

THE FIRM Temptress



Tuesday Morrigan
Changeling Press

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Lioness on the run...

With nowhere to turn, Brooklyn calls Lancaster Lionheart for a favor. Lancaster's solution -- a job at the Lionheart firm -- puts her face to face with her childhood infatuation -- Khalid. And it seems nothing's changed in the last ten years.

Khalid's not too keen on working with Brooklyn. The fact is he doesn't want anything to do with her. She's too flashy. Too dangerous. They butt heads at every corner. That is until there's an attempt on her life. When Brooklyn goes into heat, Khalid knows he has to stay away from her and protect her life at the same time.

Too bad for him she's such a *Temptress*.

Prologue -- Ordinary, Complicated Love

His heart thundered in his chest at the first glimpse of her body. The streaming, silver light from the moon danced over her voluptuous figure, silhouetting her in the gray beams.

His cock reared at the sight, hardening painfully with desire. One small palm lifted. He accepted the outstretched hand and took a step toward her, unable to stay away.

"Khalid," she whispered in a soft voice that caressed every inch of his naked skin. "What's wrong?"

"I should have found you sooner, come to you sooner."

She smiled, stepping closer to him, pressing the full mounds of her luscious breasts against him. Her small hand moved through the air, slicing through the mists that rose up from the ground. The view of the garden blurred for a second and then cleared to reveal a large bed covered in red and white satin sheets.

His cock, already hard, stiffened so quickly, so painfully, he felt the need to palm the swollen organ. Her gaze drifted to the hand holding his dick. "Let me."

Her hand covered his, caressing the thick, hard length of his erection. The other hand pushed at his shoulder. He moved back, hearing her unspoken demand. His legs collided with the bed. Stunned, he landed on top of it.

She smiled at him and knelt, her dark eyes swimming with smoldering heat. He felt his heart skip at the sight of her on her knees, before him, ready to...

Still...

"I... you don't..."

"I want to please you." The hunger in her voice, the smile on her face, quieted his protest.

He watched the slow descent of her dark head as her mouth slowly moved to the glistening head of his cock. He stared as a single drop of pre-cum leaked from the slit. Her tongue, dark pink and quick, flicked the plum-shaped head of his dick, licking up the proof of his desire. He groaned as the wet, velvet feel of her tongue on his most sensitive flesh sliced through him.

He gritted his teeth. He already felt like he was seconds from coming and she hadn't even taken his full length into her mouth. As if she heard him, her full, slightly tinted lips wrapped around his cock and sucked him deep. "Son of a..." His growl was cut off when she swallowed, taking him deeper. His fingers dug into the sheets as he held on to his sanity.

She was killing him.

He could feel his balls tightening with the pleasure her fluttering tongue gave his hard flesh. "Sweetheart," he growled as a low warning.

Instead of pulling up and easing on the suction, she suckled him harder, tightened her lips around him and literally drained the seed from his body. His hips thrust up and he shouted her name as his seed gushed forth into her ready mouth, sliding straight down the back of her throat.

When he opened his eyes, he found her looming over him, straddling his hips. He groaned when he felt his cock hardening. He should have been too exhausted, too depleted from his intense orgasm to get hard, but his little soldier had different ideas.

And so did she, judging by the sweet smile on her beautiful face. "We have much to make up for, my mate."

"Yes." His voice was thick and deep with desire, as he reached for her.

Khalid woke with a gasp. Sheets clung to his heated, sweat-drenched skin. With wide eyes he looked around him. After a moment, the fiery cobwebs of the reverie slipped away and the dream, like the ones before it, were forgotten.

Chapter One -- Going Back to Cali

Lancaster woke in a fuzzy haze. It took his sleepy mind moments to process the sound of the phone ringing. His gnarled hands eventually found the phone on the bedside table. "Hello?" he croaked out.

"Is that you, Uncle Lancaster?"

His eyes immediately focused at the sound of her voice. "Brooklyn?"

"Uncle Lancaster." Brooklyn's voice was strained and full of fear.

"Where are you?"

Her sigh was palpable even over the phone. "I'm standing outside the gate."

"My gate?" he asked as he headed for the bedroom door.

"Yes."

"I'm on my way."

Moments later, he led Brooklyn to the cold, dark kitchen. He pressed a button and the room was filled with a burning white light. Lancaster sat her at the island and took a seat beside her.

"Did I wake Auntie Sam?"

Lancaster gave her a weak smile. "No, you know Samantha sleeps like a log. A grenade could go off and she wouldn't stir. How are you, Brooklyn?"

She gave him a brittle smile. "I've been better." She darted a glance at the gigantic refrigerator behind him. "Got anything in there?"

"Hungry?"

She gave him her first honest smile. "It's not easy being a big girl. I have to eat to keep this lush figure," she said with a soft chuckle.

He stood and opened the refrigerator door wide enough for her to see everything inside.

"You know Auntie Sam would kill you if she saw this?"

"Yeah," he said with a smile. "Why she's always complaining about the light bill when she doesn't pay it never made sense to me."

"Because she worries about you wasting your money," Brooklyn said as she stepped off her stool and walked around the island. "Ooh, cake," she squealed before pulling out the large cake dish in the center of the highest shelf. "Can I?"

"Will you?" he asked, remembering the days when she wouldn't eat anything that didn't come straight from a garden for fear she would gain weight.

"I feel like I deserve this. I've definitely earned it."

"What's wrong, Brookie?" He couldn't keep the soft, worried tone out of his voice. He was picturing all the reasons why she'd called him at this time, on this night.

One lifted midnight eyebrow was accompanied by a soft smile. "Don't you think I'm a little too old to be called that?"

He snorted. "You're all of what, eighteen?"

"Twenty-five, thank you very much."

"You didn't answer my question."

"Can I spend the night here?"

He stared at her for a few seconds, reading the emotions on her face. It was all he was able to do. Brooklyn was unlike most people. He couldn't see her future, even when he truly tried to look. And Lancaster wasn't getting much from her face. Not much more than the sadness that cloaked her like a shield. "How many nights?"

"How about we start with one and see our way from there?"

"Fine," Lancaster agreed.

* * *

Brooklyn's hands shook as she pulled the knob on the nightstand and stared down at the black leather book. There had never been a time in her life when she needed prayer more. She grabbed the book, placed it on the tabletop and turned. She slowly undressed, baring her creamy milk chocolate skin to the harsh glare of the artificial light.

