here? This wet stuff is soaking all the way through to my panties."

"Climb over me. I think I'm sitting on old linens or something." He put a hand under her arm to help.

"Ouch." She hit her head on the steel lid sealing them in.

Voices outside stopped her. Rafe pulled her to sit still on his lap. The lid started to open and he pulled her closer, one arm wrapping around her back and his opposite hand holding the back of her head.

"Not a sound," he whispered, the heat of his breath tickled her ear.

Whoever lifted the container lid dumped their garbage. Wet cafeteria food slid over

Lorelei's legs. She knew better than to cry out, but Rafe's plan was much better.

Chapter Eight

Rafe covered her mouth with his. Her warm breath made it easy to find in the dark. The hand he had on the back of her head held her steady. It seemed a good plan in theory until he had her attention, and then, not so amazingly, she became the distraction.

The lid dropped in place. Whoever stood a mere few feet from them moved away with their conversation and the voices faded completely. He should have stopped kissing the sweet mouth against his when she put a hand on his shoulder. Only Lorelei's fingers crept up his lapel, swept around the collar and rose into the short-cropped hair along his nape. He only meant to keep her silent, yet her whimpering cries of excitement echoed in their confined space and he fell under her spell.

Their tongues curled together. Her head turned and gave him access to whatever he wanted. The moans they shared escalated in a needy want of more. He moved his hungry kisses from her face to her cheek and back to her disapproving whines for his departure.

His mind spiraled into a deeply primitive oblivion. How often had he thought of holding her until she begged to be released? He pressed his mouth firmly to hers and raked his hands up and down her back. Any noise she made echoed inside him. Her lips were soft, moist and delicious. He eased back, she followed, and he couldn't find a reason to detach himself from her. His tongue met hers with eager licks. Neither of them traveled beyond the confines of their own territory until he moaned with her slight retreat. It lured her back.

Rafe held her with a tempered restraint. She hummed soft and sweet with a blend of exhaustion and enthusiasm. He reciprocated with his own examination and left nothing uninvestigated. Far more thorough, he progressed through the kiss with rules of engagement. He sipped at the corners of her mouth and continued to torture her with the best kiss he'd ever given. She had been the cause and stir to his hardness, the influence on his desire. The kiss deepened and his hand went on exploratory routes.

He switched his gun to his other hand and did more to pull her to him, not wanting to take a chance at losing her affection. Dragging his lips across her cheek, he took a trail to her jaw, up to her small earlobe. Nibbling the flap of skin, he twisted it between his teeth.

"Rafe," she gasped.

He swirled his tongue along the outer rim of her ear and went back to her jaw, to her smooth cheeks and to her exquisite mouth. Sucking at her lips gave him pleasure and he wanted to leave her panting and gasping for more.

"We shouldn't do this," he murmured between slurps at her throat.

"Why?" She hung her head back.

The dumpster had a stench he ignored. The heat in the metal box had them sweating just as much as their lust-driven kiss. He sipped the moisture from her skin and felt her swallows against his lips.

"There are rules, I'm a government agent."

"What am I ... to you?" She twisted her face away.

He lifted his head and sought her mouth.

"Tell me, Rafe. Tell me what you think."

She turned her cheek to his lips and rolled her head sideways.

"Tell me," she begged.

He gripped the back of her head, holding a fistful of hair. His mouth crashed to hers. Hungrily he attacked her with the frustration he felt. Sucking at her lips, her tongue and her breath, he delayed in giving her any answer.

How did he blurt out she was the best thing to happen in his life?

The loud clang against the inside of the dumpster made Lorelei freeze. Her breath panted heavily on top of his.

"Damn!" Rafe fumbled around next to them. "I dropped my gun."

A giggle bubbled out of Lorelei and it sliced right through the seriousness of their situation.

"It's not funny."

"I know." She laughed.

"Then how about you stop making noises as if it was?"

"I can't help it."

They both let things get out of hand and it put them in danger. Laughter relieved the stress.

"Lorelei, cut it out, already."

"I can't help it."

"Just help me find my gun. This is serious if you hadn't noticed," he grumbled.

"Someone tried to blow us up tonight."

"I think I'm quite aware of that fact and I am looking for your blasted gun."

She poked her hands around his legs and then bumped the front of his trousers.

"Oops," she mumbled. "Sorry."

"That's okay," he grunted.

His erection swelled painfully with their prolonged kiss. She seemed to take more care with her hands while he wished for the sensation to singe him again.

"I think I've found it." She slid her hand along his side.

"Just be careful with it."

Her hand glided up his thigh and into his fingers. She held his hand and placed the gun in his palm.

"Thanks."

The silence grew heavy as he dissected everything about their kiss.

"Rafe?"

"Yeah, I'm still here."

"Will it be much longer? I'm uncomfortable and tired. At some point, we'll have to get out and take our chances."

"Lay against me and we'll give it another fifteen minutes." He put an arm gently around her. "By then, the police will have a lot of the mess cleared up and spectators, including whoever planted the bomb, will be bored enough to have left."

She trembled and he thought he heard her sniff back a sob. He didn't say anything and Lorelei drifted off to sleep. Fifteen minutes went past and he no longer heard any sirens. For a time, police would mill about for the cleanup crew. No one would comb the vicinity for suspects. His only real concern was the killer. Was that man hovering in the area like death?

"Lorelei, are you ready to go?" he asked, quietly waking her.

"I don't want to get up yet," she mumbled into his jacket.

“Lorelei?” he whispered louder, needing her awake and verbally attacking him to remind him she couldn’t possibly mean anything to him. “You’d rather stay here?”

“Uh-huh. You go ahead and get up,” she groaned. “You’ve been hogging the bed all night.”

She hugged him tighter and every time he tried to dissuade his affections, she made arguments against it.

“Lorelei, it’s time to wake up.”

“Five more minutes, Rafe.” She snaked her arms around him.

He couldn’t see her, but looked down wishing he could. Asleep and dreaming of him in bed caught his fantasy. She ensnared him into her dream and he embraced her as she wiggled tight to his side. Five more minutes, ten, what did he care as long as she was safe, content and in his arms?

He actually waited until Lorelei stirred on her own a half hour later.

“Rafe?”

“Yeah, I’m still here.”

“That’s nice, but I don’t want to be. I’m stiff, stinky and ready to get out.” Lorelei righted herself and pushed the container lid up. “I’d rather take my chances than spend another minute in here with you.”

From the soft glow of an alley light, Rafe saw regret in the expression on Lorelei’s face. “I know what you mean.” He smoothed a hand over her arm.

He didn’t relish the idea of staying forever in the dumpster with her either. Except as she had meant to say, they were in the dumpster. He got up and held her waist as she rolled over the edge of the container.

“Careful,” he warned.

“I can do it.” She dropped over the side and landed feet first. Only her legs didn’t hold and she continued in a downward collapse to the pavement.

“Are you all right?” Rafe quickly climbed out.

She made an adorable face. The blend of annoyance and surprise came charmed by funny little sounds. Gurgled grunts and groans wheezed out with each breath she took.

“Lorelei?”

“Yes, I’m all right.” Her hand shot up on an outstretched arm.

The fine tapered fingers waggled at him to help her. His first grip slipped and he took another hold.

“I’ve got something gushy squished between the cheeks of my ass and you’re taking far too long getting me off the ground.”

Rafe smiled. The dreamy, asleep Lorelei was gone. Back from the land of Nod, he had the familiar mouthy Lorelei with him. In a way, he had missed that for the half hour she slept. It was too calmly quiet.

“Have you ever had the feeling of pins and needles in your foot after sitting on it a long time?” She didn’t wait for him to answer. “Well I feel like that from head to toe.”

Rafe held his arms out, letting her use him for balance as she danced to make the blood circulate and regain its momentum throughout her body.

“Can you walk now?” He looked down at her feet shuffling to stir the energy back in place.

“Yes.” She smiled.

He smiled back and they had nothing to be happy about. Someone tried to kill them.

He took her hand in his and led her around the building. They stopped when he saw people cleaning up the mess in the street.

“We could have been in that car.” She leaned against the building.

“But we weren’t.” He stood behind her and put his hands on her shoulders. “You’re a mess.”

She turned around and looked him over. “And you’re not. I think you dumped me in that trash container knowing which side they’d throw the food on.”

“You know, you have a little line that creases right here when you’re upset.” He put his finger to the spot between her thin, well-defined eyebrows.

“I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but you have several in the same spot and they are not little.” She poked at his forehead.

Then her finger touched lightly to his scar. Gently, as if it still hurt, she traced the line down his face. He gazed at her without a single drawback from her touch.

“You don’t want to touch that ugly thing.” He pulled her hand away, not liking that his marred face attracted her sympathy.

“Maybe I do, maybe I don’t. However, I don’t think it’s ugly.” She put her other hand up and cupped his cheek. “It bothers you that some people only see that instead of you doesn’t it?”

He didn’t answer.

“Well, Agent Salazar. As I’ve said before, I find you handsome, even with the scar.” She stroked his cheek. “You’re a dangerous man.”

“Oh?”

“You could steal a woman’s heart while she was looking.”

Rafe started for her mouth. He hungered for another taste of her lips. She had a breathless passion before and he sought the wildness, hoping to embrace her energy.

Chapter Nine

“Shall we go?” Lorelei swallowed.

She took her hands from him and turned to look at the bombsight. She needed to stare at anything other than into Rafe’s blue eyes. The scar was his weakness and she shouldn’t have mentioned it. He came with too many emotions tied to that old wound and she didn’t want anything from him she didn’t come by honestly.

“We’ll go this way.” He took her arm and directed her back the way they had come.

“My apartment isn’t far from here,” she reminded him. “Maybe we could go there and clean up before you take me to my prison.”

“That wouldn’t be safe.”

“Maybe not, but then if they think we’re dead, no one will be looking.” She tugged on his hand. “Please, this stuff is making me ill.”

“All right, but if we get killed, it’ll be your fault and I’ll blame you.” He pierced the air in front of her nose with his finger. “Just so you understand that.”

“I understand, okay.”

He touched her face. “I’m sorry about your father.”

Lorelei bit her bottom lip and nodded her thanks. “Knowing he was going to die, I thought I’d be better prepared.”

Rafe put an arm around her and pulled her close. “It’s hard to handle when someone dies, no matter what you already know.”

She sniffed up her tears. “Let’s go. I’d like to take a shower.” She picked at the food in her hair.

“No cabby is going to let you in his car looking like this.” He took off his jacket and put it around her shoulders.

They walked a couple blocks before Rafe hailed a cab. The driver curled his nose up and glared at them through his rearview mirror. She avoided picking at the food bits.

At her apartment door, a box lay propped in the corner. The big ribbon, the size and shape told her florist.

“Someone sent me flowers.” She rushed to pick it up.

Rafe grabbed the box from her. He held it to his ear and listened.

Her heart pounded in fear.

He knelt down and carefully untied the ribbon and lifted the lid. Inside laid a dozen roses and a card.

“Do you know Charles Vaughn?”

“Yes!” Lorelei bent down and snatched everything up from the floor.

“A date you missed?” He held the card out to her between two fingers.

The need to lie and say yes seemed great for all of a minute.

“No, he’s my boss. You know, as in District Attorney, Charles Vaughn?”

“Oh.” Rafe opened the apartment door.

Lorelei read the note. “The flowers are to cheer me up because of the shooting.”

“Sounds like a guy that cares about you.”

“He’s just trying to keep one of his best ADA lawyers from breaking down with hysterics. It makes me wonder what he’ll do when he finds out about my father or that

I'm not coming back to work for a while."

Lorelei sat the box down and with a smile, began peeling of her stinky clothes. She dropped them one by one on the floor. Absurd thoughts went through her head and she left the seductive trail to her bedroom. Even in all her rush to get clean, her thoughts and now her actions, sought to engage Rafe in sex. She really couldn't have asked for a better kiss or anyone more handsome than him to console her.

Aside from the drama, Lorelei felt close to Rafe. All day, he cared about her in ways well beyond the scope of his job. It appealed to her lonely heart. The shock of her father's death would pass and she'd cry again, but for now, she needed to feel loved.

Rafe's watch of her was obvious. Easy as baiting the hook, she reeled him in with the steady line of shoes, blouse, skirt, bra and finally the panties. She took no care in concealing herself from him as she strip-walked to the bathroom.

She turned the handles in the shower and got in, giving him a show of her naked backside. The water pouring over her felt absolutely wonderful and she scrubbed everywhere to get the stink off. Putting time in going over specific spots with seductive purpose, the shadow of Rafe in her doorway motivated her. If she needed a way to humiliate herself, then it would be in her next moves.

Purposely Lorelei dropped the bar of soap. The hammered glass distorted, but it wouldn't conceal her actions. She bent over and lightly touched the glass door with her bottom. If the water hadn't drowned her hearing, she might have heard his response.

Next she wiped over her breasts, giving him the teasing side view. Outlines, she reminded herself with each move. *Give him good profiles.* When she was all rinsed and the water turned off, Lorelei reached for the towel on the top of the shower door. Her breasts compressed to the glass and this time she heard the sputter of Rafe's breath.

She wrapped the towel around her torso and went for the finale. Popping open the door with a brazen sweep of her arm, she posed in the framework of the opening.

"A little excessive in guarding me don't you think?" She lifted a brow.

The heat of his gaze took in every inch of her exposed flesh outside the blue towel's perimeter. She lifted her arms to wipe back the strand of wet hair and the towel rose on her legs.

"The last time you were in a room alone, you climbed out a window." His voice had some hoarseness and he coughed to clear it.

Lorelei laughed and took another towel to wrap her wet hair. "No windows in here if you took a second to look."

"I hadn't noticed."

No, she guessed not, since even now, his gaze wouldn't leave hers.

"If you don't want to stay long, I suggest you get busy."

"Doing what?"

"A shower." She brushed passed him to get out of the bathroom. "You may not look too bad, but believe me when I say, you stink."

She opened her closet and took down a box. The fine hairs on her body danced as he continued to watch her every move.

"These are some clothes of my father's and I think something should fit you." She pulled out jeans, t-shirts and even socks. "Help yourself."

She wanted to back away when he neared to inspect and select. She didn't want to throw herself at the man, except he knew right where to stand to corral her. Trapped by a

chair, a closet door and him, she remained close as he picked up clothes.

"I won't take too long." He went back to the bathroom and pushed the door partly shut.

Lorelei waited one whole minute as she thought of Rafe undressing. Then, sucking in a whole lot of brazen air, she pushed open the door.

He had quickly removed his shirt and his pants so what remained nearly knocked her back in awe.

"Do you need something?" He tossed his pants to the corner with her dirty clothes.

"You watched me." Her voice almost squeaked.

"So I did."

"I figure it's my turn to watch you." She swallowed as he moved in her direction.

"But I don't intend on bolting out any window."

"Not even if I admit I'm attracted to you?"

"That doesn't sound bad enough to make me run." His pace towards her was hesitant.

"You wanted to keep things formal, remember? Phillip said you were a by-the-book sort of guy."

His eyes glassed over and she shuffled forward. She could have slapped herself for mentioning his dead partner in the middle of her seduction.

"I'm sorry, maybe if I don't say anything." She lowered her gaze.

Rafe's last steps came swift and his arms circled her as quick. She put both hands on his firm, well developed chest. The dark hair trapped her fingers like tiny binds. His head lowered to kiss her and she pushed him to stop.

"I do enjoy kissing you." She tried to back away. "However, I suggest you take the shower first. The rancid smell of sour milk is nauseating."

His fingers snatched hers and pulled her the rest of the way into the bathroom. He flipped the button lock and released her hand.

"You do want me to watch." She laughed with a rush of enthrallment tickling her senses.

"I want you to make sure I'm as clean as you need me to be." He pulled his boxers down and kicked them away.

Lorelei took a deep breath at the sight of him. Nothing was small on this man, absolutely nothing at all. Standing back to get a good visual, her gaze drifted up to his. She recognized the hunger because of her famished need of sex. The real fathomless kind that even if he made love to her, she wouldn't be satisfied with once.

Rafe dipped a finger into the towel knotted around her. His knuckle tucked right into her cleavage. His other hand jerked the towel free from her hair. Pulling and coaxing her to the shower, he started the water with one hand while the other kept grip on the blue terry wrap.

"Go on," she whispered seductively. "Get in and assume the position, Agent Salazar. Let's see how you like being frisked."

She pushed at him to go and Rafe turned his back to her. His hands spread on the wall. She couldn't resist sliding her finger down the center of his spine and venturing to the crack of his ass.

"You'll be sure to check all my concealed areas won't you, ADA Blackwell?"

"I assure you, Agent Salazar. I'm a very thorough person." She dropped the towel

and kicked it to the corner of the shower where Rafe could see and imagine her standing naked behind him.

Lorelei picked up the soap and lathered his back. Rubbing over the taut muscles, she felt the tension and strain ease beneath the glide of her fingertips. His skin quivered as she progressed lower.

“Tell me about the scar, Rafe.” She kissed the center of his back while massaging the long planes of muscle beneath his winged shoulder blades. “I’d really like to know.”