She paused when she caught sight of her reflection in the mirror above the cherry wood dresser. Even to Brooklyn's tired eyes she appeared exhausted, defeated, and deflated.

Running for one's life was hard.

Hard on the body.

Hard on the mind.

Hard on the soul.

Brooklyn dropped her simple black dress on the bed and rolled the tight muscles in her shoulders. She grimaced at the pain that shot through her nerve endings. She hadn't really expected to find one of his men waiting for her when she was picking up her luggage at the Denver airport. She hadn't been expecting the hit.

Her lip curled in disgust. Ramon had come out of nowhere. His long, curled fingers had grabbed her upper arm, bit into her skin, and pulled her to him before she realized what was happening. If it had not been for her brother's training she never would have gotten away.

She pulled her cell phone from her purse and stared at it for long moments. With a long, drawn out sigh, she placed it on the dresser top. The gaping cavern of her small black suitcase stared at her. Her first instinct was to unpack. Then she remembered why she was there. The Asshole wasn't the kind to give up on the chase. She wouldn't be unpacking for a very long time.

She turned away from the open suitcase, ignoring her desire to settle down, ignoring her natural instinct to find a place to call home... even if it was only home for a day.

Her gaze landed on the bright blue flashing window on the front of her phone. She did not need to see the slickly garnished screen to see what it wanted, demanded. Still, she flipped it open. A stark text message stared up at her.

Just tell me you're fine. Tell me you're alive.

Pain stabbed her chest. The simple message cut so deep. She gnawed her bottom lip as tears leaked from her eyes. She could ignore the message like she had ignored the

countless others that had come before. But the pain would still be there. Eating away at her when the darkness closed around her at night. Eating away at her when she took off running to another town, another city, and another state.

Her shaky fingers reached for the iridescent numbers on the touchpad. They reached for the only way she had left of contacting her family.

The Asshole had taken everything from her.

Chapter Two -- Games Men Play

Lancaster stared at the phone for several moments. The emotions swirling through him were turbulent, uneasy, and not what he needed to feel when he spoke. He took a deep, cleansing breath, pushing back the sight of her haunted brown eyes. Then and only then did he reach a large, gnarled hand to the phone lying beside his bed.

He waited for the other side to pick up. Lancaster had not heard the voice in years and he suddenly regretted the distance, physically and emotionally, that separated him and his friend. "Thanks for the warning, Alan."

An empty laugh drifted through the line. "Couldn't exactly ignore she was heading straight for you." He sighed. "Tell me she's okay?"

"She's tired, but fine."

A thick pause descended between them. "I'm not so sure this is a good idea."

"Do you doubt my gift?" Lancaster asked softly.

Alan's tone changed, hardening. "I wouldn't have to doubt your gift, if it was clear. You're not even sure she's the one."

"I might not be able to see her face when my visions come, but I know enough to tell she's the one."

"I would feel a lot better if it wasn't my daughter's life on the line."

There was nothing Lancaster could say to comfort the man. He too had much on the line, but gambling with his son's heart did not compare to taking a chance with Alan's daughter's life.

Chapter Three -- A Game of Dress Up

"I remember you being a late riser, waking at noon."

She turned to Lancaster, shadowed eyes gleaming enigmatically in the barely lit room. Even the sun was finding it difficult to rise. Its light was just beginning to stream through the windows Sam had carefully selected.

Her lashes fluttered closed before slowly opening. All emotion was gone from her eyes. "That was a long time ago, Uncle Lance."

His heart broke at the hard coldness of her voice. Gone was the exuberant, bubbly young woman he knew. Someone had made her a shell of her former self. The only clue the old Brooklyn had ever existed came from the dress she wore. It was bright red with its swirling pattern of roses in bloom and circles. It was a dress unlike any he had ever seen. It was a dress that the Brooklyn he knew, the Brooklyn he remembered, would wear.

He battled back the tears that threatened to fall. Brooklyn didn't need to see the pain he felt for her. She needed to know of the strength she could rely on in her time of need. He strode across the room, and placed a soft kiss against her forehead. "Hungry, Brookie?"

"You're really going to have to stop calling me that." The smile she gave him was tinted with sadness. It wedged in his heart.

"I'll think about it when you give me some grandkids."

Her lashes flickered. Her gaze lifted to his. For one blinding moment there was none of the stark pain he had witnessed lately. "Pancakes?" The edge of her mouth lifted up with a quirky smile.

"For you, sweetie, anything." He turned to the cabinets, reached up and grabbed the white and red bag of flour. Without looking he placed the flour on the island behind

him. He found his favorite mixing bowl and the assortment of ingredients that went into his world famous pancakes. Comfortable silence descended between them.

"Thank you, Uncle Lance."

"You're always welcome, Brooklyn," he said as he stirred the flour into the liquid mixture he whisked. When the mixture was to his liking he stopped and looked up. The question on his tongue was forgotten when he saw what she was reading. "Exactly why are you looking through the want ads? You have a job."

She glanced up quickly and slid her gaze back to the newspaper. It didn't go unnoticed that her gaze did not quite meet his. "I had a job."

"What happened, Brooklyn?"

"Nothing that doesn't happen every single day. I quit and now I need another one."

His lips tightened into a frown. She stared up at him with unblinking eyes. There was no emotion there, just a level of awareness he had only seen in those men who had been forged in battle.

He turned back to the stove. There was nothing he could say to her to get her to confide in him. When the time was right she would tell him what she ran from. Until then he would do his best to protect her. He poured the batter into a perfect circle on the heated griddle. "You're in luck. I have a spot at the firm that is perfect for you."

"Which branch?"

He flipped the golden pancake over. "My branch."

"Uh-huh. So you're looking for a mathematician?"

He turned with the pancake on the spatula. "Watch your tone, young lady," he growled softly. He placed the pancake on the plate set in front of her. "No, I don't need a mathematician. I need an accountant, someone who can find out why the numbers aren't adding up in an embezzlement case. And nobody knows numbers better than the Barrister women."

Uncertain eyes caught his gaze. "How much longer do you think you have to work on the case?"

"Three or four months," he said as he made another circle on the griddle.

"I wasn't planning on staying in town that long."

"You can change your plans."

"I'll figure out the numbers." And then she would pack her things and go. Lancaster didn't need her to say the words. They both knew once she had enough money she would be gone.

* * *

Brooklyn bit the inside of her lip as she followed Lancaster into the building that housed the Lionheart firm. Like the man in front of her, the building was aged, refined, and more than a tad bit overwhelming.

She felt unbearably uncomfortable. For a moment she feared she would lose her nerve, tuck her tail between her legs, and run. And then she remembered why she was there. She desperately needed the money.

Brooklyn smoothed her palms down the front of her black slacks and adjusted her jacket. Her nerves had woken with a vengeance in the last twenty minutes. Brooklyn wasn't sure if it was because she was about to step into the infamous Lionheart firm as an employee rather than a guest. Experience told her that her discomfort came from having to wear the suit. She hated suits. They were not her style.

Lancaster looked back over his broad shoulder. There was a question in his blue eyes. Brooklyn realized she hadn't moved for some time. She took a deep breath and stepped forward. "Remember your checking account balance," she muttered low enough so no one else could hear. Brooklyn was meticulous with her finances. She knew how much both her checking and savings accounts held to the penny. She could not afford to leave Silicon Valley just yet.

She glanced at him. She was still surprised by how quickly Uncle Lancaster had agreed to pay her cash. No questions asked. She had been poised to tell him a lie when he'd simply said, "That's fine, Brookie."

As if it had indeed been a normal request.

Brooklyn wasn't foolish enough to think he didn't know something was wrong. But Uncle Lancaster was the kind of man who wouldn't try to pry your problems out of you. He always sat back and let you come to him. More often than not when she'd told him what was wrong, he'd informed her he had already fixed the problem.

But that was when she was little. And her problems weren't the size of a six-foot jackass. She pushed aside thoughts of The Asshole to focus on Lancaster.

After what felt like an eternity, she jerked to a stop. Lancaster stood in the doorway of what appeared to be an elegant office. But it was the sight of the man standing next to him that made her jaw drop.

Khalid Lionheart.

She would recognize that six-foot-four midnight-haired man anywhere. His gaze darted to her for a second. Brooklyn felt her heart lurch. Damn! You would think after more than ten years he wouldn't still have such an effect on her. The last time she had seen Khalid she was fourteen. The tall, dark, brooding man had captured her attention. And never let go.

Shit! She was twenty-five, old enough to know she shouldn't be feeling this way. She was after all an adult. Brooklyn snorted to herself. Uh huh! Two weeks. She was going to give herself two weeks to figure out the numbers and then she was heading out of the country. And she was going to avoid Khalid the whole time.

Brooklyn shifted her stance. Her heels were walking shoes, not standing shoes. She was starting to get pretty freaking uncomfortable waiting for Lancaster to tell her about the assignment.

Her actions must have garnered Lancaster's attention because at that moment he turned to her. "You remember my son, Khalid."

Boy, did she ever. "Yes."

Khalid turned and smiled at the young woman across from his father. She reminded him of a chocolate covered, pleasantly plump pixie. Her short ebony hair had espresso brown streaks running throughout and was fashionably spiked. The simple black suit she wore did a poor job of hiding her bountiful breasts and wide hips.

Khalid grimaced. He hadn't noticed a woman's figure in a long time and he didn't like the fact that he was noticing hers. The woman was going to be his employee. He was asking for legal trouble noticing her curves.

"Khalid, this is Brooklyn Barrister, Alan's daughter."

His head whipped around, his gaze confronting his father. "Excuse me?" he asked softly, his voice betraying none of the emotion he felt. None of the emotion that made him feel like he had been sucker punched.

Lancaster had called early that morning to let him know that he had found the perfect person to aid him in his embezzlement case, someone who was intelligent, quiet, thorough, and quick. He needed a professional.

He was not expecting a family friend.

And then it hit him and he realized exactly which Barrister daughter stood in front of him. "Lyn?"

The long fan of her onyx eyelashes fluttered. "Yes. Surprised, Khalid?"

He ran his fingers through his overgrown hair. For a moment Khalid was afraid he was going to do something truly stupid. "Uh, well, I haven't seen you in about... Jesus, ten years, so yeah I'm a little surprised."

One side of her mouth lifted into a quirky smile. "I'm older and wiser now, wise enough to help you on your case."

"So I've heard." He moved away from the doorway. "Take a seat inside and I'll be right with you. I just want to have a word with my father."

Khalid caught both the look she darted Lancaster and the subtle shake of the old man's head reassuring her. He didn't want to be the bad guy, but Khalid knew his father well enough to know something was up. And he planned to find out exactly what that something was from the source itself.

"Whatever you're thinking of doing, don't."

Lancaster gave him a bright smile. It was probably meant to be reassuring. It wasn't.

"I told you I can't see your mate's face."

"That hasn't stopped you from parading every single woman in front of my face," Khalid growled softly. Because of dear old Dad he was forced to seriously consider filing a restraining order against some of the crazies he had sent Khalid's way.

As if he heard his son's thoughts, Lancaster placed a hand on Khalid's shoulder. "I'm really sorry about Jessica. I didn't see that coming... I didn't realize she was a little unbalanced."

Khalid sighed. Trust his father to make light of the dire situation. "She's more than a little unbalanced. She just moved out of an apartment that came complete with a padded wall."

"Khalid..."

He stood a little straighter and glared at his father. Khalid knew that tone. The Old Man was trying to use his age as a weapon and worm his way straight to his goal. But Khalid wasn't giving in. "I will find my own mate," he said softly. He couldn't keep the coldness out of his tone. Kaelyn might be happy with the fact that their father had forced him and his wife together but he wanted to find his life mate on his own.

It was a matter of principle.

"This is not about that. Besides, she's barely more than a cub."

One midnight eyebrow lifted. "Are you trying to tell me I'm old?" He flashed a mischievous smile at his father's florid face. The Old Man was getting embarrassed. It was about time the shoe was on the other foot.

"You're not even forty. How can I call you old when I've seen over three hundred years? I'm just warning you that Brooklyn is young and inexperienced in the ways of men."

"As long as you're not hoping for another wedding in six months..."

"I'm not. She needs this job, Khalid."

"But can she handle it?"

His father's full lips, lips Khalid had inherited, spread into a warm, remembering smile. "In all my years I've never seen a person better with numbers than the Barrister women and she's the best of the best. She can do the job."

* * *

By mid-afternoon Khalid was sure that Brooklyn could do the job, but he wasn't sure that he wanted her to do the job. They butted horns worse than two angry bulls.

Every time she got near him to pick up a file or drop one off, she said something that made him growl. And he wasn't a growler. He was usually the cool-headed one. Three years as a beat cop, plus law school, and a few years at the firm had cured him of all heated emotions.