“A car accident,” he groaned.

She knew it a lie. Moving low and steady to the lower muscles, she kissed there and her wet hair slapped his buttocks. Farther down, she ran her tongue between the clenched cheeks. Gliding her fingers up between his legs, she slipped her fingers up the inside of his thigh and cupped the taut skin hanging heavy.

“Rafe?”

He made a low growl.

She kissed one muscled cheek and nipped it playfully while rubbing his legs and soaping his thighs.

“Come on, please tell me or I’ll stop.”

“A confrontation,” he moaned.

She prodded him to open his legs wider for her to massage his balls.

“And?” She pressed his anus with the pad of her thumb.

“He was a smuggler ... importing illegal Cuban ... jeez, Lorelei.” He choked on the words as her strokes ventured into the sensitive region.

She moved her forefinger into place and pushed it inside the crinkled ring of his bottom. Then wiggling in two inches, she fondled his prostate.

“Go on.” She stopped moving.

“I can’t.” His body shook and she reached forward between his legs to grasp his erection.

“I insist.” She pumped the soft skin back and forth on his cock.

He didn’t have the chance to say more as his body jerked and stiffened with the repetitive motion. Start and stall—the thick warmth of liquid ejaculating from him rolled over her hand.

“Damn!” Rafe slammed the shower wall.

“Should I stop?”

“No ... no, don’t stop.” He breathed heavily. “Cigars ... he was smuggling cigars into one of the Miami harbors.”

His body tensed and another shot of creamy fluid oozed over her knuckles.

The wheeze of his breath fought to gain all the air he could while standing under a steady stream of water. She eased her finger out of his bottom and stood while sliding both hands around to the front. Scratching over his stomach, she let her breasts compress against his back as she held him.

Rafe lowered an arm and she pushed it back to the wall. “Not yet, Agent Salazar, I’m not through with my search of you, nor my interrogation.”

He resumed his position.

“So, you lost a fight?” She traced the groove in the center of his stomach from his navel to chest.

“In a way, my partner Kari was killed.”

“Oh, I’m sorry, Rafe.” Lorelei circled around, putting herself in front of him. She rubbed up and down the sides of his ribs. “Were you and she involved?”

“Just partners and friends. I had a girlfriend and she had a boyfriend.” He cupped her face.

“What happened?” Lorelei continued her consoling strokes. Their wet bodies molded together as he kept his head bowed to shield her from the shower of water falling on them.

“The guy had Kari around the throat with a knife. He told me to drop my gun and he’d let her go. I was stupid enough to believe him. I put my gun down and he cold-bloodedly slit her throat. I grabbed my gun and charged him. The knife slid across my face just as my gun went off in his chest. Kari was dead by the time I got to her.”

Lorelei had heard all the horror stories. Seen enough crime photos and viewed enough crime scenes, but nothing hit her quite the way Rafe’s story did. She turned the faucet off and reached up to hug him around the neck.

He put his hands under her bottom and had no trouble hoisting her up where she could wrap her legs around his middle.

Lorelei sorted through all the men she’d slept with and not one had her total admiration. She felt silly thinking of love, yet it seemed naturally suited to how she felt when around Rafe. Even angry, he had stimulated her nerves enough to wet her panties with a profound lust.

He covered her mouth with his and while kissing, he blindly carried her out of the shower. His tongue teased hers. Hot, searing, each passionate gasp he took claimed her breath. She rode him like a stallion with a saddle horn rubbing her bottom. Across the bathroom to the door, his hand left her back to unlock the knob. His mouth remained fixated on tasting every drop of saliva she had.

“Lorelei, don’t do this out of pity.” He lowered her to the mattress of her bed.

“You were going to get me here long before you had my sympathy, Rafe.” She laced her fingers behind his head and pulled him down.

“Now how is that? We didn’t exactly start off on the best of terms.”

“In Phillip’s office, you worried about what I thought about your scar.” She stroked a finger over it. “And all I saw was your beautiful eyes hungering for what we’re doing now.”

“You’re sure my looks didn’t have to do with how I wanted to strangle you for accepting Phillip’s help?”

“When my neck is up here under my chin and your gaze was aimed down my blouse, I knew exactly what you were thinking. Besides, there had to be a great deal more to you than arrogance and vanity.”

Rafe kissed her deeply. He smelled wonderful after the shower. Her lilac scented soap filled her nose and she buried it under his chin and pressed kisses to his skin.

“Oh Rafe,” she moaned, writhing beneath him.

She combed and scratched his scalp in agitation. It had been a long time since a man had touched her. She couldn’t remember all the sensations she’d missed. Somehow, she didn’t think she’d ever had the ones she now experienced with Rafe’s lips grazing over hers in feathery light brushes. His kisses slurped at her like a tasty piece of candy.

“Rafe,” she murmured over and over. “Oh, Rafe, make love to me.”

Her breasts nestled in the short hair on his chest and she clutched at him with the

overwhelming release of emotions. From nowhere, except her crazy mind, could she turn her seduction into a cry-fest. Tears erupted and wet his thick, smooth shoulder.

"Lorelei, what's wrong?" He lifted his head and held her face.

She kept her eyes shut and sniffled like a baby. "I don't know."

His warm lips touched her forehead, her nose and once again her mouth.

"I think I do." He hugged her. "Phillip, the threat against your life, your father, those add up to a pretty miserable past twenty-four hours."

"And you." She looked at him when he took a deep breath.

"I have been pretty rotten to you, haven't I?" He swept a finger under one eye and then the other.

"We both were a bit obnoxious—testing boundaries I guess."

His features softened with his tender smile. Her heart attacked her ribs because Rafe had tears as well. They may not have been shed, but she was a sucker for someone taking pity on her.

"I think I have an idea to make it better for a little while."

"Oh? I thought I had this idea."

He grinned with a sly foxy lift of his brow and leapt off the bed. "Wait right there while I get something."

She rolled on her side and tried to figure out what he had planned. Instinctively, her ear trained on the front door with a crazy notion he might flee. Then he stuck his head in around the door.

"Close your eyes."

Lorelei put her hands over them with a laugh. "What are you doing?"

Her eyes flew open as a rainfall of feathery touches landed on her. Rafe stood over her sprinkling rose petals on her and the bed. She fought the tears and lifted her arms to claim him. His empty hands skated over her as he knelt.

"The flowers seemed to cheer you up before."

"Having you here is a pretty good lift to my spirits too." She stroked circles on his cheek with the back of her hand.

His mouth fell on hers and she curled upward to feel the glorious heat of a man unintentionally working hard at making her love him. She nipped his ear and ran her tongue over the outer rim.

"You taste good here," she whispered.

"Hold still, Lorelei."

"Hold still?" she whined as he got up again.

Everything about him excited her beyond the capacity to remain immobile. She had perpetually labored for a better position so he'd not miss one place on her. Her body went rigid and she picked her head up.

"Rafe?"

He returned an instant later from the bathroom—his pants in hand, plucking his wallet from a pocket. She smiled at how wonderfully sexy the man was searching for a condom. While he fumbled with the billfold, his face appeared too serious. Yet it was for a good cause. His body was rock hard and anxious to be on top of her.

"Guess what?" Rafe looked up sadly.

No. He couldn't bring her to the edge of insanity and leave her dangling because he didn't carry the necessary safety net. It was unacceptable.

Chapter Ten

"I don't want to know. I don't care to know. Come back to the bed and we'll not worry over consequences." Lorelei pleaded, concluding naturally he didn't have a condom. "I'll trust you're healthy if you'll trust I am."

Her desperation didn't go unnoticed. She bewitched him with love spells and unspoken taunts of a carnal utopia.

"Lorelei, it's not that."

"Then nothing else matters as long as I have you."

He didn't know what to say. The joke took a serious turn. He held the foil pack up before she could blurt out silly love stuff he couldn't handle.

"I have one," he laughed, nervously.

He didn't want to misinterpret her meaning any more than he wanted to spill his heart out. This was supposed to be a moment of indulgence, a relaxation from the danger they escaped.

"Oh you ... you ... you better be good, that's all I can say. Making me want you so much I'd risk pregnancy. I haven't been with anyone in a very long time." She held his face when he lowered down to her. "And I certainly know I've never wanted anyone as much."

"I didn't mean to worry you." Rafe kissed her nose. "It's been over six months for me as well and I was surprised to find this still in my wallet."

"The girlfriend?" She stroked the scar over his brow.

"Uh huh," he hummed, kissing her in between questions.

"She didn't like the scar?" She dragged her lips over his cheek.

"I don't know. She was around for a while. I'd like to think it was other problems, but when they all started after the incident, it was hard to believe it didn't have something to do with my changed appearance." He kissed her lips lightly. "Do we need to talk about this now?"

"No." Lorelei proficiently kissed over the scar.

She brought up a hard subject for him to talk about and at the same time, it dispelled all his worries she'd ever be cruel with the information.

"You're beautiful, Lorelei."

"So I've been told." She circled her fingers over his one ear. "But tell me more." She kissed his jaw and made tiny pecks chase one after another to his earlobe.

"You're gorgeous, refined and delicately shaped." He brushed the kisses along her collarbone. "Tell me something you don't think I know."

"I'm afraid."

"Lorelei, I know you're frightened by what's happened. But I promise I'll protect you." He lifted his head and looked at her glistening eyes. "I promise." He bowed his head and put his forehead against hers.

She nuzzled her face to his and Rafe drew her to him. The wiggling, squirming legs and arms swarmed him with urgency and he met them with vigor. He not only needed to make love to the woman, he desired the way she wanted him without attachments. He wasn't ready, but if he was, she could be the right fit.

Rafe lifted over her and for a second looked at her with reserve. This would change a lot about how he felt. Before, it was a possibility to fall in love with her. Now was dangerously close to that precipice and he took a moment to see if she was prepared to maybe accept that he could love her. All thoughts of not wanting commitment drifted away. How could he not desire the woman when she offered up so much affection? Could they have that same loving adoration out of the bed?

"We can't hold back because of something that might not be, Rafe. For the moment, let's love one another as if nothing else matters," she whispered, raking her fingers down the center of his chest.

"You read my mind, too well," he murmured, and lowered down against her.

She threw her arms around his neck. Her breasts flattened to him. He kissed her hard, dangerously aggressive. He stole all her breath, afraid it would be the one and only time, he could have her pretending to be in love with him.

Lorelei wiggled her silky body against him. They couldn't get closer and he smiled thinking how in her anxiousness she might feel she could. He couldn't protest. It gave his trapped cock an arousing stimulation to have her grind restlessly in such a way.

He put most of his weight on his elbows leaving his hands free to finger her cinnamon hair and twirl it into big curls.

"Can we skip foreplay?" she asked.

"Why, are you in a rush to have me off you?"

"No. I'm in a rush to have you in me."

He didn't have an argument for her claim, except he had enough manners not to go plundering into a woman without the cuddling.

Her hands went to his hips, urging him. The coolness of her fingers wrapped his hot cock and guided it into place. He pushed a little and she let go. Her hand slid under his balls and kneaded them for a few seconds.

"That feels good," he moaned.

"I like touching you here."

"Yeah, well be my guest to touch all you like." He lifted and lowered, stroking the entrance of her sex.

Faster and faster she moved up and down. Alternately her finger constricted on his balls. When she let him shove his cock between her parted nether lips, her insides took over the job of squeezing him. Her vaginal muscles snatched and tightened, flexed and drew him in deeper.

The back of her knuckles glided up his belly. Her hand rolled and her palm slipped up to his chest. He lifted on his hands, feeling the loss of her breasts tickling his ribs. She rubbed both hands in a sweeping motion, from the center, outward.

"You're a gorgeous man," she hummed appreciatively. "And I love the natural tan to your skin."

"How do you know it's natural?"

Her hands slid over his hips and she urged him to thrust. In massaging squeezes on his ass, she pulled him into her.

"No tan lines." Her nails dug into the flesh and he pushed into her farther.

"I could sunbathe in the nude."

"You could and I'd really get a thrill watching, but then there are your armpits. Even the best sunbathers don't get them evenly matched to every place else." She tickled the

flesh and pulled the hair he had there.

"It's possible I'm meticulous."

Her hips lifted and he drew back, not ready to give her everything she wanted.

Her touch returned to his chest. Her focus landed her fingertips on his nipples. She rubbed over them briskly.

"Tell me. A smidge of Cuban?"

"Half."

"Half?" Her head cocked to the side.

"Is it a problem?"

"No. I'm just surprised."

Her play with his nipples sped up his plans and he thrust into her harder. He rocked his hips, pumping up and down.

"Oh God ... Rafe ... faster," she cried.

He dragged his cock up and down with each shove. Raking the hard length of his erection over her clit, he made her cries turn to stuttered whines.

"Please, faster." She slapped his ass, startling him.

He rammed into her with a hard jolt.

"Yes," she shrieked. "Yes, like that."

He beat his body against hers to the rhythm of her smacking his bottom. One ass cheek and then the other, she played him like bongo drums. The tempo made him sweat profusely.

"Oh yes, fuck me hard, my Cuban stud."

The hard-nosed, ADA Blackwell became a sex nymph, a lustful wanton, a sensuous woman begging him to perform at his best. He leaned into her, bouncing his hips up and down, making her follow. He dropped his head and captured her lips. Thrusting his tongue into her mouth, he lowered his whole body onto her and pressed her into the mattress.

Lorelei writhed with frustration at the weight he subjected her to. She clawed his back and he felt the slicing strokes mark his flesh. He rolled to the side and drew her leg over his hip. Bucking against her, he held her face and kissed the salty wetness of her skin.

She wept tears and hugged him stiffly. He couldn't hold out against the strain of her orgasm and his body froze. The heated fluid ballooned the condom. He sucked her lips in with his and kissed her passionately until their bodies relaxed.

Lorelei's kiss retreated and she looked at him through her watery hazel eyes.

"I'm glad you're only half Cuban." She laughed. "I don't think I could keep up with a full one."

He grinned having the boost of pride shoot to his cock. "I was just warming up."

"You were wonderful," she crooned. "Amazing."

"And you're good for a guy's bruised ego."

Her hand folded behind his neck and pulled him to her puckered lips.

"The scar has nothing to do with how I feel about you." She kissed him lightly. "I wish you didn't think it did. You're a handsome, caring man and nothing about you dissuades the way I've wanted to have you in my bed all along."

"I've locked the door and I have a gun." He turned his head and kissed her forehead. "How about we catch forty winks?"

He needed more, a lot more now that he expended his energy on Lorelei. He could go on, if he had to. Make love to her over and over again or he could get on the road. What appealed to him the most was to hold a very special and very loving woman against his beating heart.

“You’re the boss.” She searched the bed for the covers.

Rafe found the edge of the top sheet and pulled it up. “You don’t mind if I hold you, do you?” He tipped up her chin to look at her one more time before closing his eyes. He wanted to take the glow of her smile into his dreams.

“I’d be disappointed if you didn’t.” Her lashes lowered as he planted a long kiss to her puckered lips.

Lorelei fell asleep almost right away while Rafe laid awake thinking. She wiggled closer with a sleepy hum of contentment and her peaceful slumber made him seek some of the same.

“Rafe?”

Lorelei’s whisper pulled him from a sleep he felt he only just started.

“Rafe, wake up.”

“Sorry, sweetheart. Only had one condom, this was a one shot deal tonight.”

“If I wanted more, you’d be putty in my hands. But wake up anyway. I think someone is trying to get into my apartment.”

Rafe sat straight up next to Lorelei already clutching the sheet at her breasts. He hopped off the bed ignoring the distraction of her beauty. Grabbing his holster on the chair, he pulled the gun out.

“Get in the bathroom and stay down,” he ordered.

“Be careful.”

Rafe walked to the living room and stood next to the door. Hearing what sounded like a set of keys, jingling and tapping the doorknob, he decided on surprising the intruder.

Flipping the lock, he flung the door open in one swift move.

Chapter Eleven

Lorelei heard nothing at first. She put on a robe and retrieved her gun from the closet. The familiar woman's voice made her run to the living room.

"Who are you and where is Lorelei?" Her friend Peggy nervously demanded.

"Sweetheart, it's for you," Rafe called over his shoulder, not knowing she'd already emerged from the bedroom.

"Peggy, what are you doing here?" Lorelei tied the sash on the blue terrycloth.

She turned and watched Rafe go back in the bedroom. When she looked back at Peggy, she smiled. Her friend's eyes were as wide as saucers. Fear, surprise and a naked man could most certainly render any woman speechless.

"I was worried about you. You didn't come to the hospital this afternoon." She raised her gaze up and tried to get another glimpse of Rafe. "However, you need not explain. What a stud muffin. Is he a cop?"

"That handsome man is an agent with the ATF."

"He's in the wrong profession. Centerfold would be a right nice spot to put him. I wouldn't even mind the staple in his navel," she sighed.

"I don't think anyone would look past his scar."

"He had a scar?" Peggy's brow lifted. "I didn't see one."

"You'd have to have your gaze aimed up, at his face, instead of his nether region."