"At least I thought so," Khalid muttered as he ran his long fingers through his hair. The woman had the uncanny ability to get a rise out of him no matter what she said. Hell, she smiled and said hi, and he felt his emotions rise.

Unfortunately his emotions weren't all that he felt rise. He looked down at his cock. Just thinking about the way she muttered out the side of her mouth when she didn't think he could hear her made his cock twitch.

He was a masochist. Apparently he liked his sexual gratification with a lot of pain. It was the only reason to explain why he felt attracted to a woman who irritated the hell out of him.

He squinted as he thought of something. He saved and closed the file he was working on and slowly lowered the screen of his laptop. Khalid made his way to his father's office. Three short raps and he walked into the room. "You're up to something."

"I'll call you back later, Sam," Lancaster said into the phone, his gaze on Khalid's face. He slowly lowered the receiver.

Khalid closed the door behind him and leaned on it. "You lied to me," he said slowly, enunciating the words.

Lancaster leaned back in his chair and smiled at him. "How and when did I lie to you?"

"I'm smarter than Kaelyn. I know what you're up to."

Lancaster's smile became wider. "Let me remind you that I cannot see your mate. I've tried. The fates don't want me to see her."

"I know you're up to something."

Lancaster leaned forward. "You're starting to repeat yourself."

A smile tugged on Khalid's lips. He *was* repeating himself. He stepped away from the door and took a seat across from his father. "I just want to reiterate my point. I do not want you playing your matchmaking games."

Lancaster's smile slipped and he sighed. "This is about more than matchmaking. This is about survival."

Khalid stilled. "You're going to have to explain that last comment."

Lancaster slumped in his chair. "She's on the run from something that is scaring the hell out of her. And I don't know how to protect her."

"That's why you gave me the super efficient math whiz. Michael's the one with the case due in a few weeks and the Whitehall case I'm working on isn't due for a few months. But I got her."

"I want, no, need, someone I trust watching over her. I need a hunter."

Khalid rubbed his hands over his face. "I no longer use those skills. I'm not a hunter. I left the force for a reason."

"You weren't at fault for that man's death. You were protecting yourself."

"I morphed into my bestial form and snapped his neck with my jaws."

"Khalid --"

He turned to his father. His actions had caused his family so much grief. If it hadn't been for his father's connections in the force, they wouldn't have been able to dispose of the body so easily. He didn't want to put them through that ordeal again. "I refuse to use my abilities. Find yourself another protector for Brooklyn."

Lancaster glared at Khalid. "You'll protect her. She's your responsibility. You can and will watch over her."

Bloody fucking hell! Khalid knew that tone. He was stuck with Brooklyn. Now all he had to do was keep his cock under control.

Chapter Four -- Thief in the Night

Brooklyn sighed and leaned against the door to her temporary office. She found it increasingly difficult to pretend that nothing was wrong around Lancaster. There was something in his vivid blue gaze that told her he not only knew she was on the run, but what she was running from.

Lancaster chipped away at the carefully erected walls she had around her emotions. Brooklyn had steadily built the walls over the year she had been on the run from The Asshole and she had no intention of letting Lancaster tear them down.

Brooklyn suspected her father already knew where to find her. There was no way Lancaster hadn't called his friend, but knowing the two, her father wouldn't show up until Lancaster deemed it necessary.

And she hoped to get out of town before it became necessary.

Between Lancaster and Khalid her nerves were frazzled.

Khalid grated on her nerves with his rigidity. Everything had to be done his way, in the order he wanted, at the time he wanted. He was the law firm's very own tyrant. And as if that wasn't bad enough, the strength and sexuality that clung to his tanned, golden skin attracted her like she was a moth to the flame. Brooklyn was smart enough to know that Khalid Lionheart was the last thing she needed. Oil and water had a better chance of getting along.

Although she and the Lionhearts weren't related, there was enough of a connection between her and the Lionheart family that Brooklyn could not take the chance of staying in the Valley longer than the two weeks she had given herself.

She could not take the chance that any one of the Lionhearts could be harmed. She slapped her hands over her eyes and groaned. She had put off the truth long

enough and was tired of hiding. Running across the country was not really far enough to guarantee her safety.

Brooklyn grabbed the simple black leather bag by her feet and fished out her Palm Pilot. After a few moments she had the number she needed. She dialed and waited for the other woman to pick up the phone.

"Hello?" the throaty, distinctively feminine voice said softly. It was early morning on her side of the planet.

"It's Lyn."

"Jesus H. Christ. You're fucking alive!"

"And I need a favor, Amelia," Brooklyn said, cutting her off before the other woman could say more.

There was a pause on the other end of the line. "What kind of favor? His arms don't reach here, but you know I got to come into the States every few months."

"Don't worry. I wouldn't do that to you."

"No, you wouldn't. What do you need, mate?"

"I need a passport."

"I'm out of that business. I'm legit now."

Brooklyn waited several seconds. Her heart knocked at her ribs, powered by the fear that permeated her pores. Brooklyn was desperate, and afraid Amelia would turn her down.

"How soon do you need it?"

Brooklyn sucked in a deep breath, feeding her air starved lungs. She had not even realized she had been holding her breath. "How soon is too soon?"

The woman on the other end sighed. "You're lucky I love you."

* * *

The intruder stared at the tall black wrought iron bars for several moments. He only had one option.

He took several steps back. The intruder eyed the gate and took a few more steps back. He took off at a run and leapt when he was less than ten feet away from the gate.

He landed with a soft shudder on the other side of the gate. He remained motionless for long seconds. When he was sure he had been undetected, he sprinted across the carefully manicured lawn.

The intruder smiled to himself when he reached the edge of the mansion and could fully stand in its shadows. It had all been too easy, pitifully easy. But neighborhoods such as the one that housed the Lionheart mansion did not believe they would be the victims of burglaries.

Then again, he was no burglar. What he sought was more precious than diamonds or gold. He was looking for his freedom. What the boss's bitch knew was enough to put his ass behind metal gates so confining he would be licking his balls every time he spoke.

Even though the deck was wood, his steps were silent. Not a single creak sounded through the midnight air. His lips spread into a humorless smile when he reached the small metal box that housed the mansion's security system. The man dug into his hip pocket and pulled out a small dark item. With a quick flick of his wrist a small, sharp blade appeared. He pried off the top half of the cold, gray box.