"Well he had me all flustered with that weapon." She patted her chest and walked to a chair to sit down.

"I'm sorry about the gun."

"He had a gun?"

Lorelei laughed as Peggy's smile widened.

"So, did you hear the news?"

Peggy always came through for her, especially when she got busy with cases at work. She relied on Peggy almost too much.

"I was with Dad when he died." The thought removed the smile from Lorelei's face. She didn't want to think of the loss and had relied immediately on Rafe to fill the void. His presence became her crutch to keep her head on track. His tender passion in bed had been something she needed even though lust fueled their reason to be together.

"I'm sorry, honey." Peggy patted her hand. "I know you were ready, yet it's still hard when it finally happens. So what problem did you have?"

Lorelei smiled again, liking the way Peggy recognized her need to move off the subject.

"A real humdinger and it's put me under protective custody."

"Doesn't sound as if it's too terrible, the stud looks like he's doing a good job hiding you under the covers. Now get to the part why you're sleeping with your bodyguard. I mean why you're in that sort of position."

"Because of a death threat." She lowered her voice. "Rafe's partner was killed two nights ago by a man they were investigating. A man the DA's office is trying to convict for another murder."

"Wow. I always said your work was exciting," Peggy cooed. "How'd he get the

scar?"

"Long story." She shrugged looking over her shoulder to see if Rafe listened. She didn't want to talk about something he had trouble talking to her about.

"Well you've got to tell me something about that sexy man. Scar or not, I do like his uniform." She leaned forward. "Well hung, isn't he?"

Lorelei continued, happily agreeing .

"You liked to scared the shit out of us, Peggy." Lorelei sat on the chair to give her heartbeat a chance to slow down.

"Me? I had a naked man greet me with a loaded gun and a loaded cock and you were scared?" Her grin became bigger. "Of course, I was all prepared to tell him I wouldn't put up a fight."

Lorelei laughed. "He's pretty amazing, even out of bed."

"I'm happy for you." Peggy patted her hand. "You need someone to take care of you for a change."

Lorelei kept her real smile inward where it warmed her heart to think of Rafe in her future.

"I don't know how long I'll be gone, but here's my checkbook." Lorelei pulled it from her desk drawer. "Come by, pick up my mail and pay my bills for me, please. Rafe will only let me make one phone call a day and if you have any questions, I'll have only three minutes to answer them."

"Aren't you supposed to be holed up in a safe house or something?"

"Yes, except I snuck away to visit my father last night and had a bit of trouble." She checked the doorway to make sure Rafe wasn't there yet. "We were almost blown up."

"Oh no, that car bomb last night?" Peggy gasped. "It was all over the news. Oh, Lorelei, you have to be careful."

"It was Rafe's car." She nodded. "He's keeping me in a house about two hours from here. A house his uncle Milton Wainwright left him. Can you imagine having an Uncle Milty? Anyways, I don't know when I'll be back, but keep saying prayers that it'll be soon." She hugged Peggy. "You better go. Rafe is going to realize we've been here too long already and make me leave."

"Okay, but you take care of yourself." Peggy started crying. "How do you get in these fixes, Lorelei?"

"Lucky, I guess. Don't worry about me. You know I can take care of myself." She opened the door and watched Peggy get on the elevator.

"Time to go, Lorelei," Rafe said from behind her.

She pushed the door closed and turned around.

"So it's the morning after." She swallowed. "Do we chalk this up to a one-night stand?"

His beautiful blue eyes, marred by a long ago pain, stared hard at her. She thought once out of bed, the warm generosity he had with his affection might have dissipated like a morning-after horror show. He lifted his arms in response and she rushed into them, not caring to know more than what she could get at that moment.

His mouth, with minted toothpaste breath, sealed over hers. Her tongue explored his teeth and the arch to the cavern. He untied her robe and she shivered with his cool fingers snaking around her waist. He had dressed and it didn't matter. Her naked flesh molded to him regardless of the cloth. His hard cock pressed tight to her lower belly as he heaved a

long expelling breath.

"You need to get dressed." His hands massaged the curve of her ass, pulling her into him. "We've spent way too long here."

His kiss attacked her mouth again and his caresses traveled. Rafe made her ache and while she knew he didn't have a condom, he took a satisfying route.

The robe dropped from her shoulders, making a swished plop to the floor. Rafe kissed her skin in a circling pattern. A chirp formed in her throat and sucked down into her lungs. His lips captured her nipple. One and then the other, he laved with rapid attention. The trailing wetness of his kiss ventured south.

Rafe didn't linger with preliminaries. They were rushed for time. He licked deep inside her and his wide, strong shoulders became her support. Shudders rippled from her insides.

He put an arm under her thigh and lifted her leg, exposing her to the hot breeze of his breath. His tongue swirled her clit until she hit his shoulder in agitation.

"Rafe, please," she gasped. "I'm going to fall if you keep this up."

"I'll catch you." He pressed his tongue against the pulse.

Her orgasm exploded.

"Oh, God." She clutched at his hair.

He put his hands on her hips and ran kisses up her belly, up her breasts and up her neck.

"You taste good."

"Incorrigible man."

He laughed and hugged her.

"The clothes don't fit too badly." She smoothed over the plaid cotton.

"They'll be fine, now come on." He led her to the bedroom. "Hurry up and get clothes on while I gather anything that looks like we've been here."

"Rafe, if the man that set the bomb stayed to watch, he'd know we didn't get in the car." She tossed the robe to him and he put it in the bag.

"That's why we don't want to be here."

She felt his gaze inspect the length of her as she moved around getting dressed. She liked the way her insides churned from his hungry look.

"We'll go get some stuff at my place next. Seems what I had, disintegrated with my car."

She put a blouse on, slipped her skirt into place.

"Oh, the funeral. Rafe, you're going to miss it." She covered her mouth with nervous fingers.

"Carolena wanted me to be here for you." He pulled her to him. "She was right. You need me more than Phillip does."

The phone rang and Lorelei looked at it as something evil in her apartment. The last time she answered it, a man threatened her.

"Let it ring," Rafe said. "It could be someone keeping tabs on the apartment."

"Wouldn't it be better if they watched the place?" She picked up her purse to go.

"It's possible they're doing both, but I doubt it." He carried the trash bag. "I believe they'll think we're too smart to come here."

"Yet, someone could be waiting for us outside this building." Lorelei stalled at the door.

"I know." He put a hand to the small of her back. "But we can't stay here forever. We'll hope Bennington didn't hire the cream of the crop with intelligence."

She pushed the elevator button and it opened almost instantly. They both stepped back a little startled.

"You scared me." She pressed the lobby button.

"Me? You jumped first. I just followed the chain reaction." He pushed the lobby button as well. "And you thought the elevator was slow in the hospital. We should have taken the stairs."

"I don't see any rush to go to my death." She folded her arms, disturbed by what waited outside and how they reverted to their moody behavior again.

"And you think I do? It wasn't me that started all this." He brushed her arm as she darted out of the elevator. "Lorelei, I'm sorry."

"Why? If it's how you feel, then go ahead and keep blaming me for everything bad."

"Lorelei, wait. I wasn't thinking before opening my mouth." He grabbed her arm before she could get outside the building. "Please, let me go outside first."

She jerked free of his hold and pulled the door open with a bow to his wishes. "Go. Stand out there until someone shoots you and then you can blame me for that as well."

Rafe wrapped an arm around her waist and pulled her up against him. "I don't blame you." He cupped the side of her face. "I honestly don't hold you responsible for anything."

He kissed her and she accepted it with reserve. She had to stop laying her heart out for him to trample on or she was going to get seriously hurt. More than any bullet could do. How would it be to love a man so much and not have it reciprocated?

Rafe's lips were warm memories of the time they spent in bed. His hold had a commanding tightness and his caress endeared him to her soul. His sensual touch moved from her face to gently massage the tense muscle going from her neck to her shoulder where he pressed a kiss along the bend.

"Be careful," she whispered.

She watched him ease through the doorway and look around.

"Come on." He held his hand out for her to join him and then led her quickly down the street.

Lorelei studied everything as a possible evil. From a woman crossing the street with a stroller, to the car parked diagonally from the building, she examined the area. She checked the windows and shadowy doorways with a strong wave of paranoia. Hanging onto Rafe, she walked cautiously along like a frightened child.

"Where are we going?" She stumbled to keep up with his quick-paced steps making her purse swing from her shoulder.

"Dumpster." He turned down an alley.

"You're not going to toss me in one again!" She balked at his tug.

"No, I'm going to throw this stuff away." He let go of his tight grip on her and went to a large container marked 'store use only'.

"Wait!" She mentally went over everything in the bag.

"What?" Rafe held it over the edge of the open dumpster.

"Nothing, go ahead. I was just thinking if there was anything I really didn't want you to dispose of, but I guess it doesn't matter."

He glanced at the bag. "Was there something? I'll take it out if you want."

Lorelei shook her head. "None of it's important." She smiled. "You can buy me new."

Rafe dropped the bag and she listened to it plop to the bottom of the obviously empty can.

"What if I refuse?" He grabbed her hand. "Will you go naked?"

"I might."

They continued their journey along the sidewalk until they reached a used car lot. Rafe pulled his wallet from his back pocket and plucked out a credit card. Lorelei glanced at the insignia for the ATF.

"If you use that, there will be a whole lot of explaining for the expenditure of a car."

"I know." He peered in the window of an exceptionally clean sedan. "What do you think of this one?"

"I like that one over there." She pointed at the least practical car on the lot.

It was small, sporty, two seated and had a stick shift that would mean no whoopee in the car, neither for her nor anyone else Rafe picked up. She had to think of the future.

"We need safe and cheap. I'm going to put it on my expense account and I may end up having to pay for it out of my pocket when all is said and done at the agency."

"You're an 'ole stick in the mud." She walked alongside him to look in the car.

"Good day!" a man cheerfully announced. "Welcome to Happy Motors, where we put you in a ride that suits your life!"

"What's the least you'll take on this one?" Rafe slid in the seat and looked over the dash.

"Sir, that's a top of the line model—fully loaded."

Lorelei eased behind the man she knew to be a crook. Charlie, the car dealer liked to scam people and it was a wonder he'd never gone to jail.

"Come on, Charlie, how much?" Lorelei tapped him on the shoulder and enjoyed his surprised expression at seeing her.

"Oh, you two are together."

"Bottom line, Charlie," she demanded.

Rafe continued to go over the details of the car. He popped the hood and checked underneath.

"You know I got to make a living," Charlie whined.

"Must I remind you about the two old ladies in my building that both bought a car from you that didn't work after they took possession? The poor dears signed a paper allowing you to remove certain parts. Now while it's a legal move no court could refute on one case, it is illegal to make the habit a scam."

"Okay, okay already, Ms. Blackwell. Take the car at cost, I'll make nothing but I owe you." He walked away grumbling to get the paperwork when she nodded.

"You have even less scruples than I do." Rafe remarked. "You practically threatened the man with jail."

"Me? I did no such thing."

Rafe kissed her and they waited for Charlie to get all the documents. With all the trouble they were in, she found a lot to like being around Rafe.

Chapter Twelve

Rafe stopped the car in front of the safe house. He looked at Lorelei asleep, propped against the door. He thought a long time about their relationship. For practical purposes, they had to put on hold their emotions and personal involvement. Planning how he was going to go each day living with her and not touching her would be hard.

"Lorelei, we're here." He picked up her hand and pulled her from the door.

"That wasn't enough sleep." She stretched and yawned.

"You can get more inside." He opened his door and walked around to open hers.

Lorelei took his hand. She stuck one delicious leg out the door after the other.

"You could carry me."

"You need to stretch your legs." He let go and she wasn't about to be put off.

"Come on my strong, brave man." Her arms coiled around his neck. "You had no problem picking me up to put me in a dumpster."

"Lorelei." He peeled her arms away. "This is back to business. We can't pretend we're in love anymore."

Her eyes widened as if she hadn't seen it coming. They'd had their fun in her bed. She'd even been the one to suggest making believe there was nothing between the two of them to think about.

"I'm hungry." Lorelei walked up the sidewalk without looking back at him.

He'd hurt her, but they really needed to slow things down. Not only was it a bit unethical for him to sleep with a victim, it was distracting.

"Lorelei, you're back." Mac hugged her once they got in the house.

"I'm going to take a nap." She resumed her stiff trek away from him.

"Rafe, is something wrong?" Fitz jerked his head toward the empty hall that Lorelei disappeared down.

"Not now that I've got her back in this house." Rafe lifted a finger. "If you two ever let her out of your sight again..." He raked his fingers through his hair. "Never mind."

Lorelei couldn't be controlled, even by him. She would have climbed out the window with him there. He touched his pants' pocket and checked to make sure he had the keys to the car.

Rafe walked down the hall and stopped in front of the door of the room Lorelei obviously selected. It was the one he used when staying with his aunt and uncle. He wondered why she selected that room opposed to the more feminine one his aunt had decorated for Carolena's childhood visits.

Rafe didn't have a right to forge a bond with Lorelei, not while she was in the midst of danger. It wasn't his feelings that concerned him, it was hers. Fear had a great affect on a person and he couldn't let any attachment she displayed, make him think it was anything more than her way of hanging onto him for her safety.

He squeezed his fingers into a fist to knock, paused and then tapped on the door with one knuckle.

"Yes?" Lorelei answered.

"It's Rafe. I was wondering what you wanted to eat."

"It doesn't matter."

He waited to see if she'd open the door and when it didn't happen, he went to the den.

"Fitz, you sit on the front stoop and keep an eye on Lorelei's bedroom window," he ordered.

In the kitchen, he thumbed through take-out menus. Nothing suited him and he was too tired to think. Opening the refrigerator door, he grabbed the box of eggs. They couldn't have been more than three weeks old since he was there last to relax. After cracking the whole dozen into a bowl, he whisked the eggs until they were frothy. In the freezer he found a bag of pre-diced onions and peppers and added them. Pouring the whole mess into a baking dish, he set it in the oven to cook for a meal his uncle called 'unexpected company dinner'. Though, as he recalled, they ate it even when no one showed up unannounced.

Once that was accomplished, he sprinkled on cheddar cheese, and began rounding everyone up to eat the late breakfast.

Mac and Fitz were first. Lorelei dragged into the kitchen rubbing her sleepy eyes and Rafe kicked out the last available chair with his foot.

"Sit before you fall over." He spooned food onto her plate and poured her coffee.

"Who's the chef?" She smiled after her first bite.

Rafe watched her gaze zip from Mac to Fitz and upward.

"You can cook?" She appeared surprised.

"No, I performed magic and made this appear under the spell of abracadabra."

"I hope you'll be getting some sleep after you eat, Mr. Grumpy."

Rafe couldn't think of sleep. His mind constantly battled between what scenarios would make Lorelei take off.

Since the others had all the bedrooms occupied, after they ate Rafe took the sofa. He flipped channels on the television, searching for something interesting.

"The police are still investigating the car bomb that claimed the life of Avery Moore last night," the newscaster announced.

Lorelei sat on the sofa next to him. "This is about us, isn't it?"

"Yes." Rafe glanced down at her pale fingers close enough to his own that he could easily touch them.

"It's unknown if there were any other victims involved. The police have indicated that there were no other bodies found, but it's unconfirmed at this time." The newsman continued.

"We're not dead." Her voice shook. "Bennington will keep looking."

Rafe took the chance she wouldn't read anything more into his touch than need be. He covered her hand and held it.

"He can look all he wants, but he won't find you." He brushed a finger over her smooth skin. "You're safe here with me."

She breathed a contented sigh. He didn't know if it came because of his comment or his touch and he considered both when her finger curled around his pinky.

"You should get some sleep." She slipped her hand farther over his. "You've had very little rest in the past thirty six hours."

"You're on my bed."

"The sofa?" She stood and tugged him to get up. "You can have my room."

"I'm all right out here." He reluctantly got to his feet.

Their fingers remained interlocked as they gazed into each other's eyes. It was still there, the attraction, the will and desire to fall into bed together.

"Now go on and get some sleep." she coaxed.

"How do I know you aren't going to run off and do something crazy?"

"Like what?"

"Oh, I don't know. Go to work, shop for clothes, something." What else was there she could do other than kiss him? He didn't want that and at the same time, he willed her to take hold as she had in the past and pull him to her lips.

"Rafe?"

"Huh?"

She mesmerized him. Irresistible and intoxicating, she hypnotized him as if he were in a drunken stupor. She had the same affect on him as when he drank too many beers.

"Bed?" She moved closer.

There, she invited him. What more did he want?

"We can't." His head lowered to the draw of her blue-green eyes.

"I know we shouldn't." She inhaled his breath close to hers.

"It's not professional."

Her fingers tightened on his.

"Hey, Rafe, Fitz said..." Mac's voice awakened Rafe like a thunderbolt struck him.

He backed from Lorelei and she looked at him as if he were the boy on the playground pretending she had cooties. She hurried off down the hall and he listened to the thump of the bedroom door close.

"What is it?" Rafe sat back down on the sofa and adjusted his pants to relieve the pressure.

"Did I interrupt something, boss?" Mac's stare rolled toward the empty hall.

"No, Ms. Blackwell and I were getting a few things straight about her stay here." He glanced down the hall when the bedroom door creaked open.

Lorelei trotted out carrying a pillow, a book and a smile.

"The room is all yours, Agent Salazar." She plopped down on the cushion and made herself comfy. "Mac, do you and Fitz have a preference as to what we watch on the TV while Rafe takes a nap?"

"Anything sports." Mac sat in the chair. "Hey, Fitz, come on in and watch TV."

"Is there something you wanted to say?" Lorelei batted her eyes at Rafe.

"No."

"Well then, go take a nap already."

He went to the bedroom, feeling the child given the punishment to be away from her. Pacing the room for five minutes, he finally gave in to his exhaustion and lay on the bed. He closed his eyes with choices to make and decisions to question.

Rafe woke from a nightmare. He yelled in his sleep and it caused him to bolt upright in bed. The bedroom door flew open and he stared at Mac and Fitz as Lorelei squeezed between the two men.

"Get out, it was only a nightmare." He bowed his head, letting his chin rest on his chest.

It was probably the worst dream he'd ever had and his heart beat like a jackhammer. Wiping a hand over his face to forget the painful dream, he concentrated on relaxing by taking deep breaths.

“Excuse us, gentlemen.” Lorelei pushed them from the doorway. “Go watch the television and I’ll stay in here with Rafe.”

Their cocky grins, the snickers as they moved away, made it obvious he and Lorelei weren’t hiding their attraction very well.

“I said to get out,” Rafe snapped and rubbed at the kink in his neck.

“I know, but maybe you’d like to tell me what scared you.” She smiled.

“Nothing.”

“Then I could just sit here for a while.”

“It was Phillip,” he said calmer, wanting her to stay.

“I figured as much.” She sat on the end of the bed. “I’ve heard tell that shoes that are too tight put pressure on the brain.”

He watched her pull his brown loafers off one by one and drop them on the floor.

“I think it was Chinese or something having to do with pressure points in the foot.”

“Lorelei, what are you doing?” She tickled the soles of his feet right through his socks.

“I’m making you comfortable.” Her beautiful eyes held him intrigued.

The box springs squeaked as she shifted her position. She rolled down his black crew socks and the touch of her palms on his ankles, heated his insides.

“You’d be amazed at how wonderful a foot massage can be.” She discarded one sock and then removed the other.

She held a foot between her hands and began to meticulously rub each muscle, every fiber until she had his toes flexing easily.

“Who taught you to do that?” He let her work the magic warming his aching feet.

“Old boyfriend.”

He held his foot rigid and she grinned.

“You have to relax.” She slapped his toes.

“And what was this old boyfriend, a masseuse?” He groaned, when she worked her fingers hard into his other foot.

“Just a boyfriend.” She chuckled. “Don’t even remember his name it was that long ago. There, all done.”

“Oh?” He scooted down and rubbed his toes against her skirt.

Shoving his foot under the hem, he stroked between her thighs.

“My turn to give you a massage.” He pressed his toes against her panties and discovered they were damp.

Wiggling along the elastic leg hole, he managed to work his big toe into the folds of hot flesh.

“You might want to go ahead and start removing that blouse too,” he told her.

She moved slowly, pushing one button at a time through the holes. Meanwhile, he fondled her clit, rubbing it back and forth with his big toe. He never thought to use his foot before, but the kinky experiment gave him an erection that threatened to tear his pants open.

“Maybe you should think about undoing your fly.” Small beads of perspiration formed on her face.

He worked his pants open while continuing the exploration into her. Her shaved cunt stimulated the nerves leading to his cock. Memories of her velvet nether lips in his mouth weren’t hard to envision. He rubbed her harder, finding the moment exotic and

electrifying.

Lorelei arched back, leaning on her hands. Her soft moans aroused him. She lifted and rocked against his foot. He watched her climax, felt the tremor in her thighs and experienced something unique when she had her orgasm. From a different perspective, sex wasn't the same. He gave her physical pleasure and received an emotional contentment.

Rafe drew his leg back and sat up. He pulled Lorelei forward and cupped her cheek. She had that dreamy sated glaze to her eyes he remembered from their lovemaking at her apartment. Again, he thought of her in his future.

"It seems the only good sleep I've had was at your apartment." He put his arm around her and lay down. "You don't mind if I use you to get to sleep, do you?"

"I'd be disappointed if you didn't." She snuggled into the niche that fit her to the length of his body.

"Rafe, your plan of professionalism isn't going to work."

"We'll discuss it later."

As her arm draped over his middle, he closed his eyes. "Lorelei?"

"Yes." Her fingers strummed the back of his hand.

"You don't have to get up and leave once I drift off."

"Good, because I like this bed better than the sofa." She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. Rafe's fingers interlocked with hers and they both went to sleep.

Chapter Thirteen

Lorelei woke, listening to Rafe snoring lightly. They had parted during the course of their slumber. He lay on his stomach with the pillow balled up under his head and a death-grip locking it in place. She turned to her side and watched him with fascination. Innocent and serene, he didn't appear to have a worry.

He made a snorting sound as if he was a pig and she put a hand over her mouth to stifle the giggle. Placing her fingers on his mouth, she rubbed the shadow of stubble darkening the surrounding area. Touching the very point of the scar near his jaw, she thought of the pain he'd gone through.

Rafe's happiness possessed her. Tears rolled down her cheek, one chasing another until she wiped her face on the pillowcase. It had become an obsession for her to have him want her as much as she needed him, but could she make him happy? She had fallen in love and didn't know what to do about it.

"Lorelei?" Rafe opened his eyes.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to wake you." She drew her hand back.

"What time is it?" He rolled to his back and stretched his arms up, overhead until they touched the wall.

"A little after three."

He wiped a hand over his face, rubbing his eyes.

"What are we going to do about us?" She blurted out her thoughts.

"What do you mean?" He blinked a few times, apparently more surprised to hear the question than she was to ask it.

"I mean me, you and what we've been doing together."

"There's nothing to do. We're two healthy adults with physical needs."

"You don't think there should be ... could be more?" It was all she could do to hold back the, *I love you, dammit* statement.

"No on both counts." He climbed off the bed.

Shoving his feet into the shoes without socks, he headed out of the room. Lorelei followed in her bare feet. She didn't want to be put off.

"Hey look, the dead do wake when the sun goes down," Fitz joked.

Rafe and Lorelei both shot him an angry glare.

Mac's chuckle ceased and both men hurriedly looked to occupy themselves another way.

"Go get us something to eat," Rafe ordered. He took out his wallet and handed them cash. "Get anything," he added, before either could open their mouths and ask what.

"Bring me a milkshake please." Lorelei smiled to break the tension. "Chocolate."

Mac and Fitz left on the food run and Lorelei stood waiting to broach the subject again with Rafe. He didn't want to face it, yet it was the only thing on her mind. What else was there to do but sit and talk?

"Rafe won't you at least tell me how you feel?" She stayed back away from him, giving him the distance he might need to be honest. "You use words like can't, shouldn't, not professional, yet given the right amount of coaxing, you give in. I know this is an odd time and we don't seem to be two people that could make things work, however, I don't

like the word can't, and I've never believed in the word shouldn't."

"Lorelei, there is nothing to discuss until this case is over with. Strange circumstances make people do things they wouldn't normally do." He combed back his hair with his long fingers.

"You can't possibly have regrets?" Her chest burned with the rejection.

"Yes, in a way I do."

As if someone poured lead into her veins, her body felt weighted, her lungs heavy and she couldn't breathe.

"It was unprofessional. We were thrown together by stressful events." Rafe sat on the sofa, lifted the remote, and pressed the button turning the television off.

Lorelei left the room, not needing to hear more. The situation that night may have heightened her desires, but she couldn't say it wouldn't have happened. She hurled herself out of the house to the backyard, letting the door slam shut for spite. The yard gave her no place to hide. Standing on the patio by a pear tree, she stared at the lawn while fruit bees zipped around savoring the rotten fruit on the ground.

Rafe came out the door fast.

"I haven't run away." She glanced back at him.

He skipped down the three steps and it might have been easier to ignore him if he didn't stand behind her with his hands on her shoulders.

"We've known each other less than a week. I don't think we should jump into this like love-struck teenagers, professing undying love, do you?"

She nodded, hating the confession. The tears ran furiously down her hot cheeks. Rafe smoothed over her shoulders and backed away.

"When this is over, you'll go back to your job, I'll continue on with mine. I don't want to rush into anything that later we'll both feel trapped by."

She listened to Mac and Fitz in the house arguing about forgetting something.

"Dinner's here," one of them called.

She ran up the steps to the kitchen, drying her face on the back of her hand.

"Fitz forgot you wanted a milkshake," Mac announced.

"Well, I wasn't the only one getting food," Fitz grumbled, taking containers out of a bag. "Sorry, Lorelei."

"No problem."

"I'm going for a drive. I'll be back in an hour." Rafe walked away from them all.

Lorelei wanted to throw things, yell and scream with her frustration. The presence of Mac and Fitz prevented her from doing anything.

"Would you two walk a couple blocks and get me a cherry slushie?" she asked.

"We can't leave you alone."

"It won't take you long. I'll lock the doors and sit right on the sofa, I promise."

Mac shook his head.

"How about one of us go?" Fitz told Mac. "You forgot her milkshake."

"Rafe will kill us if we leave her alone."

Their bickering continued and Lorelei needed quiet time to think.

"Please, I really want to sit here for ten minutes alone. Go get me a cherry ice or I promise, I'll disappear on you when you least expect it and Rafe *will* have a conniption."

Mac made a face, however, they agreed and she sat down.

Two minutes later, the door opened and she turned to confront Rafe. Only a large

man filled the doorway and he looked nothing like her Latin lover.

Lorelei ran to the kitchen and grabbed the first thing she could find—the toaster.

The man came through the doorway and she hit him solidly in the chest. It sent him staggering back to the den and knocked his gun from his grip. He scurried to retrieve it except his thick arm wouldn't fit under the buffet. She didn't wait to see what he planned next. Lifting a lamp, she hurled the thing at him. The cord, plugging it into the wall receptacle, stopped the lamp midair and the brass fixture dropped to the floor.

"Who are you?" She backed into the sofa and fell over the arm into the cushioned seat.

"Introductions aren't necessary." He came at her.

Lorelei got up and moved around the sofa, keeping furniture between her and the intruder. She tossed objects left and right. Each one glanced off the man. She lifted the photo of the boy in the sailor suit. His eyes captured her attention and she hugged it to her as she grabbed for anything else.

"Who sent you?"

"A man with a lot of money to spend."

"Bennington is going to jail and the government will seize all his assets. You'll get nothing except a cell next to him on death row." She set the picture aside and flipped the coffee table up at him.

"Not if you're dead."

He dodged one way, she went the other. The game lasted for a few minutes and then she picked up the small portable television.

"*Go ahead, make my day!*" Lorelei goaded. "Geez, how I've wanted to say that phrase ever since I saw that Dirty Harry movie years ago."

"I'll make your day, sweetheart, just as soon as I get a hold of you. It'll be the last day you have." The man danced around in front of her like a bobbing chicken.

Rafe burst in on them and it was she, he surprised the most.

Lorelei dropped the thirteen-inch television on the floor as Rafe stumbled through the entrance. The man threatening her made a lunge for her at the same time. He came up with a knife under her chin.

Lorelei could have died with the frightening expression on Rafe's face. She didn't have to ask if he experienced déjà vu. Clearly, Rafe envisioned another time and another woman in the same precarious situation. It was impossible to think how he might react to another set of circumstances that led to a woman's death.

"Put the gun down and I'll let her go," the man sneered with his challenging demand.

Lorelei elbowed the man hard in the stomach and dove for the ground. Rafe fired his gun twice. Her assailant crashed into a cabinet and fell to the floor near her. She crawled away when Rafe dropped to his knees.

Lorelei turned over to look back at the man. He didn't move, not even a twitch. Still, Rafe had his arms out ready to shoot again. Getting to her knees, Rafe slid an arm around her.

"Rafe, you're squishing me." She protested the hard squeezing hold he took.

"You're all right?" He continued staring straight ahead.

"I'm fine. You arrived in time to save me." She reached out slowly and put a hand on Rafe's to get him to lower the gun. "It didn't turn out the same."

"You're sure you're all right?" He gripped the side of her head and pulled her closer.

“Yes.” She hugged him as he kissed the side of her head. “I’m afraid I broke a few things. I know I promised not to, however, he left me no choice.”

Rafe held her for the longest time. His tense muscles were banded tight and she said nothing to stop him from constricting the air in her lungs. The gun hung from the trigger on his thumb when his hands cupped her face. He kissed her a thousand times and hugged her again.

His heart beat fast and she felt it against her chest.

“What made you come back so soon?” She rubbed a calming hand up and down over the back of his shirt.

“A car that sped by. Nothing about it triggered anything in me for about five minutes. Suddenly, the idea of a sleek black Mercedes in a rural area didn’t fit.”

“Lorelei!” Mac came tripping over the carpet into the room.

She stood with Rafe and the thought that came to her was Laurel and Hardy, not Frick and Frack. Mac and Fitz weren’t exactly inept at their job. However, to anyone that hadn’t spent some time with them they sure could give a bad first impression.

Rafe’s shoulders bunched up his neck. Frustration, exasperation, he took too much on himself when it came to her, making everyone a little crazy. She put a hand on his arm to soothe the rage staining his neck crimson. She could no more hold back an incoming jet.

“Where the hell were you two?” Rafe charged. “You’re supposed to be protecting her. But no, what do I find? The woman I have under protective custody is standing here alone, defending herself with a television!”

“We just went to get her a cherry ice,” Mac explained.

“Lorelei said it’d be all right,” Fitz added.

“That’s right. Besides, I had other furniture, and was doing quite well,” she interjected and saw it only made Rafe’s eyes bulge.

“They were derelict in their duties and I can have them written up for not obeying orders.”

“Oh stop it, Rafe. If I recall, you promised to protect me as well, and then you went and left. Just forget it. The man is dead and now I can go home.” She took the cherry drink and slurped at the straw.

“These guys are a dime a dozen, Lorelei. You won’t be safe until Bennington doesn’t find you a threat.” Rafe walked over and examined the man on the floor. “What I don’t get is why he came here to kill you with just a knife. Guns aren’t hard to come by.”

“He had a gun.” She took another sip of her drink. “I surprised him with a well placed whack to his chest using the toaster and he dropped the gun. It slid under the buffet. That thing’s an antique and made solid. He couldn’t move it. Naturally, I kept throwing furniture at him too.”

Rafe rubbed a hand over his eyes and face, and gave a short chuckle. He waved at the other two to leave them alone.

“You’re an amazing woman, Ms. Blackwell.” He tipped her chin up. “I promise, Lorelei, when this is over, we will have a talk about us.” He kissed her lightly. “I do want *an us*.”

“That’s all I wanted to hear.” She wrapped her arms around him with the lightness hope gave to one of her worries. “I needed you to say it was possible.”

He hugged her for a second.

“Mac, Fitz!” Rafe called them to the room and let go of her. “Call the agency and tell them the safe house has been compromised. Give them no details, just that we have a dead man on the premises and we believe he’s a hit man for Victor Bennington.”

“Right, boss.” Mac grinned with his approval at Rafe’s hold of her.

* * * *

It didn’t take long before the place swarmed with police officers and ATF agents. They repeated the whole story over and over, from start to finish, and none of them deviated from the scenario they devised to keep out of the line of suspicion.

“Maybe somehow they found the link to my uncle.” Rafe sat forward on the sofa with his hands clasped together.

Lorelei watched the men take away the body. A chalk mark put a disturbance on her concentration. She wanted to touch Rafe and give him the support he needed. Everyone looked at him as the man in charge as well as the one that messed up. Yet, at the same time, all eyes were on her and she had to keep her distance.

The woman Rafe introduced as ATF Agent Diane something or other, rudely stared, making Lorelei nervous.

“As Phillip’s partner, they’d know you’d be involved.” Lorelei added. “Or how about when we came here? Caution is one thing, but we’re not invisible.”

“You seemed to think you were when you took off to the hospital to visit your father,” Diane charged with a distinct nastiness. “You might have gotten another one of our agents killed.”

“How about I keep the rest of the ATF safe then, I’ll go home.” Lorelei stood. “And if you should tape any more conversations involving confessions of murder, I suggest you destroy the evidence. That way you won’t have to bend a pinky in doing any work. You’ll be able to go home with your paycheck provided by people that assume you’re doing the work you’ve been paid to do.”

“Lorelei, take it easy.” Rafe grabbed her arm.

Everyone in the room stared. She didn’t want her relationship with Rafe jeopardized by putting it on display as another point of attack on their judgment.

“No, Agent Salazar, if I go, no one else in your little group will get killed because of me.” She stalked out of the room.

Lorelei went as far as the hallway, out of sight.

“You know she can’t go back as long as Bennington wants her dead,” Rafe’s voice neared as he spoke.