He stared dispassionately at the tangle of wires that glinted and caught the silvery streams of moonlight darting between the moving clouds. He considered simply cutting through the least conspicuous wire, the most important one, and leaving the system dead.

But that would alert the occupants that someone had breached their security system. And he wasn't quite sure he wanted to give the bitch that kind of heads up. He had been chasing her long enough. He didn't want to go on another chase.

He snipped the end of the dark wire. Out of the corner of his eye the intruder spotted one of the yard's security cameras stop in mid perusal of the perimeter.

Perfect.

Without the restriction of the security system, the intruder found himself inside the mansion in moments. A quick investigation of the house and he discovered what he was looking for.

The intruder darted a quick glance around the room. Being the hunter that he was, the characteristics of the panther gave him the ability to see the room as plain as day despite the darkness that cloaked his every movement.

What he saw made his thin lips spread into a harsh smile.

He bent, lifted the suitcase that sat on the floor beside the rumpled bed and placed it on top of the scattered sheets. He flipped open the un-zippered lid. For a second he was sure he had miscalculated. The clothing was all wrong. It was not bold enough to belong to the woman he sought. Maybe he had followed the wrong flight. No. The flight attendant had described his target perfectly. He had to have the right woman.

He lifted a light piece of fabric. A bra. He brought the item to his nose and sniffed it. He took the scent deep into his body, allowing his powerful senses to identify the owner.

The intruder smiled. There was no denying the scent of the lioness that clung to the article of clothing. The intruder had found the boss's bitch. And he was going to make sure she never revealed his secrets.

Chapter Five -- Sinking Ship Soon

Khalid stared out the large glass window of his corner office. It gave him a perfect view of the northern California landscape and the small city that had drawn him to the firm. But the view didn't register. Instead he kept seeing his dream lover's dark brown eyes, eyes that were strikingly familiar.

With a sigh he forced himself to focus on his work and... Brooklyn. Khalid could not stand her. The woman was like an armored truck. A deliciously attractive armored truck. Although he hated working with Brooklyn, he felt he couldn't ask Lancaster to transfer her to another attorney.

Too bad every time Khalid looked at Brooklyn he got the feeling the pixie was playing a game of dress up. She didn't look quite comfortable in her suit. And unfortunately he couldn't stop picturing every delicious way he could help her undress.

He ached to taste the sweetness of her chocolate skin.

He pushed thoughts of Brooklyn out of his mind and grabbed the file at the top of the manila pile. The shrill ring of a phone cut through the still, stale office air.

Khalid dropped the file in front of him and pressed the blinking red button. "Yes, Nora."

"Mr. Lionheart to see you, sir."

He glanced at the file in front of him and then the pile yet undone. "Send him in."

Lancaster entered the room with purposeful movements. Khalid's attention was immediately piqued. "Hi, Dad," he said with his best imitation of a natural, welcoming smile. He hoped to calm whatever storm was brewing right off the bat.

"Hey, son." His father glanced at his desk. "How's the Whitehall case going?"

He smiled at his father. As much as he hated to admit it, Brooklyn was doing a damned good job figuring out the numbers. "She's certainly efficient. I won't be surprised if she shows me exactly where the money has been going and how it has been disappearing by the end of the week."

"Damn," Lancaster growled.

Khalid's smile disappeared. "Dad?"

"Keep me updated on how far along she is on the project. Okay, son?"

Khalid stared at his father for a few seconds, seeking some kind of statement that there was nothing to worry about, but the look on the Old Man's face didn't make him feel secure. "I need you to tell me exactly what's going on."

Lancaster gave him an unsteady smile. "I wish I knew what was going on."

That wasn't the answer Khalid was expecting. A denial of the truth he could work with, work around, but...

Lancaster shifted in his seat for several seconds. When he seemed to have found a comfortable seat, he lifted his eyes and caught Khalid's gaze. The rage and fear Khalid saw there made his heart jump.

"What the hell is going on?" he thundered. Almost immediately he realized that he was being unreasonably emotional. "Tell me what's wrong, Dad?" he said more softly.

"She's running from something very dangerous, someone dangerous enough to break into the mansion without leaving a scent."

"She?"

"Brooklyn."

Khalid's eyes widened. "Fuck!"

Lancaster gave him a harsh smile, devoid of any warmth. "The bastard didn't leave a scent for me to trace, but I'm older and wiser. I found his tracks, both sets."

"Both sets?"

"Yes, human and animal."

Khalid gaped at his father for several seconds; then he exploded. "She's got a shifter on her tail? Who the hell is she running from? What the hell did she do that they sent a shifter after her?"

"I don't think they sent just any shifter after her. I think my intruder was none other than the Black Panther."

"I hope you're kidding, because the Black Panther is on the Preternatural Operatives most wanted list."

"I'm not." Lancaster leaned forward in his seat. "I'm certain she doesn't know he was in the house last night. And I don't want her to know."

Khalid sighed and leaned back in his seat. "Why do I get the feeling that her ship is sinking and I've just been recruited to not only keep it afloat, but make sure it reaches harbor."

Lancaster gave him a soft, sad smile. "Because that's exactly why I'm here. I know I asked you to watch her before, but that was when I just believed she was running from an ex-boyfriend. Now I know she's running from a killer. I need you to keep her safe. Khalid, I need you to keep her alive."

Chapter Six -- American Dream

Shadows shifted and darkness moved across the ground, cloaking him as he stalked his prey from the back corner of the simple motel she had checked into. She moved in front of the window and he caught a glimpse of her silhouette. He growled low in his throat and watched as she removed her blouse, pulling it down her softly rounded shoulders.

Because of the screen he could not actually see her.

Anger rose deep inside of him.

He scented the second animal long before it reached him. Too late, the other realized his mistake.

The bright glare of fear glistened in the raccoon's eyes at the sight of the giant cat. For one moment the Black Panther considered chasing it down and ripping its jugular out just to feel the quick rush of lifeblood seeping.

He was in a bad mood and death, whether it be a human or animal's death, was the only thing that could appease him. He took a step forward and the raccoon, no longer frozen in fear, turned and ran. But the cat did not follow.

It was not the beast's blood he wanted but hers.

The Black Panther was not happy with the turn of events. He had not anticipated finding another hunter on the scene. Plans needed to be altered. For that alone, he would make sure that she and the hunter paid.

Very soon he would appease himself with the taste of her lover's blood.

Chapter Seven -- The Nature of Desire

Brooklyn slammed her palm against the small, black box on the rickety table next to her bed. The act did nothing productive. The alarm still sang its shrill, dream-chasing song, and the last vestiges of her dream drifted too far away for her to reach it.

Her fingers danced over it, searching for the snooze button, or better yet the button that would turn the damned thing off. With a start her dream fogged mind realized what she was doing. Reluctantly she pressed the off button and lifted her head.

She had a job, one that started at nine. With a heartfelt groan, Brooklyn lifted her head from her pillow and sat up. She missed her old life. She missed the days when she would show up for work at seven p.m. and work until midnight or two.

She threw the covers off and padded to the bathroom to brush her teeth and shower. Brooklyn had stayed up too late working and she had woken too early. The hot water felt incredible as it beat down on her exhausted body.

Her moan cut through the steam as the water caressed her skin with its harsh, invigorating touch. Brooklyn grabbed her scented body wash and loofah. She squirted a generous amount of liquid onto the sponge and pressed it to her shoulder. She groaned at the contact.

Her skin felt like it was on fire, but the heat wasn't painful. No, it was pure, unadulterated pleasure.

Brooklyn's breath caught and hung in her throat as she lowered the loofah and moved it across the tip of her breast. The silver ring in her nipple glinted as the water rolled over her skin. Her nipple was dark, hard, and shiny with the water's moisture. It was also extremely sensitive. Her breath leapt out of her throat on a gasp.

"Oh God," she moaned and repeated the caress, but this time against the other breast. It was as if her left breast had just been warming her body up. The right nipple

sent hot, streaking pleasure through her system. She moved the loofah under her arm and grabbed both breasts in the palm of her hands. Her body shook as she cupped them and tugged harshly on the silver rings.

Air hissed through her clenched teeth as sharp pleasure sliced through her body, touching every erogenous zone at once, touching every one of her nerves. Passion, pleasure, and even pain ripped through Brooklyn's body. Her belly clenched, her pussy muscles tightened, and her body erupted in a blinding inferno.

Brooklyn opened her eyes and fought through the haze of sexual delight. "Wow," she breathed out through plump, parted lips. Then a shocked laugh drifted through the steam-filled bathroom. She had come just from playing with her breasts.

Brooklyn dropped the loofah. She propped one foot on the edge of the tub and touched herself. Her fingers skirted over her flesh, dancing over the plump lips of her pussy. With her increased sensitivity she was unsure how the caress would feel. Brooklyn's gaze widened with shock for a moment and then a shiver ran through her body. She slammed her eyes shut and sunk into the pleasure of her simple touch.

Her fingers drifted lower, spreading the lips of her sex and pressing against the distended head of her clitoris. The pleasure was almost unbearable, but this time she was prepared for it.

Her mouth opened on a breathless scream as her body ran head first to the peak that promised fulfillment. But Brooklyn wasn't quite ready to fall deep into the abyss of completion. Her fingers moved around the flesh that surrounded her clitoris, teasing the sensitive button, before slipping lower and caressing the slit in her sex. Two fingers slipped into her pussy.

Her groan was deep, harsh, almost terrifying in its intensity. Her pussy was moist; her walls were covered with the proof of her arousal. Brooklyn had never been so wet before and yet, she could feel herself getting wetter as she thrust her fingers deeper into her cunt.

One hand grasped her bouncing breast and pinched the firm nipple. Her piercing pressed against the raised skin around the tip, cold metal rubbing against her hot skin.

Her fingers thrust in and out of her pussy, pressing past the clenching walls as she fucked herself into oblivion.

Her breath rasped through parted lips. Her rasping breaths and the equally harsh sound of her fingers disappearing in her cunt were the only noises in the room, and then she pictured his face.

Brooklyn imagined that it was his long fingers pinching her nipple, his large palm holding her breast, his cock plunging into her pussy and she came in a body imploding orgasm that left her breathless and with tears in her eyes.

With a wet jerk, Brooklyn pulled her fingers from the deep heat of her body.

The hot water had run out some time during her pleasure session, but the cool water sliding over her feverish skin felt incredible, soothing. Her soft, jagged breathing seemed to stifle the cool air that filled the shower. The sound was ragged, disturbing in its singleness. There was no lover to accompany her.

With every heaving breath Brooklyn's lips parted, swallowing the spicy taste of arousal, desire, and need. The taste was sharp, tart, tinted with the loneliness that she could see clinging to her.

Chapter Eight -- All Day Long I Dream About...

He had her up against the wall, his hands around her waist, holding her to the hard planes of his chest, his mouth pressed against hers as he devoured the sound of her moans, thrusting his tongue deep into the inner recesses of her succulent mouth.

Brooklyn wasn't quite sure how they had ended up there, how Khalid had gotten so hot, so ready within seconds of entering the room. They had looked at each other, breathed deeply, and then before she knew it his mouth was latched onto hers, consuming the very essence of her soul.

Khalid kissed like a god, like a starved, lusty god. The soul-searing depth of his passionate kiss forced a shiver from Brooklyn. Khalid's hot, wet tongue thrust deep into her mouth as his hands held her face immobile for the hard, urgent stroke of that velvet muscle moving inside of her. Every flick, every plunge, every sweet stroke into her mouth touched the lips south of her waistline. Her pussy clenched, fluttered and moistened with every sweep of Khalid's talented tongue.

Brooklyn was gasping for breath, groaning with the force of his kiss. Her nails dug into the hard curve of his biceps, as she held onto him for dear life. One hand slid down her torso, mapping the planes of her body with his touch, until it settled on her hip. He tentatively squeezed the resilient flesh. She groaned his name when his fingers worked the zipper and buttons on her trousers.

Brooklyn sighed with relief when Khalid's hand snaked beneath her pants to touch the moist fabric covering her pussy. Her breath caught in her throat when his long, strong fingers moved her panties to the side to reveal her smoldering cunt. One finger traced her moist slit.

Heat streaked through every one of her limbs. Brooklyn felt hot and needy. And only Khalid could appease the ache that drove her. She sagged against the wall. Her

body was quivering so much her legs wouldn't hold her up. Belatedly, Brooklyn realized that if not for Khalid she would have fallen to the floor.

"Yes. Yes, Khalid," she moaned against the corded flesh of his neck as his fingers danced upon her flesh.

His hand paused a fraction of an inch away from her pussy.

Brooklyn felt the tense movement deep in her sex. She lifted her hips, hungry for his touch. Khalid murmured her name in answer to her demanding actions before claiming her mouth in a hungry kiss that left them both breathless.