Lorelei moved into the doorway of the first bedroom as Rafe went into the kitchen followed by Diane. Lorelei moved back to the hall to listen.

“What are we supposed to do, Diane, tell potential victims, sorry, we only handle the easy parts of the job?”

“You shouldn’t be on the case, Rafe. Your sister could use you at home right now.”

“My sister is up in Daytona staying with Phillip’s parents. She’s safely out of the way while I do my job. You know, Lorelei once accused me of being a coward because I tried to talk Phillip out of doing what was right. Maybe it’s time I take up the slack.” He took a deep and noisily irritated breath. “Lorelei means a lot more to me than just a victim, Diane.”

“I knew it. When I came in tonight, I noticed the way she looked at you. I thought,

oh no, another victim has fallen for the dashing Rafe Salazar. You can't seriously think anything can come of this little infatuation she has for you. What have the two of you've shared—a hug, a kiss? Don't tell me you hopped into bed with her?"

"It's not any of your business."

"Once this is over, she'll have no use for you. Can't you see that? Whatever she's said or done, it's to use you for her case."

"Our case, Diane. Lorelei and I both want to put Bennington behind bars."

"The district attorney's office and the ATF have different agendas."

"It'll get worked out."

"She'll hurt you in the end."

"That's a possibility, just the same as I could hurt her."

"I think you should tell her to back off."

"Look, Lorelei's not a subject open for discussion or debate. It's private and has no bearing on what my duties are."

"I care about you, Rafe."

"I know and over the past few months you thought we might get together. I didn't see that happening before or now. If you want to punish anyone, it should be me."

"You're going to let her come between us?"

"There was never anything between you and me." He took another deep breath.

"We went out."

"For drinks, with Phillip and others."

Lorelei leaned on the wall and waited. Rafe's loafers tapped the hardwood floor and brought him around the corner to her. His mouth curved into a beautiful and reassuring smile. She lifted her arms, laying them over his as he put his hands on her waist.

"She's not thrilled finding out about us." Lorelei glanced toward the kitchen doorway.

"It doesn't matter." He leaned and kissed her lightly.

"She won't get you in trouble or anything?" she whispered, not wanting Diane to overhear them.

"Whatever Diane does can't change how we feel."

A noise of someone coming separated them. Rafe grabbed her hand and tugged her into the first bedroom.

"You want to play fox and the hounds?" He turned to her.

She looked at him puzzled, not understanding.

"It's a game played with checkers. One red checker is the fox and four black checkers are the hounds. The fox makes one move, the hounds make one. The object of the game is for either the hounds to surround the fox and kill him or for the fox to get to the other side of the playing field and win."

"And you want us to be the fox?"

"Precisely." He shut the door. "They're out there devising a new plan for where to put you and you're right. You can't stay in hiding forever."

He sat her on the end of the bed and she watched him pace back and forth.

"Phillip wasn't the only person to hear that taped phone conversation firsthand. I also heard Victor Bennington confess to killing his girlfriend, Angela. She tried to get out, but you don't just walk away from Bennington's little world. Angela came to us, aware we were investigating him. When she turned up dead in that hotel, it was our fault. We

should have seen it coming.”

“Why were you going to let Phillip do this himself? With two witnesses, my case would have been much stronger.”

“For the same reasons I didn’t want Phillip involved. Whether you want to believe it or not, I was willing. Phillip insisted only one of us should do it, leaving one of us to take care of Carolena and the kids if something went wrong.”

“How did you decide?” She rubbed his fingers wrapped in hers.

“We flipped a bloody coin—one toss, heads or tails. Phillip would testify and I’d hang back, not mentioning I heard the conversation. I thought I could talk him out of it. I had him ready to stay silent until you came along with your holier than thou speech making us feel guilty for not rushing to do this.”

“I’m sorry.”

“No you’re not, it’s your job, and you should never be sorry for doing it right. Now I’m going to do my job and catch the bad guy. I know one piece of evidence that Phillip doesn’t. I heard another conversation of Victor’s. He told someone he took the scalp right off the girl and he was going to keep it like a souvenir as his ancestors once did.”

“Bennington is part American Indian?”

“No, French. They were the first to take scalps and they passed the practice onto Native Americans.”

“What are we going to do first?” She got up to his tug and they snuck from the first bedroom to the middle bedroom.

“Get Bennington back in jail. Tie his hands from making outside contact.”

“You know that’s next to impossible. He’ll have friends inside that will be more than happy to pass the information along for him.” She stopped and looked up at Rafe.

“Maybe if we can get him put in isolation. No, I guess that wouldn’t be possible until he’s convicted.”

“We’ll slow him up a little.” He opened a drawer, handing clothes to her. The red bra dangled from his finger.

“What?” She snatched it from him. “You said you liked it.”

“But you put it back in the drawer at your apartment.” He pushed her back against the wall and pinned her hands up above her head.

“I slipped it back out when you weren’t looking.” She took the firm kiss he gave with appreciation for the splendor of his adoration.

They’d crossed one hurdle and it had to be the biggest one of all. He wanted her and he admitted it. What else could give them a greater problem?

“So, you tempting little vixen, you had made plans all along to seduce me.”

“I believe I confessed to that when you were carrying me from the shower.” She tilted her head to the side as he kissed down the cord of muscle on her neck and followed it into the top of her shirt. “You do remember we have company outside this door, don’t you?”

“They won’t come in without an invitation.”

He pushed up her shirt and cupped her breasts. Skilled fingers rolled over her nipples and pinched. He kept kissing and nibbling at her ear.

“You’re not wearing a bra.” He kneaded and caressed, displaying an urgency to make her hot and anxious.

“Another of my many plans to gain your full attention,” she moaned. “Rafe, don’t

start something you're not going to finish. I get very cranky if I don't get my way,"

"You're right." He pulled his hands out from under her shirt. "Now's not the time."

Rafe stepped back holding her at arms length. She saw his by-the-book staunchness lean toward *no, not now*, and she pulled her shirt off to give him incentive.

Chapter Fourteen

With her kiss-puckered mouth and her erect rosy nipples, Rafe had no will.

"It'll be my job if someone walks in here." He jerked her to him.

"You said they wouldn't." She unbuckled his pants while their mouths crashed together.

The danger of discovery fueled the passion already burning between them. Lorelei's hands worked fast.

"When they start hearing strange sounds..."

"I'll be quiet." Her fingers slipped beneath his waistband and curled around his cock.

"I won't." Rafe bent his head and sucked one of her plump nipples into his mouth.

She made a small sound as she worked his trousers down. They fell in a heap at his feet. Lifting her skirt, Rafe jerked her panties down far enough to get a finger into her. There was no time to dawdle on the preliminaries and niceties that were usual in foreplay.

"Wet and ready, but I don't have a condom."

"You don't need one. It's the right time of the month."

"Oh?" He gripped the front panel of the thong panties and tore them off her.

"I don't have my period yet, however it's due in a couple days."

"And this is beneficial how?"

"Trust me, I've passed breeding time."

He hoisted her up and entered her with a shallow, testing prod of his cock. Each poke went deeper until he sunk all the way. He kept pumping into her.

"Take me to the bed," she begged.

Her orgasms, in a string of small vibrations had her writhing in his arms. He sat on the bed and lay back holding her mounted on him.

"Ride me." He bounced her up and down.

She grew wetter and her body accommodated him nicely, taking him into the abyss with ease.

"That's good." He slapped the cheek of her supple ass.

She stiffened and her pleased surprise had her raking her fingernails over his nipples beneath his shirt.

"Faster," he commanded, giving another stinging smack to her buttocks.

Her insides clenched on his shaft. Each time he felt her muscles weaken their hold on his erection he slapped her bare bottom. It made her constrict on him hard.

"Don't stop." She shoved his shirt up and rubbed his chest.

His repeated thwacks lifted her higher. The increased elevation, made her plunge down on him rapidly. She shuddered with desire blazing in her eyes. Her rounded breasts swung wildly over him and the breathtaking sight near his face drew him up closer for an appetizing lick.

But he couldn't reach. Gripping her hips, he rolled her forward for the advantage of suckling the pendulous delights. Lorelei wriggled with a chaotic anxiousness. From the salacious expression on her face, he knew his cock had the right angle to create the abrading joy on her clit.

"Oh, God," she groaned, and a sizzling warm liquid lubricated his shaft.

The wicked titillation wracked her atop him. She grasped the short hairs on his chest and twisted in her violent throes of another building orgasm. He smacked her reddened bottom several more times, not wanting her to stop her lunging quakes. When the skirt became a nuisance, he unzipped it and pushed the garment up on her waist. He grasped her hips, dug his fingers into her flesh and pulled her down tight to his thrust. His cock burned against the friction of her drying channel.

He jerked her forward and burrowed his fingers into her hair, twisting his grip to angle her face. While they both panted out of breath he attacked her mouth with a ravenous kiss. His tongue whipped hers into instant submission and then he turned her over on her back and jerked his hips, forcing himself in, up to his aching balls. She lifted her legs, encircled his waist and hung fastened to him.

“Rafe,” she cried out.

He lifted off, not wanting to chance her calculations against pregnancy. Getting to his knees, he rolled her over and kissed her back and her bottom. She rose to her knees, arched her back and laying her head on the pillow. The position left the cheeks of her ass exposed for him. Blotched red from his smacks, her flesh glowed with the heat he couldn’t wait to feel pressed into his groin.

Rafe gave a forceful lick into the cleft that retained the savory tight ring she held clenched shut. The rosy circlet opened and he drove his tongue savagely into her. He enjoyed the confines he imbedded his raging tongue into and considered how the tightness of her anus would feel on his cock.

He lapped at the dampness to her skin. The sexual perspiration of rigorous involvement had a unique flavor. Inhaling the enticing scent, sweetly intoxicating and feral, animalistic urges kept pushing him to take her soon with a cock too hard to ignore.

Smoothing over her back, he slipped his caress down her sides until he cupped one of her breasts.

A whimper stuttered from her. The hum had hardly an ounce of sound.

He dragged his tongue everywhere, tasting her silky flesh and delighting in the sounds of her stimulation. Her bottom wiggled, drawing his tongue down and into her with a newfound verdure. He played rapaciously with her anus and her cunt alternately.

A gurgling groan panted from her. Her orgasm forced her ass back and his lips smacked her amorous cunt. She continued squirming and searching for her debauching relief.

With his tongue dripping from her spending, he lubricated her bottom. He smeared the thick cream over the opening making the winking gap slippery for his access.

“Now Rafe, put it in me now,” her desperate plea whined.

He pressed the knob of his cock against her sex first and he rocked into the expanding entrance. Gently, he flexed his hips until she took all of him into the clenching tight space. With each thrust her excited grunts heightened his climax.

When her stuttered whimpers went ragged and her body jerked in spasms, he pulled out.

He fisted his shaft and pumped the flesh hard, bringing it back fully erect and pushed his cock against the clenching ring.

“Relax.” He rubbed soothingly over her lower back. “Push your bottom to me and relax.”

Lorelei pushed and the halo yawned, letting him sink into her. He reached around her

thigh and fondled her clit, making her body respond immediately.

Thrusting, he savored her rumbling gurgle of sounds. The moaning and groaning of a woman captivated him. He buried himself up to his excited testicles and rooted deep.

"You have a small ass," he rasped.

Lorelei gasped again at the push of his groin shoving his erection into her. Her entire body rippled in a flowing shudder. Her orgasm came extremely hard and she jerked and flopped on the bed in spasms. He met her orgasm with an explosive release with no control over the throes of his raging rapture. He heaved upward, filling her with his entire arousal. Ejaculating, his seed spewed into the chasm until it leaked out around his depleted cock.

He pulled out and flipped her over, under him.

"We weren't quiet." She stared at him with a sated expression that turned him on.

"I don't care." He began kissing her, renewing the aroused sensations he craved.

"Rafe?" Her hand lay on his cheek.

"Okay, let's get out of here." He jerked her up from the bed.

They'd had their fun with the kind of wayward actions teenagers indulged in, not responsible adults. Rafe worried it would get them killed if they didn't focus on their jobs, yet as he watched Lorelei, he found himself already anticipating the next time they'd have sex.

* * * *

Lorelei handed Rafe her apartment key. They'd snuck out of the safe house by the same window she had used before. They had a few agents looking for someone arriving, not departing and it was the only reason they got away unnoticed.

"I don't know how you think we can stay one step ahead of Bennington if we keep showing up at familiar places." She watched him unlock the door.

"You need clothes."

"You should have thought of that before ripping mine."

"That was an accident."

She laughed and put a hand to his back. "Next time, it's my turn to accidentally rip your underwear."

"I think you left food out of the refrigerator." He waved a hand over his face.

"Something is rotten in here."

Lorelei stopped laughing.

"Oh geesh." Rafe's hold on her tightened.

Peggy lay sprawled in the middle of the living room. Her open eyes were blank and her clothes were in bloody shreds from torturous slice marks that slashed her arms, legs and torso. She wasn't killed quickly. Someone mutilated her in an excruciatingly slow manner as if whoever was in charge might not have wanted her dead.

"Lorelei." Rafe stood behind her and rubbed at her arms. "Lorelei, come sit down."

"I told her about your uncle's house," she told him, knowing it had to be her fault. That's how the killer found me at your safe house. "I asked her to check my mail and pay the bills and they killed her to get information on me."

Rafe turned her from the gruesome sight.

"She's dead because of me." Lorelei pressed herself against Rafe and cried.

"Bennington is to blame. You didn't know. None of us really knows what's going to

happen next.” He spoke softly and rocked her.

“You did. You said if Phillip came forward he’d get killed.”

“It was his duty to come forward, Lorelei. It’s the business we’re in and we can’t hide ourselves away or the bad guys will win.” He kissed her temple.

Rafe flipped open his phone and dialed nine-one-one. After explaining the situation to the dispatcher, he took Lorelei to the kitchen.

“They’ll be here in a few minutes and I have to go down and let them in the building.”

“I can’t stay in here alone with her. I’ll go.” He nodded and led her out of the apartment.

“Are you sure you don’t want to wait here, in the hall?” He touched her cheek.

The elevator doors opened and she pushed her way on. “No.”

By the time they reached the lobby, the police were there.

“Officers, I’m ATF agent, Rafael Salazar.” Rafe took out his badge and showed them. “This is ADA Blackwell.”

“You said there was a murder?” The officer handed Rafe back his credentials.

“In Ms. Blackwell’s apartment.” He led them to the elevator and on the ride up, Rafe explained more. “I’m guessing she was murdered because of mistaken identity.”

“But Rafe...” Lorelei tried to interrupt and he shushed her with a hand on her arm.

“We’ll need to let the killer think the woman is his intended target. Until we determine more facts, no names are to be released about her or us being here. Lorelei, I want you to get on the phone and get yourself in front of a judge as soon as possible. I’ll testify and that will get Bennington off the street until the trial.”

“It’ll get you marked as a target.”

“Won’t matter, not as long as I have you to hide out with.” He put a hand to her face. “I’m not going to let anything happen to you or me, now make the call.”

Chapter Fifteen

Lorelei stood nervous, hoping for the best, expecting the worse. The judge didn't appear in a good mood.

"Ms. Blackwell, I understand you have new evidence for which you've had Mr. Bennington arrested and want to hold him over for trial."

"Yes, Your Honor."

The judge studied the papers and looked over at the defense table. "Mr. Thomas, do you have anything you wish to add before I make my ruling?"

"Only that Ms. Blackwell can't keep bringing my client in here on a whim. What does she have now that she didn't before?" He leaned, said something to his client and gave Lorelei a determined glare.

"Your Honor, we have a new witness that has personally heard a conversation between Mr. Bennington and an associate of Mr. Bennington's. It was a complete confession in detail that he taped regarding the murder of Angela Beaumont."

"Ms. Blackwell, we cannot accept taped conversations solely used as evidence alone."

"Your Honor, this tape was transcribed and recorded by my witness in the course of his job as an ATF agent. His department had full warrants for such evidence."

The judge sat quietly, contemplative and Lorelei found herself crossing her fingers. If her shoes weren't tight, she'd have her toes crossed too.

"All right, let's take this to trial." The judge looked up from her records. "Mr. Bennington is to be remanded in custody pending trial."

"Your Honor, we request bail," Mr. Thomas demanded.

"Mr. Bennington has been accused of murder." Lorelei pressed her luck aggressively. "He is under investigation for illegal firearm sales. He has homes in four countries that we know of and two have no extrication laws set up with the United States. He also has enough money to live comfortably outside of our reach."

"I am aware of this information, Ms. Blackwell."

"I know, Your Honor, I'm just trying to make sure I've not forgotten to give you anything to consider. Mr. Bennington is a suspect for the murder of the last witness. And I've also had an attempt made on my life."

"Your life, Ms. Blackwell? Do you have proof of Mr. Bennington's involvement?"

"Nothing concrete, Your Honor. A friend of mine was killed in my apartment, which we believe was for information as to the location of the safe house I've been staying at since I received a phone threat to back off this case. The ATF has a recording of the threat coming from someone on the Bennington estate." Lorelei glanced over at Bennington and gave him her best smirk.

"You think you're smart, don't you, bitch!" Victor jumped up from his seat and two court officers grabbed him. "This isn't over yet. You think you and your ATF boyfriend are safe. We'll just see about that."

"Based on what I've read in these briefs and have just heard, bail is denied." The judge cracked the gavel on her desk.

"Thank you, Your Honor." Lorelei smiled at Victor Bennington as she watched him

being led away.

He mouthed the words, *Boom*, and she suppressed the shudder chilling her spine. Her legs shook and she bit the inside of her lip as a distraction. *Show no fear. That's what he wants.*

Lorelei hurried out of the courthouse as soon as possible. Rafe waited in a car at the curb.

"Well?" He looked worried.

"In front of the judge, Bennington threatened to blow me up. I couldn't have asked for a better reaction from him." She leaned her head back. "I can tell you I played it cool, but my knees were knocking the whole time."

Rafe put a hand over hers on the seat. "Stay tough, Ms. Blackwell. We'll get him so tangled in arrests and trial dates, he'll have trouble finding time to think about you."

He drove away from the curb.

"I just want this to be over." She looked out the window at the passing buildings—the tall spires of skyscrapers looking safe to hide behind.

"I know."

Rafe had the kind of strength that went farther than a job that needed doing. Even during the moment that could have been his weakness, when she was being held with a knife to her throat, he didn't flinch at pulling the trigger. He had everything necessary to be the man she often dreamt of loving and he came along at a good point in her life. She didn't need work to dominate her life anymore as a crutch to her emotions where her father was concerned.

"Where are we going?" she asked, when Rafe drove into an underground parking garage.

"We're switching cars." he pulled into a parking space.

"Switching?" She looked out the side window. "Why?"

"A precaution." He got out and hurried around to open her door.

"This thing?" She wrinkled her face as he led her to an old, beat up Chevy Impala. "Where did you get this from, a junkyard?"

"It's been in storage. Something else Uncle Milton left me. It's not registered and has no plates, so let's hope we don't cross paths with any overzealous police officers." He held the door open and bowed. "Your carriage awaits, m'lady."

He tried to entice a smile from her with his cocky grin. She didn't comply. He had changed since she met him. Or maybe she had by growing familiar with his quirks and his moods.

"It's already turned into a pumpkin. I'm doomed." She sat on the cracked leather seat and swung her legs in. "Now what?"

Rafe turned the key. The car gave a few sad whines of disturbance. She couldn't blame the thing for not wanting to start or going out in public. The last thing Lorelei would do is make a presentation all rumped. She glanced at the visor and then the rearview mirror which gave her a slight temptation to use and check her face. She ignored the impulse.

"Come on, girl. We'll go for a spin and you'll like the scenery." The car groaned a dying breath.

Rafe got out, opened the hood and stood with his hands on his hips. Lorelei couldn't recall seeing a sexier man stare at a car with such a blank expression on his face.

"I guess we're out of luck," he announced.

Lorelei shook her head and joined him in front of the car.

"Is that some sort of magic pose?" She found him cute with his perplexed gaze.

"I'm not mechanically inclined," he confessed.

"Well, you start by bending over and giving something a try." She reached for the wing nut and spun it loose to remove the air filter. "Get in and try starting it again."

He did as instructed and the engine fired right up.

"Something seems highly wrong with the fact you know more about cars than I do." He hopped out of the car and closed the hood.

"Auto shop, Agent Salazar. Transportation interested me more than a home-economics class."

"Auto shop, huh?" His brow rose with a comical disbelief.

"Okay, so the boys in auto shop had more of my concentration. It doesn't mean I didn't learn anything. Just don't ask me to use a tool because I'm not sure I'd remember a wrench from a ratchet."

He pushed back a lock of her hair. "You do all right, Lorelei."

"You mean for a woman?"

"Guilty. Before you, I thought women were helplessly waiting for my help."

"As a woman, I can guarantee you, there are areas I do love a man's assistance." She moved closer to him and rubbed the front of his shirt.

"Hmmm, you do make it hard for me to think."

"Well we wouldn't want that right now." She pushed him away. "We need both of us thinking today."

She slipped inside the car and watched him hurry around to the driver's side.

"Okay, next stop is a store."

"What are we buying?" She touched the thick padded dash with a heavy layer of dust. "Maybe some cleaning supplies. I do know the basics of getting rid of this." She held her finger up, showing him the glob of gray fuzzy dirt.

"We'll worry about that another day."

"Are you going to tell me this plan or let me stumble around, blindly following you?" She rolled down the window. It blew a flurry of dust around her head making an abundant possession of sneezes rattle her.

"God bless you." Rafe smiled and turned down another street.

"Thank you." She rubbed her nose, feeling the ticklish sensation starting up again.

"You were saying we shop. For what?"

"Clothes." He parked the car in front of a thrift store and got out.

"Clothes?" She followed him in the door.

"You need some, remember."

"Well it's not like I'm naked. Besides, I'm not into buying used panties."

He glanced at her with a raise of his brow. "Don't remind me of that sight. I have to concentrate."

A bell jingled over her head and she took in her surroundings. This was the type of place she shopped in college, on a budget.

A woman, very ornate in garb, waddled over in her retro seventies outfit. Beads of various colors hung from her neck and disappeared into the flowery printed blouse. Her graying brown hair was a mass of wiry ringlets and she controlled them with a scarf tied

gypsy-style on top her head.

"Hello, hello, how are you today?" she sung. "Please feel free to look around and if there's something specific you are hunting for just let me know."

Rafe nodded to the woman. "Come on." He took Lorelei's hand and led her to a rack of clothes. "Hike your skirt up, sweetheart."

"You're incorrigible. If you think I'm going to give into a kinky romp in the back room of a thrift store, you are sadly mistaken."

"That's a nice thought, but I wanted to see if this is short enough." He held a tacky red leather miniskirt up to her waist.

She looked cautiously at him and rolled her knee length, lightweight gabardine skirt up.

Rafe let out a low whistle. "Sweetheart, you sure do have some nice legs. Phillip even thought so." He handed her the skirt and rummaged through the rack again.

"Phillip told you that?" She checked inside the skirt to see if it were her size.

"Yeah, the first day we met. He tried to convince me I might like to date you. Aha!" He jerked a blouse from its hanger.

Turning around he unbuttoned the one she wore.

"You've got on the red bra." He smiled. "That's perfect."

"I just put one on without thinking." She smiled with the lie and shoved her arms into the sleeves of the blouse he held up. It too was very small like the skirt. "I can't button the top."

"I know." His grin widened. "You're my decoy."

"I'm your what?"

"Decoy. You're going to get the man's attention at the gate of Bennington's estate. Angela told us where the evidence is we need, but red tape put a big kibosh on getting to it. I don't think he's aware we know. If I can get in there and locate it, we'll have him."

"You can't, Rafe. It's not legal. We can't put him away with illegally obtained evidence." She tugged at the blouse gapping open as the bell rang over the shop door. Two girls entered the store.

"And killing us *is* legal? We can't run, and we can't hide forever. We're on a very short list and I think we've made it to the number one slot."

Lorelei sorted through the clothes on the rack and held up interesting items. "Who was number one?" She tried on a dark brown suede jacket.

"His competition." He spun her around and looked at the back of her. "It's torn and not on the seam."

Lorelei took off the jacket and checked the price tag. "Do you know she only wants five bucks for this? It's worth a few hundred even with the hole. I'm going to get it."

"This isn't a shopping spree we're on." He helped her put the jacket back on.

She saw the dressing room in the corner and carried the other clothes there.

"Who's the competition?"

"Someone that would gain the most if Bennington took a permanent vacation." He pushed her into the dressing room and jerked her skirt up. "You know, I've always heard tell of men getting it on in dressing rooms."

"But you've never thought to try it?" She whimpered at the placement of his hand right in the center of her needy spot.

"Not till now."

“Weren’t we in a rush?”

“Didn’t I hear you say this wasn’t going to happen?” He yanked her last pair of clean panties down.

“Must be something you imagined.” She couldn’t get her feet out of the leg holes fast enough to prevent Rafe from his torturing kiss over her pussy. He licked and nipped at her flesh and she held his shoulders when the shudders raced through her limbs and her knees started to buckle.

“This isn’t me, I’ll have you know.” He kissed his way up, over the clothes.

“No? You could have fooled me.” She unzipped his pants.

His hands slid behind her thighs and squeezed her ass. She reached around his neck when he hoisted her up and glided her onto his stiff erection.

“You make me hot, babe.”

“It’s these trashy clothes.”

He kissed her gently. “It’s you.” He kissed her again. “There’s much to be desired in every little thing about you.”

His hips drew back and forth, shoving her up against the wall.

“Sweet-talker.” She wound her arms tighter as he kissed under her jaw.

“Sweet woman,” he grunted.

Talk ceased in favor of their sounds of passion. She tried not to think how the room might amplify her whines of delight or his rumbling pleasure. He pumped into her, repeatedly jolting her up against the wall.

“Rafe.” She nipped his earlobe. “Please, don’t stop.”

He tensed and the liquid warmth of his sperm filled her. The heat tickled her insides and her orgasm clenched her insides on his shaft.

“That’s it sweetheart,” he moaned.

Sweat drenched Rafe’s shirt and naturally, Lorelei rubbed his back when the sensations they shared began subsiding. He kissed her on the mouth, driving his tongue between her parted lips, and sucking at her gasping breath.

“Rafe, you were going to tell me who Bennington’s competition was.”

He lifted his head from where his kisses had traveled to her neck.

“You do know how to throw ice on a man’s desire, don’t you?” He let her slide from his hips.

“We’re letting this attraction distract us. It’s not good.” She swallowed down the buildup of lustful yearnings to touch him as she watched the way he tucked his cock into his pants and closed the zipper.

“I think we handle ourselves fine.” He walked out of the dressing room first.

He sounded angry. She didn’t mean she didn’t like the way he treated her to the sexual interludes, only that they just needed to keep focused on Bennington.

The girls in the shop looked at her while she zipped up the jacket. She glanced back at the dressing room and thought of her panties.

“Rafe?” She caught up to him nearing the cash register.

“It’s Lu Chow.”

“Who?”

“Bennington’s competition. Those two have been on the edge of a rumble for a long time. When they get together, one is going to end up dead.”

“Rafe, the dressing room.”

"I'll try to control myself in the future."

"You're angry. I'm sorry I mentioned it."

"You're right, Lorelei. We're making ourselves vulnerable."

"Well I'm more exposed than you at the present. My panties, my last pair of clean panties I remind you, are lying on the dressing room floor."

"I'll get them."

She waited in the center of the store. He came right back and patted his pant's pocket. Then took her arm and led her toward the counter.

"They're staring." Rafe rubbed the scar.

Lorelei pulled his hand down. "Of course they are, handsome. They no doubt heard what a stud you are in a dressing room."

She released his hand and moved to the counter ahead of him.

"You're good for a man's ego." His heated breath whispered against her ear.

She shivered and moved willingly into the curve of his arm around her waist.

Rafe inspected the room, while she studied him. It obviously made him nervous to be in the open when they had no idea where the next attack would come from. She wanted him to feel safe with her as much as he made her feel protected with him so she hugged him around the waist.

He gave her a puzzled look and then turned his attention back to the approaching woman.

"Find everything you need all right?" The woman inventoried the items Lorelei wore.

"Yes." Lorelei wasn't sure any of it could be called needed.

"Can you ring it up right on her?" Rafe pulled out his wallet. "My lady likes the trashy look."

"Rafe!" Lorelei smacked his shoulder as he squeezed her close and kissed her temple.

After paying the bill, he carefully led her to the car, inspecting every person in sight as a potential assassin.

"What if Lu Chow has inside information that would help him get rid of Bennington? Like where to find that evidence and how he can turn it over to the police?" She slid into the car trying to hold the short skirt down so it didn't slide up over her hips and become a belt.

"I think Lu Chow would rather kill his competition than put him in prison. That's something that can come back to haunt a man."

She pushed him back from his salivating stare at her legs and pulled the door closed.

He went around the car and got in. Tossing the paper sack with her other clothes onto the back seat, he took another glance at her knees and she read the lust in his expression.

"If it was so simple to kill him, I think he would have done it by now, don't you?"

"Not necessarily. There is a method to the madness of smugglers and drug dealers. Their competitors are what keep the market high as they wipe out each other's supplies."

"What does the ATF have on Mr. Chow?" She twisted and forgot the skirt was not flexible.

Rafe put a hand on her thigh to prevent her from moving away. "Nothing we can use to put him away. He's very careful about staying far from the violence, unlike Bennington, who's a hands-on type guy."

“He’s not the only one that’s a hands-on type guy.” She raised a brow, dropping her gaze to his fingers worming their way under the hem of her skirt. They left a warm scintillating trail of goose bumps.

“Yeah, well you make it hard to resist.” He started the car and pulled out into the light traffic. “My idea’s out and yours is now a go.”

“Mine? How?” It was only an idea, she had no plan.

“I can get us an audience with Lu Chow. However, do you think you can talk him into helping us?” He stepped on the gas and they went faster than the cars around them.

“Don’t get us pulled over, Rafe. I don’t want some cop to ask me to get out of the car.”

“Too late,” he groaned.

She twisted farther and looked out the rear window.

Chapter Sixteen

"Sorry, sweetheart." Rafe pulled over to the siren and lights that reflected in his rearview mirror.

Lorelei's face was livid with horror in the flashing blue.

"I'll take care of this, don't worry," He patted her leg.

She sat back with her arms folded over her lap after tugging the skirt down as far as it would go. Rafe got out of the car in attempts to spare her embarrassment.

"License and registration, sir," the officer said.

Rafe took out his wallet and handed the man the information. He noticed the registering of information in the officer's eye.

"All right, hold it right there. Turn around, hands on the car."

"What's wrong?" Lorelei asked, getting out of the car.

"ADA Blackwell?" the officer glanced at Lorelei.

"Yes?"

"Officer Kelly, Joe Kelly, ma'am. I testified on one of your cases about two years ago. You're a right good prosecutor, ma'am and I was glad you got that murderer put away for life."

"Two years. Murderer ... Phelps?"

Rafe raised his brows. They needed to discuss why the officer was frisking him.

"Yes. It was a good strong case and you were one of the best officers I've ever had on the stand."

"Ma'am, I've got an APB on my hot sheet for the man that kidnapped you."

"Kidnapped!" She squealed and covered her mouth to suppress the rise of hysterical laughter. "Sorry, but there must be a mistake."

"I'll say!" Rafe's voice rose.

"I wasn't kidnapped." Lorelei slowly moved around the car, putting herself between Rafe and the officer. "I left on my own volition and Agent Salazar gave me a ride."

"Ma'am, please step away from the perp."

"Joe, I can call you Joe, can't I, since we go way back?" She slipped her arm around Rafe. "He's my boyfriend, not a criminal."

"Joe's fine, ma'am."

"Please, my name is Lorelei. We don't need to be so formal. Rafe and I'll follow you back to your car. You can radio in you've found us and then I'd like to talk to your captain. We'll just get this mess straightened right up and then I can be on my way."

"He stays here. That way I know he's not threatening you in any way." Joe's gun hand shook at his side.

"That's fine."

"Lorelei?" Rafe didn't like the idea that someone put an APB out on him.

Lorelei turned to him and put a hand to his cheek. "Stop looking at him like you're evil."

"Evil?"

"You know you do when you frown like that," she whispered. "I don't know why they would do something like this, but I'll be right back."

“Be careful. There’s something not right about this situation.”

“I know.”

Rafe watched her closely and he watched Joe even closer. He had expected police involvement in the mishap at the safe house. But this officer had looked at him as if he was a deranged killer and he worried about who they could trust.

Rafe didn’t let out the breath he held until Lorelei walked away from the police cruiser and Joe got in his car to leave.

“Well?” Rafe went to her.

“Someone in your department said I was abducted.” She climbed in the car from the driver’s side and only moved in far enough for Rafe to get behind the wheel. “Rafe, they said you were unstable and dangerous.”

He stayed quiet as he pulled out and drove along the darkening streets.

“Rafe?”

“The enemy is within.” He glanced in the rearview mirror.

“What?”

“Phillip said he heard something that made him think there was a person in the ATF that couldn’t be trusted and I told him he was crazy. I should have given him a chance to elaborate.”

“You can’t believe someone would purposely align themselves with Victor Bennington. They couldn’t ever gain from that relationship knowing he’d eventually be put away.”

“Why would someone claim I’m unstable and you were forced to go with me against your will?” He looked over at her.

“Then if it’s true and there is someone working on the inside for Bennington, we have to be even more cautious.” She leaned against him. “We can only trust each other.”

“That pretty much sizes it up.” He picked up her hand and wove her fingers between his. “And I have no problem trusting you.”

“Same goes for me, handsome.” She rested her head on his shoulder. “Where are we going?”

“You’ll see soon.” He grinned at her. “Someplace safe, where we can plan out our next moves.”

“And no doubt act out a few more of your fantasies?”