Khalid pressed his thumb against her clit at the same time he pressed his tongue against the roof of her mouth. His tongue skimmed over her teeth as fingers skated over her clit, softly, barely a whisper of a touch. One finger flicked the swollen head of her clit. Lights danced before her eyes. Brooklyn's head fell back when the painfully acute streak of pleasure shot through her cunt.

"Dear God." It was so much, but not nearly enough. Needing more than he was currently giving her, Brooklyn grabbed Khalid's thick wrist and pressed his hand hard against her wet pussy. She broke off the kiss. "Don't tease me. I need you," she whispered. "Fuck me."

His gaze caught hers for a fleeting moment, but it was all that was required to sear her heart with the heat in his dark eyes. "Oh God, yes," he murmured before grabbing her hips and wrapping her legs around his waist.

Brooklyn had just managed to cradle his erection against her hips when the slow, soft creak of the door opening slipped past the haze of lust that swarmed around them. She heard the sound deep in the recesses of her mind, but she was too consumed by the fire Khalid's kiss had stirred to notice it.

With a savage curse, Khalid pulled away, separating their mouths, pulling her away from the heat she so desperately needed. For a moment she stared at him in shock.

Shocked by the emotions she felt. Shocked by the need, the desire, and the intensity of the heat that simmered underneath her skin.

She pressed a shaky hand to her swollen lips.

A loud cough broke through her thoughts and Brooklyn looked up to find Keegan Lionheart watching her with a smile in his emerald eyes.

She zippered her pants, gave Keegan a brittle smile, and walked out of the room with her head held high.

Khalid turned to his brother Keegan and cut him off before he could say a word. "Don't. Ignore what you saw." Keegan stared at him silently for several moments. Khalid squirmed under the hard gaze. "Damn it. Don't look at me like that."

"Like what? Like you were seconds away from fucking her in your office?"

Khalid choked on the words he had been about to say. "I was not about to... what the hell are you doing here?"

Keegan shrugged a shoulder. "Besides trying not to get hard after all that soft core porn? I came to see if you wanted to go to lunch."

"It was not soft core porn," Khalid said, turning red. He had been acting outrageously. He was already dreading running into Brooklyn later in the day. He was going to have to do some heavy duty apologizing.

Keegan snorted. "You can't lie to me. Remember, I can feel your emotions. And right now lust is riding you hard. Pun intended."

Khalid ran his fingers through his hair and considered his luck. Of course Keegan, an empath, had walked in on him. Not that one needed to be an empath to know he wanted Brooklyn. Keegan was right. He had been seconds from fucking her against the wall.

The look on Brooklyn's face as she demanded that he fuck her sliced through his mind. "I just don't understand it." Khalid scrubbed his hands over his face.

"I do. She's sexy, just the kind of woman a man would love to... love. There's something that draws you to her."

Khalid's gaze connected with his brother's. "Stay away."

Keegan's smile widened to a grin and he lifted both palms. "Don't worry, caveman. I won't touch *your* woman."

Khalid cursed. "I can't help it. Ever since Brooklyn started working here, I can't stop thinking about her. Fuck, I can't stop thinking about..."

"Sex?"

"Yeah. I feel like I'm sixteen. I can barely focus enough to work on my cases. All fucking day long I'm thinking about sex."

"Have the dreams gotten... better?"

Khalid lifted his head and regarded his brother. Keegan was the brother he felt closest to, now that Khalil had decided to go to another Lionheart firm. He was, in a sense, his best friend. It was the reason why he had confided in him and told him of his dreams. He shook his head. "No. If anything, they are getting worse."

"You need to tell him. He probably knows something to help."

"I can't tell Father. I'm not even sure what this is. Every Lionheart has one gift from the gods. One. I am a hunter. You are an empath. I can not have the gift of premonition and the gift of the hunt. It is unheard of."

"All the more reason for you to tell him. Dad will know what's going on." After a pause Keegan continued. "What are they like?"

"I still can't remember her. I can't remember her face, her name, anything. But I do know that now I am dreaming of... being with her. They're getting more erotic and more vivid every night."

Keegan snorted. "No wonder you're so horny."

"To be honest, I'm not sure I can blame it entirely on the dreams. I'm starting to suspect Brooklyn has a lot to do with it."

Chapter Nine -- Recipe for Heartbreak

"Ms. Barrister, can I see you for a moment?"

Brooklyn stilled at the cold voice. She refused to allow that hot, wet, steaming kiss to change her opinion of him. The man was still a bastard, more so because of the kiss. It took every ounce of her energy to keep the smile plastered on her face as she turned to Khalid. "Of course, Mr. Lionheart."

A fleeting image of Khalid biting one of her pierced nipples floated through her mind. She jerked to a stop. The image had been so strong, so powerful, so real, both her pussy and her nipples had tightened with arousal. She was suddenly very glad she always wore a lightly padded bra.

Brooklyn quickly glanced at her chest. Even with the padded bra, her nipples were noticeably hard. Damn! She crossed her arms over her chest to hide the tight buds, proof of her shocking arousal.

Khalid lifted his eyebrows at her actions. "Is everything all right, Ms. Barrister?" he asked in that silky, deep voice she was coming to fall for.

Fortunately, hearing herself addressed in such formal terms effectively wiped away all traces of her erotic daydream. "I'm fine, Mr. Lionheart. Just a little chilled. Please, lead the way."

Khalid watched her for a few seconds, apparently trying to decide if she was telling the truth about how she felt. She increased the voltage on her smile. He shrugged and turned. She followed behind him and tried to keep her gaze off the tight cheeks of his perfect ass.

She failed miserably. She couldn't help imagining what his great ass looked like naked... as he thrust between her thighs. She sighed to herself and tried to inconspicuously move the crotch of her pants. Brooklyn was uncomfortably aroused

and with every step her panties moved against her sensitized flesh, firing the already heightened flames of her desire. If she wasn't careful she was going to come from walking!

She gave Khalid a strained smile as she walked past him, through the door he held open for her. She immediately took one of the seats across from his desk. She crossed her legs and grimaced. Her pussy clenched and her belly did flip flops with the little action.

Khalid stood beside his seat and peered down at her. "Are you feeling all right, Ms. Barrister?" With his six-foot-four muscled body, he loomed like a tower over her.