Her hand eased down his middle and his insides fluttered. Old girlfriends, casual dates—no one made him experience the kind of sensations Lorelei did.

* * * *

The motel was a hole in the wall place that no hooker would even reside in for an hour. The lights were all burned out in the neon sign, making it appear that it was no longer in operation. The neighborhood had a sleazy atmosphere that Lorelei wouldn’t be caught in during the day let alone at night. Still, Rafe pulled the car to a stop under the tattered awning.

“Wait here and I’ll get us a room.”

“Are you sure this place is safe?” She peered out all the windows.

“No one will think to look for us here.”

“I didn’t mean Bennington. This is a pretty rough looking neighborhood.” She stared at one dark niche in a doorway where she thought she glimpsed someone lurking.

“Come on, Lorelei.” He pulled her across the seat and out of the car. “We’ll get the best room in the place.”

“Yeah, but what will the best look like?” She kept her eye on the area she saw movement.

Rafe turned around and looked as well when a car drove by. He opened the door and pushed Lorelei into the motel office when the car passed.

“Tio!” a young man came out from behind the counter.

“Enrique, this is Lorelei and we need a room.”

“Si, Tio, I can see why with this long-legged beauty. You’re a mighty lucky man with that ugly face.” He gave a low whistle, showing no respect as he bent over and looked up and down Lorelei’s legs.

“Hey!” Lorelei stepped back.

“Easy, sweetheart, he’s harmless.” Rafe wrapped his arms around her waist. “Meet Enrique Salazar, my nephew. He’s my brother’s eldest son and has no manners.” He put his chin on her shoulder. “He can hide the car in his garage.”

“Nephew?” She bit the inside of her lip. “I’m sorry. You shouldn’t have let me go on about this place appearing...”

“You didn’t say anything that isn’t the truth,” Rafe remarked.

Well then, thank you, Enrique. I do appreciate your help.” She stretched her hand out to him.

Rafe laughed when his nephew kissed her knuckles, but Rafe’s gallant charm stepped in and pulled her arm back when Enrique began slowly slurping his way up her limb.

“We’re in a jam, Enrique, and we’re here to rest, that means I don’t want you to tell my mother you’ve seen me, either.”

“She’s gone to Daytona to be with Carolena.”

“On a plane?” He turned his gaze at Lorelei. “My mother is afraid of driving.”

“I think all mothers would risk anything for their children.” Lorelei smiled.

He nodded and resumed his conversation with Enrique. “She’ll be one less person I have to worry about.”

“But, poor Carolena? Your mama will insist on doing everything.”

“It’ll keep my sister’s thoughts off the loss of her husband.” He plucked a key from a hook. “Remember, you haven’t seen us.”

Enrique agreed and told Lorelei. “You get tired of his face you come see a younger man that will treat you right, chica.”

“Sorry, Enrique, but I’ve grow quite fond of Rafe and his looks.” Lorelei reached up and cupped Rafe’s chin. “I’m very happy with his treatment of me as well.”

Her words were an assurance that built confidence. Yet, it still bothered him to have her think about his scar and he’d have to try better at hiding his touchiness over it.

Rafe led the way to the motel room. “Keep the drapes closed and don’t use the phone.” He let her in and waited in the doorway.

“Where are you going?”

“I was going to get us something to eat.” He stepped in the room and held the door closed. “Don’t worry, I’m just going to raid Enrique’s fridge. He’ll have something we can chew on to chase the hunger pangs away.”

“I don’t need anything.” She gripped his shirt and pulled him farther into the room.

“Just you.”

He reached back and flipped the lock on the door liking her idea better.

“Now what were you saying?” He dug his fingers into her hair and pulled her mouth to his.

They spent a long time kissing, removing clothes and fondling. Along the way, they managed to get on the bed. Rafe stretched out over her and moving his hand under her neck, he let her head drop back to kiss the hollow of her throat. He took advantage and pressed his lips to the underside of her jaw, speckling her tender creamy flesh with purple passion kisses.

Kissing behind her ear, he let his needs wait. He buried his nose in her fresh scented hair.

“You’re too beautiful for me, Lorelei.” He lifted up. “Why do you want to be with me?”

“For your capacity to show human emotions, like now.” She stroked his scar. “I wish I could say the perfect thing to make you forget this.”

She pulled his head down and her warm moist lips kissed the length of his old injury.

“Now don’t bore me anymore with your vanity.” She nuzzled her cheek to his. “I want you to make love to me.”

When everything felt right in his world, he always got a shock. His first partner’s death, his girlfriend’s sudden departure and his recent partner’s murder all led him to Lorelei. The past events were also like a warning, foreshadowing his future.

He kissed her nose, her cheeks and went from hesitation to stimulation. From sucking the warm fluttering pulse on her neck, he drew out her whimpered moans. The sounds of her delight encouraged him down to her shoulder.

“You’re so soft,” he groaned, moving over the curve to her arm.

He swept a hand over her breast and her nipple puckered. Attacking the hardened nub with a stab of his tongue, he circled, lapped and inhaled the succulent flesh into his mouth. He raked his teeth over her breast and teased her, nudging one breast with his nose and pinching the other with his fingers. Each aria humming from Lorelei produced an ache that made him want to hurry.

Her fingers danced over his skin, glided over his back and landed in his hair. He liked the way she gripped his head and guided him to the places he could best serve her. Taking his time over her belly, feeling the velvet flesh retract from his airy kisses, he followed the curve of her hipbone. The pelvic concave and the scent of her body made him appreciate the slow seduction.

“Rafe!” she squeaked.

Her finger twisted against his scalp when he parted the lips of her sex and dragged his tongue over her clit.

“Oh that feels good,” she purred.

She aroused him with her trills of excitement. Flicking his tongue at her clit and probing deep into the wet center, he brought her to a slow climax.

“Come up here.” She yanked his hair.

He slithered over her glistening body and stared at her.

Lorelei’s watery eyes spoke to him. He covered her mouth with his and closed his eyes to the undulation of her kiss. Shifting into place, he pressed his aroused cock into the tightness of her body and she sighed with a pleased tone.

He dragged up her one leg and she pulled the other along his side clenching her knees to his ribs. The bed groaned in protest as he drove deeper into her. Her kisses were exhausted puffs of air on his face and he held her tighter, hoping she wouldn't quit. The worry of pregnancy no longer made him hesitant. In the back of his mind, hung a little image of him and Lorelei together forever and children would be a natural course if they married.

Lorelei's gasps progressively declined as their orgasms peaked and their snuggling became intimately relaxed.

It would be the last time they'd peacefully sleep for a while. By the end of the next day, they'd be in too deep at carrying out their plans. He just hoped he didn't get Lorelei killed in the process of saving her.

Chapter Seventeen

Lorelei caressed Rafe's warm skin while she laid waiting for him to wake up. She may have slept a few hours, but no more.

"Lorelei?" He looked over her at the clock. "Can't sleep?"

She shook her head and stretched her lips into a pucker to meet his kiss.

"You're safe here. Not many people know about my family."

"It's not that." She touched his rich dark hair and wondered about them.

Family seemed a foreign subject. She only had her father and he'd been sick so long, it was hard to recall when the last time was she and her father ate dinner together or watched a movie while sitting on the sofa eating popcorn.

"Tell me what's troubling you and I'll make it better." He nuzzled his face to hers.

She enjoyed his attentiveness. It was funny the way he had eyed her with a staunch frown in Phillip's office and now he had a smile every time she didn't. He was a rather stable person and she understood why Phillip thought she should give Rafe a chance.

"I don't know how we're going to get out of this situation." She flopped back and stared at the ceiling.

Dingy paint with water stains formed pictures. Sort of like when she was little and laid in the park staring at the clouds. If she imagined hard enough, she saw wondrous things. Not like now where one of the dark stains very much resembled a knife.

"Let's talk about that, okay. I think I have an idea." Rafe talked and she listened.

Even though what he described sounded perfect for a movie script, she didn't like the risks they took or the danger they'd both be in if it didn't work.

"What if Lu Chow doesn't do what you expect?" She rolled to her side and propped her head on her hand. "What if he kills us as a way of forming an alliance with Bennington? What if something happens we haven't prepared for?"

Rafe gave her a shrug and a frown. "Lot's of *what ifs*, don't you think I have enough details to make this work?"

"You have too many and that's what worries me. You can plot the scenario, however, someone can mess it up."

"I won't and you won't and we're the stars of the show."

"I don't know." She got up from the bed and dressed.

"You're the smartest woman I know and I say we can pull this off."

She glanced at him getting out of the bed. The beautiful lines of his body made her ache to climb right back on the mattress with him and suggest they leave the country for a magical paradise where there was no bad.

"Besides, this is all we got to get our lives back on track. I have a job to get back to and so do you."

She turned away, feeling oddly distanced from him by the words. "I don't think a job is as important as your life."

Rafe's brow rose. He walked to her and took hold of her arms. "I need you to focus on the job and not me. I can't thank you enough for giving me my confidence back where my looks are concerned. No woman could ever begin to compare to the compassion you hide in that cool exterior of yours. Nevertheless, I need you to be *Ms. Blackwell*, the

ADA wiseass I met.”

She wanted to tell him that part of her disappeared the moment she fell in love. His tone kept her from expressing too much sentiment and the shaky ground they were on emotionally made her want to protect him—from himself.

“Tell me again what I should say to Lu Chow upon my interviewing him.”

Lorelei sat down and let Rafe drill her with facts, details and different scenarios they might encounter in the course of getting Bennington out of their lives. They needed a solid conviction to put him behind bars forever.

“You ready?” He picked up her jacket.

“No, but let’s do this anyway.”

When she passed him, she felt he wanted to hold her, yet she had to work with him and not against. Keeping business before pleasure forefront in her head, she avoided touching him.

She took the jacket from him.

“Lorelei, above all else, I want you safe.”

“I know.” She slipped an arm into the sleeve of leather. “Where to first?”

“Phone calls first and then we’ll go visit Lu Chow.” He helped her get her other arm in a sleeve.

Lorelei left the motel room and Rafe groaned because of her obvious lack of caution. He followed her to the office and she was glad he didn’t mention she needed to be careful.

“Good morning, Enrique.” She smiled.

“Ah, the pretty woman has come to her senses and prefers me.”

“Not exactly,” Rafe grumbled from behind her. “Get my car.”

Enrique left them at the counter.

“Jealous?” She smiled at Rafe.

“Lorelei, don’t take this situation with such flippancy. Something could go wrong.”

“You said nothing would.”

He put his hands on her hips and she stiffened to prevent herself from wilting into his embrace. “Rafe, I’m a big girl. I know the chances of everything going smoothly are slim and I know how to take care of myself.” She rubbed his arms. “I’ll be careful just as I know you’ll be.”

He led her outside when Enrique pulled the car up.

“Hey, Tio, you haven’t been to any of the family dinners for a long time, maybe soon you’ll be bringing you’re pretty lady?”

Lorelei noted Rafe didn’t answer. His mind was set on their course and she saw him in the same light as their first meeting. He didn’t have room for anything outside the box. She did hope one day he would take her to meet his family. It was something she’d truly like, even if things didn’t work out for them.

She didn’t talk on the drive to Lu Chows until they were in front of a large estate on the outskirts of the city.

“He lives very well.” Lorelei tilted her head back to take in the grandeur of the tall mansion.

“Blood money bought it all,” Rafe grumbled.

Two men came from the gatehouse. One went to the driver’s window and one walked to her side of the car. That man motioned for her to put the window down.

“ATF Agent Salazar to see Mr. Lu Chow,” Rafe said to the other.

The man watching her opened the car door.

“You walk in, no weapons,” the man told Rafe.

“No problem. This is strictly a courtesy visit.” Rafe got out.

“Hey!” Lorelei slapped the man’s hands from her hips as she stepped out of the car.

“If you’re going in, you both have to be searched.”

Rafe nodded an okay and Lorelei closed her eyes while a stranger’s hands glided up her sides. He pushed around to the front.

“That’s skin,” she complained, when he touched the exposed curve of her breasts.

A shuffle of feet on the pavement made her open her eyes. Rafe didn’t look happy.

The man with him jerked his head for the other man to move on with his search.

The hands went down her belly, around her hips and to the edge of her skirt.

“That’s enough.” Rafe took another step.

The hands went under her skirt to the inside of her thighs and brushed against the crotch of the panties she had retrieved from Rafe’s pocket.

“She’s clean,” he announced.

Rafe advanced fast and took her elbow. “Come, Ms. Blackwell.”

They followed the man that had searched Rafe. The wrought iron gates creaked open. Lorelei turned her head and glanced back when Rafe did and saw the man that stayed behind, licking his fingers, giving Rafe a grin.

“Remember why we’re here,” she whispered.

“Are you all right?”

“Nervous, nothing more.”

She did as Rafe instructed and stayed quiet during the interview with Lu Chow. The man didn’t think women should speak unless directly questioned and the interview went well. The man had a vast store of information on Bennington. It appeared they were going to be able to put Bennington behind bars for a long time.

Chapter Eighteen

Rafe sat in the back of the courtroom so Lorelei didn't see him. They had parted with a professionalism he neither anticipated nor liked. Yet, how could he tell her what was in his heart. They still had one piece missing from their puzzle. There was a leak in the bureau and he had to figure out who it was, therefore they had to be discreet.

Rafe waited as planned out of sight. He trailed her like a hound dog and was never far from hopefully, rescuing her. He heard the audio himself on the wiretap that she was to die at the courthouse, regardless of the outcome.

By the grace of an instinctive nature, when Lorelei exited the courthouse, he heard the screech of tires and knew danger approached. He didn't wait to see if he was right or wrong. Before the first shot, he plowed into Lorelei. He hit her harder than planned when the impact of a bullet slammed into his back and forced him to fall forward. He hoped the landing on the sidewalk put Lorelei out of harm's way. He'd do anything for her. If giving his life wasn't proof enough, he didn't know what would be.

"Rafe!" Lorelei's petrified voice screamed annoyingly loud in his ear. "Rafe!"

The crowd around the courthouse added to the noise with their shrieks. The gun blasts cleared the waiting paparazzi seeking exclusive interviews.

"Rafe?" Lorelei struggled to get out from under him and he held her tighter.

"Stay down," he moaned.

"No, you've been shot."

"And it hurts like hell, but I've got on a vest."

Through the crowd of legs milling back into their places, he saw Bennington on the ground dead. The irony was the assassin took out the contractor instead of the target. Bennington got what was coming.

"You're sure you're okay?" She hugged him.

"I'll have one hell of a nasty bruise, but I'm alive." He leaned against the wall dragging her with him. "Are you all right? I didn't want to hit you so hard."

She cried into his collar—terribly violent, hiccupping sobs. Something he had never seen from her. It made him love her more the way she looked to him for the comfort she needed.

"Hey, it's over." He kissed the side of her head.

"I know," she sniffled.

"The state won't have to provide a free room for Bennington. Looks like Lu Chow will get a bigger piece of the pie and more of the ATF's attention from now on." He rubbed a hand over her back.

He pulled her face away and retrieved a handkerchief from his pant's pocket.

"We have reporters casting eyes at us—cameras and everything. You might want to dry off." He held the hanky to her nose.

She sat back and he wiped the mascara from her cheeks.

"I look awful."

"You've never been more beautiful." He combed her hair into place.

"That's sweet, but I've seen myself before in a mirror after crying."

"Shall we greet the reporters on our feet?" He attempted to get up. "I may need help."

I think I have cracked ribs.”

He used the wall of the stone courthouse and inched his way up to stand erect.

“Let me see,” Lorelei insisted on checking his back.

“I’m all right, really.” He took her hand and held it as the reporters looked at them for the rest of their story.

Rafe held her as the reporters grilled them for ten minutes. He couldn’t give details, but he gave them the gist of the plot to kill ADA Blackwell. They seemed satisfied enough when he turned Lorelei away and began walking.

“Until the word gets around Bennington is dead and the contract will not be paid, you are still under protective custody.” Rafe put her in his car.

“Another safe house?” she groaned. “For how long?”

“How long do you want it to be?” He glanced over at her. “I’ll be on leave of absence with my ribs and I was thinking of taking you to Daytona to meet my sister.”

“That’s different. I might like that indefinitely.”

“Good, because I also have a series of operations to remove the scar on my face and I’d like it if you were around for the process.”

“Remove the scar?” She put her head against his shoulder. “It’ll change your appearance.”

“For the better I hope.”

“I suppose.”

“What’s wrong? Have you gotten so attached to this ugly mark that you’ll miss seeing it?”

“You know I lied when I said all women would see you as a handsome man. That’s all I saw when I first met you, but there are women that wouldn’t like the scar.”

“I knew that.”

“When you have the scar removed, you’ll have a lot more choices than me.”

“But what would my wife say?”

“Wife!” Lorelei scooted to the far side of the car.

Rafe pulled into an alley off the busy street and turned to look at her. He put his hand out to pull her back and she slapped it away. “Jealous?”

“Mortified that you’d lead me on like there was something special between us.”

Rafe slid closer, cringing at the pain in his chest. “Will you marry me, Lorelei Blackwell?”

She stopped struggling instantly. “You don’t already have a wife?”

“Not until you say I do.” He grinned. “And if you want, I’ll keep the scar, if it makes you happy.”

“I’d never ask you to do that.”

“I love you,” he murmured against her hairline. “I’m willing to rush headlong into a firm commitment with you.”

“It would have been highly appropriate to have said that before teasing me.” She combed her fingers in his hair along the sides of his head and held his face with the heels of her palms. “All common sense says I shouldn’t love a man I don’t know anything about. However, logic has a way of complicating things and taking away the fun. I think I started to fall in love with you the moment I saw you in Phillip’s office. You had such a hurt expression on your face because you thought I stared at your scar, instead of you.”

“You mean you felt sorry for me.”

“Well, who wouldn’t feel sorry for a man that was vain and had every right to be. You really are too handsome for your own good. I think the scar has made you see that looks aren’t everything, at least to you. I’ve seen nothing but the best, Rafe, in your looks and in your heart.”

Rafe kissed her. Necking like teenagers in an alley made her giggle and him outright laugh. She fingered his collar while he studied the diamond dust dancing in her tranquil gray green eyes.

“You said you started to fall in love with me in Phillip’s office. So, when did you know for sure?” he asked.

“In the dumpster. Oh sure, I thought you were quite dreamy when you were bubbling with that angry glare at me in Phillip’s office, but it was the dumpster that had me.”

“And just what gave me an advantage in there. Maybe I smelled better than the garbage?”

“You smelled better only before we got in, so no, that wasn’t it.”

“What then? There had to be something because if I recall right, you were doing a lot of complaining.”

“I was scared and you held me. You made me believe I’d always be safe with you. No one’s ever made me feel like that.”

“Like I said before, you sure are good for a man’s ego.” He wrapped his arms around her and smoothed a hand over the back of her head. “I’ll always protect you, Lorelei, even when you fight me on it.”

“I was rather obnoxious about not needing your help, wasn’t I?”

“A downright bitch in the obstinacy department, but I liked you for it, not in spite of it. You’re a strong, determined lady, and it’s commendable that you take your job seriously. It’s also rare to have a woman aggressive at her job and turn into a soft, cuddly pussycat in bed.”

“I love you,” she said, in between pecks to his chin and jaw. “I love you very much.”

Rafe carefully slid back behind the steering wheel and drove Lorelei home to pack for their trip. He wished they didn’t have to go in, but they did, and the apartment still hung with that air of death. Even though the body of Lorelei’s friend, Peggy, had long been removed, all other evidence of the police officers remained in the same position. Marking tape outlined where the body had lain. Overturned lamps and chairs were still in their haphazard stance. Knocked to the floor, knick-knacks lay broken in the carpet and on the tile. He didn’t want to take Lorelei back to the crime scene, but she had a right to want her belongings.

The bedroom had been untouched. He shut the door to block out the living room and give her a sanctuary from the disarray.

“What can I do to help?” He opened the window wide to let air freshen the room.

“Sit down.” She helped him take off the vest. “Shouldn’t we take you to the emergency room?”

Rafe stretched, and rubbed a hand against his side. “No, I’m pretty sure I’m just a bit bruised. You have some painkillers?”

“Yes, in the cabinet in the bathroom. I’ll get them.”

While she was gone, he called Diane and explained why he and Lorelei didn’t wait around.

“No, I’m not bringing her anywhere,” he told Diane when she began insisting they

needed to come into headquarters. "There's still a contract out to kill her."

Lorelei came back and handed him the pills and a cup of water.

"I'll take care of her. In the meanwhile, make a list of everyone that knew about the safe house and check them against the police department's incoming calls during the time Lorelei and I were stopped by a police officer. He said the caller claimed I was dangerous." He unbuttoned his shirt to look at the sore spot on his back.

Lorelei helped him remove it and he checked over his shoulder in the mirror.

"Feels worse than it appears," he whispered to Lorelei as Diane began her speech about protocol with a victim.

He stuck his arm back in the sleeve Lorelei held up.

"No, we're leaving town, Diane," he said into the phone. "Lorelei is packing a few things and I'm giving you notice right now, I'm on sick leave."

He watched Lorelei sift through items in her drawers and pull out clothing.

"Now really, how can I help," he asked, once he hung up on Diane.

"In the bottom of my closet you'll find a couple of canvas duffle bags. You can get those out for me."

He rummaged through the shoes, the tangle of belts and junk she had piled in the closet well after the bags were put away.

"There's no money hidden in this mess, is there?" He checked inside a boot. "I hear tell women hide their rainy day money in their shoes, figuring a thief wouldn't look there."

"I invest all my money," she laughed. "All my days have been rainy days."

He only half-listened as he tugged on the duffle bags to free them from foreign objects keeping them captive in the bottom of the closet.

Lorelei squatted down next to him. "Here, let me. I know the inner workings to this heap."

She yanked hard and fell back with the bag in tow.

"Brute strength." Rafe laughed helping her up. "I'll have to remember that the next time I'm sent on a mission by you."

He squeezed her upper arms as if testing the size of her muscles and gave her an approving nod.

"Very funny." She pushed him back and he fell into the pile of extra bedding.

The soft landing and Lorelei hanging over him made the creative juices flow. He took the bag from her and tossed it out to the bedroom floor. With a hand around her waist and one to the back of her head, he forced her down to his chest.

"And just what are you up to?" She hummed against his mouth sucking on hers.

"Something different, spontaneous and a little kinky." He ignored the soreness throughout his chest.

"Kinky, huh?" She slurped over his lips with a giggle. "I knew there was more I should know before running off with you."

"You don't like kinky?" He dropped his head back on the stack of blankets.

"Now how can you possibly think that after I made-out with you in a dumpster?"

"That does top the list of crazy places for kissing." His hand slid under her blouse. "I'm glad it didn't turn you off."

"When you kiss me, I can hardly think of where I am." She bowed her head and he kissed her nose.

“Then we won’t think.” Rafe pushed her blouse higher.

Lorelei lifted her arms. He removed the garment over her head and flung it out of the closet.

“I like your plan already.”

“Yeah, well I like to see you out of your bra.” He rubbed his hands over the seamless fabric.

Her nipples hardened to the stimulation of his caress. With the raking of his fingers over her shoulders, he tugged the straps down, and her ivory breasts swelled the fabric.

Rafe sucked hard against her skin, bruising her breasts and her neck with love bites. She panted heavy, her chest heaved and he jerked the bra down. The voluptuous mounds of soft flesh sprang free on the wave of her appreciative moan.

She leaned toward him and the pendulous globes swung away from her body. Rafe caught the tip of one pale pink nipple and caressed it with his wet tongue.

“Yes, don’t stop doing that,” she groaned.

She opened his unbuttoned shirt and he let her scatter kisses over him for a while. Her lips took one of his nipples and he didn’t think he’d keep still as she unzipped his pants and dipped her fingers inside his boxers. Her grip claimed his hot cock, throbbing excitedly at her stroke.

Lorelei lifted up and her breasts hung again over his face. He nipped playfully at one of her nipples and bathed the softness with his wet lips.

“Like that, babe?” He kissed the blushing tip.

“Uh-huh, more.” She clawed his shoulders.

The electrifying discomfort in his loins intensified. Her body trembled at the touch of his fingers working into her—pumping between the wet folds of flesh.

“Rafe,” she gasped. “Oh God, Rafe, what are you doing to me?”

Goosebumps and perspiration spread over his body. She wove her fingers into his hair and pulled at it as he brought her climax closer to eruption. He replaced his fingers with his cock and the tight fit of her moist center pushed him deeper.

Rafe wanted his thrusts embedded into her soul. He twisted and rolled her on her back where he could sheath himself into the clenching heat. Lorelei arched at his forceful jolts.

Their momentum escalated. He dropped down closer to her mouth.

“I want to hear that I am hitting every sensitive spot inside you.”

A whine ripped from her lungs. The sound turned into breathless squeaks as he hammered into her. His balls ached with pressure. Kissing her hard, his ejaculation came as a relief and his mouth froze against hers.

“It’s you that does something to me, Lorelei Blackwell, and you’re the best thing that’s happened to me in a very long time.”

Chapter Nineteen

Lorelei carefully packed everything of importance in the two boxes Rafe found for her in the basement. She had the picture of her father wrapped in an old sweatshirt and headed to the box when she folded back the fleece and looked at his smiling face.

She'd miss him. He had been a major part of her life, especially after his cancer got worse. A sudden thought about her relationship with Rafe turned her head to study him. She was a smart girl, she would know if what she felt for him were merely a fixation to avoid a lonely prelude.

Rafe picked up items, examined them and moved on to something else. Her heart beat with a joy much more profound than any temporary affection could be placed.

"Sweetheart, what about these?" Rafe held up a pair of old and worn-out pink satin ballet slippers.

"What makes you think I'd want them?"

"Because no one keeps raggedy items unless there is a sentimental attachment to them."

He walked over and put them in the box. She rose up on her tiptoes and kissed him, reassuring herself that she truly loved him.

"I always wanted to be a ballerina like my mother. Those were her favorite pair." She put the picture of her father in next to them. "I was awkward, klutzy and didn't really have my heart in it as much as my mind said I did."

"I bet you look good in the outfit."

"Don't you get any more ideas about dressing me up from that second hand shop, I'm not a doll." She poked him and cringed when he did, forgetting his sore ribs. "That was not flattering the way Officer Joe looked at me in that short skirt."

He smacked her bottom. "You're my doll and don't you forget it."

"Would you go get me one more box, please?" She bent over the bed and reached for another stack of clothes to sort. "I never thought I had collected so much."

She froze to Rafe's hands on her hips. His caress glided up to her ribs and then down to the hem of her skirt.

"Didn't you get enough in the closet?" She looked back at the hungry gaze in his eyes.

"It's never enough."

"Then do me, baby."

He pushed her skirt up and rubbed a hand between her legs. "You're always wet for me." He pushed two fingers into her and she rocked back to make the access better.

She sucked in her breath at his play over her anus.

"Where do you want it?" he asked.

"Wherever you want to put it."

He pressed his thumb further in her bottom. "We need lubricant." His hand rubbed her cunt.

"Bottom drawer in my dresser." She remained leaning on the bed.

"Where have you been partying?" He came back with one of her vibrators and a tube of lubricant.

She laughed and pulled him down on the bed. "That's for one of my lonely, one person parties."

"Is this something you do often?" He stroked a hand over her head.

"Not now that I have you."

"Hmmm?"

"What?"

The twinkle in his gaze warmed the pit of her belly.

"I was thinking how hard you'd make my cock if you let me watch."

She took the vibrator from him and turned it on. He offered the tube of gel, but she had the natural kind spilling from her like a waterfall.

"Will you help?" She pushed the vibrator in his hand.

"I've never done this. I wouldn't want to hurt you."

"You won't." She guided his hand, putting the rubbery tip close. "Just touch me with it the same way you do with your tongue or your cock."

She pulled his arm and the vibrator glided into her. "It's smaller than you," she moaned.

He worked it back and forth, twisting, angling, and hitting spots she couldn't do herself.

"Oh yes, like that." She let go of his wrist and grabbed the front of his shirt. "Kiss me."

He came close to her mouth. "I can't watch like this."

"Watch some other time." She jerked him to her lips.

His voracious appetite had him sucking on her mouth. The vibrator in his hand kept pumping. He even found a way to brush her clit, each pass in and every pull out.

She reached for his waistband. The snap popped to her tug, the zipper didn't go as easily over the bulge of his cock pressing against it.

"Come on babe, you aren't going to let one zipped fly prevent you from getting what you want, are you?" He laughed.

Lorelei bit his lip and then looked down to get his pants open. She jerked his cock out and squeezed hard.

"Tease." He removed the vibrator and she felt empty.

She put her other hand up to his face. "I think you got that backwards. You just pulled out of me."

"No, I just removed something in my way."

He squirmed next to her and she helped him remove his pants.

"I think I ought to just remain naked around you." He sat up and pulled his shirt off. "Seems you prefer me that way."

"Oh yeah, stud," she sang, and pulled him down with a hand behind his head.

After the ride she took on him in the closet, he didn't have the stamina to last long. However, orgasms came just as sweet on the end of a powerful quick fuck, and Rafe didn't disappoint. He rode her hard and fast and had her thrashing beneath him before he roared with his completion.

His kisses were hungry reminders of his love and she ate them up greedily.

"We're never going to get out of here if you keep screwing me every half hour," she panted.

"I'll go get you those boxes." He pushed up off her.

“Love you,” she called, watching him walk away fastening his pants.

Lorelei smoothed over her skirt and buttoned her blouse. She stacked a few more things on the bed and turned to the sound of him in the bedroom doorway.

“That was quick.” Her smile faded when she saw the gun Diane aimed directly at her.

“I gave him time to get over the bitch that left him.” Diane’s glazed stare made Lorelei shiver. “I wanted to take things slow, not rush the guy, so he’d get the idea I would be good for him, and then you come along.”

“What do you do now, kill me and wait for him again?”

“He’ll grieve, only this time he hasn’t had time to form any long term bond with you. If that idiot Bennington had better men working for him, I wouldn’t have to do this myself.”

“You know Rafe will figure out you’re the inside source for Bennington.”

“I don’t think so. That case will be closed now that the man is dead.”

“You can’t just kill me. It’s not like having someone else do it.” Lorelei tried to think of where she laid her gun. She wouldn’t just pack it carelessly. It had to be on the bed.

“Naïve, aren’t you, ADA Blackwell. You of all people should know the strengths of a woman. You work in a man’s world and have made a very nice name for yourself I understand.”

“I know my job.”

“I know mine too. It’s to look out for number one. You’re a threat to what I want. Bennington paid me quite well to give him information. He took care of getting Phillip out of the way and I took care of that insipid woman that caught me going through your mail.”

“You killed Peggy?”

“Not until I found out what she knew about where you were. Rafe is too smart for his own good, taking you to a house he owned without letting anyone in the agency know about it.”

“He’s also smart enough to figure out you’re the leak in his department.”

Diane’s gaze drifted to the bed and the vibrator. “Is that why you wanted him, to take the place of your little toy?”

“Diane?” Rafe’s voice came from the living room.

The second Diane turned her head Lorelei shoved her hand under the clothes on the bed and found her holster. She put it behind her back and pulled the gun out.

“Stay back, Rafe.” Diane moved into the bedroom.

“Put the gun away, Diane.” He stopped in the doorway.

“I’ve waited for you, Rafe. I’ve put up with your affair and your grief and you choose her.” Diane waved her gun toward Lorelei.

“We don’t pick who we love, it just happens.” He took another step in Diane’s direction.

“And when she’s dead?”

“If I’d never met Lorelei, I still could never love you.”

“Then you can die with her.” Diane’s arm swung around toward Rafe.

The gunshot echoed loud in Lorelei’s small apartment. Diane stared at her. She seemed frozen like a statue—pale, unreal and still. In an instant, she fell back.

Rafe rushed forward, but he was too late to catch Diane. The open window did

nothing to stop the collapse of the woman falling through it. The scream hardly started before it stopped.

“Lorelei?” Rafe turned from the window.

“She was going to kill you.” Lorelei let him take the gun from her hand. “I didn’t want to shoot her. I just couldn’t let her kill you.”

“It’s all right sweetheart.” He hugged her. “It was a clean shooting.”

“Rafe, she was involved in everything—Phillip’s death, Peggy’s death, everything.”

“I heard. Sorry, but I suspected for a long time she might be the one giving Bennington information. It’s why I told her we were here packing. I just didn’t guess she would be here this soon.”

Lorelei stared over his shoulder at the living room. Crime scene tape still hung broken at the door Rafe left open.

“Let’s leave here.”

“We will, as soon as we deal with the police.”

“No, I mean let’s leave this city and never come back.”

“But our jobs?”

She leaned back in his arms and studied his eyes for an okay. “I have this sudden urge to do something different with my life.”

“What do you think about a stopover in Las Vegas?”

“On our way to Daytona?”

“Yeah, you know, for one of those quickie weddings.” He put his forehead against hers. “I really want to always take care of you.”

She nodded and kissed him. If she knew anything, he was the one person that made her feel safe in his protective custody.

The End

About the Author:

Even though I was born on Halloween, in New Jersey, USA. I've actually lived most my life in Alabama. Married with one son, I have a farm full of animals and a house full of cats. Luckily, since my husband and I are in the contracting business, I reaped the benefits of having a huge house to fit all my hobbies including taking in stray felines and collecting books.

I've written for more years than I should say, but lets just say it started in the 1970's and we'll not get into just how old I am. I started out a poet and have had hundreds of poems published in magazines. I dabbled with short stories and non-fiction, yet novels were a lingering attraction.

After the turn of the century I turned my attention to writing longer works. E-publishing gave me leeway in what I wanted to publish and erotic romance became a big word in my house as I reworked old stories to fit the genre.

I love writing stories and with a supportive family, I spend endless hours doing what I love. I believe I have the perfect life...well outside of having a few billion dollars, I do.

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