She leaned forward and gave him a slow, heated smile, letting some of the desire she felt show in her dark eyes. "I've never felt better, Khalid." Her voice was thick, sultry, and hinted at the arousal that snaked beneath her skin.

He blinked at her and cleared his throat. "Yes, of course." He dropped into his seat with a quickness that widened Brooklyn's smile. She'd known from his kiss that the man wasn't as cold as he pretended to be. Now she knew she could get him hot in seconds. She sat back, sinking into the plush seat, and smirked to herself. Once she got past his cold exterior...

With a jerk Brooklyn realized what she was thinking about doing. She had never once considered fraternizing with a co-worker and she was not only considering fraternizing with a co-worker, but one who was also a family friend.

Almost reluctantly Brooklyn sat back in her seat, putting some desperately needed distance between her and the instigator of the flame, Khalid Lionheart.

If she didn't know any better she would think she was in heat. Could she be?

Brooklyn's mind immediately conjured up the image of her mother's beautiful café-au-lait face. She thought back to her fifteenth birthday when her mother had sat her down and had a talk with her about the birds and the bees. At first Brooklyn had listened with half an ear. She had already gotten the talk about where babies came from in her health class. She knew more than she ever wanted to know, but what her mother told her had never been covered in class.

That was the day Brooklyn truly came to understand what it meant to be a lioness. Before or after a woman started her menstrual cycle there was a week where she would be unusually, easily aroused. This was her fertile period. Most women, lioness and human, barely noticed this time, but every five years, a lioness would go into heat. During this time period she would become desperate for sex, desperate for a man's seed.

That year Brooklyn had gotten her first period. She was young, too young to go into heat, but her mother had given her the talk to warn her of what would happen five years from then. When she was twenty, just as her mother predicted, she had gone into heat. She had been forced to leave college for the month and stay locked alone in a room where only mated males and females could visit her.

Her mother hadn't needed to tell her what would happen when she came in the vicinity of an unmated male. Every time Brooklyn had scented a male, shape-shifter or human, she had literally felt the need to break out of her self-imposed prison, hunt the male down and impale herself on his cock.

She shifted in her seat. If she was doing her math right she was due to go into heat soon. She could very well be in heat.

Then just as quickly as the thought entered her mind, she dismissed it. The last time she had gone into heat, she had been ravenous, desperate and insane with need. She did not feel that way now.

No, instead she felt like a twelve-year-old girl. Yes, she was ravenous and desperate, but she was also full of infatuation. And unlike the last time, all of her sexual energy was directed at one man.

Almost as if it was an afterthought, she remembered her mother's parting words. *A lioness in heat will direct her attention to every unattached male in her vicinity, but a lioness around her mate will hunt him until he attaches himself to her.*

Brooklyn mentally snorted. She would rather scoop out her ovaries with a rusty spoon than be mated to Khalid Lionheart. The man might be great for a few nights spent between sweaty sheets, but a mate was literally until death.

And something told her that if she mated with Khalid Lionheart death would come sooner than the Fates had planned for both of them. They would tear one another apart in anger within a few weeks.

Chapter Ten -- Brand New Jones

Brooklyn barely managed to stumble away from Khalid's office. Earlier that morning she had convinced herself she was horny, not in heat. She had clung to that belief until about thirty seconds into the meeting with Khalid.

Apparently she only had thirty seconds of self-control in her. Thankfully she had a lot more pride than that in her. Otherwise, she would have jumped Khalid in his own office and had her way with him, right then and there, not caring that she was in an office building with men and women walking back and forth past the door.

No, siree. Not one iota of care.

"Stupid uterus," she growled to herself as she stepped away from the door.

The first step almost bowled her over. With every step her pussy clenched. Walking away from Khalid's door damned near caused her to orgasm right then and there.

Brooklyn slowly took a deep breath, steadying herself, and darted a look down both sides of the hall. No one was around. No one saw her almost pass out in pleasure.

Brooklyn gritted her teeth and took a step forward. She almost smiled to herself. Because she had been braced for the pleasure, the shooting heat that spiraled from her pussy didn't overwhelm her. Taking deep breaths before every step, she managed to make it halfway to her office when Lancaster stepped into the hall.

Brooklyn couldn't help groaning out loud. *It's official. Today is the worst day ever,* she thought as she glared at Lancaster.

He smiled at her, but his smile only held for a few seconds before it morphed into a grimace of concern. "Are you okay, Brooklyn?" he called as he took quick steps to reach her.

"I'm fine."

Lancaster wrapped his arms around her shoulder. Brooklyn leaned into him, taking the support he offered.

"You're not fine," he growled. Then, as if Brooklyn wasn't horrified enough, she watched with wide eyes as Lancaster sniffed once, twice, and then took a third, deep breath, drinking in her scent.

His warm blue eyes widened immediately.

"I have cramps," Brooklyn said quickly. A little too quickly she realized almost immediately. Even to her, her words sounded like a blatant lie.

Lancaster nodded his head slowly. He didn't believe a word she said, but Lancaster was fully willing to let her cling to her lie, even if only to keep her dignity intact.

She was very grateful to him for that.

Brooklyn leaned farther into his hold and allowed him to lead her to her office. Thankfully they didn't see anyone in the halls.

The moment her office door closed behind them, Lancaster bent at the knee and wrapped both arms around her legs and carried Brooklyn to her seat. He slowly lowered her into it. He propped his hip on her desk and looked down at her. "What are you going to do until your cramps go away? You know the pain is going to last a whole month, don't you?"

Brooklyn stared at him for a few startled seconds. She had barely had time to adjust to the idea she was in heat, let alone that she would be in heat for a whole month, until her next menstrual cycle was due.

That is, if she didn't get pregnant first.

"I'm going to survive this one like I did the last one. I'll be fine, Uncle Lancaster."

He stared at her for several moments before leaning low and pressing his warm lips against her forehead. "I love you," he whispered softly, before stepping away from her desk.

Chapter Eleven -- The Burn

Hours later Brooklyn looked away from the computer screen and glanced around the room. The sun had set long ago. Her office was barely lit. She probably wouldn't have noticed the darkness if her stomach had not protested the lack of food.

Brooklyn stood and stretched. Bones cracked, muscles groaned, and she sighed as her body unfolded. She was more than a little surprised by how much she ached.

"This is why I don't do nine to five," she muttered to herself as she padded in her stocking feet across the room. Brooklyn had long ago discarded her heels.

She opened the heavy wooden door and walked into the hall. It was so late that she didn't expect to see anyone. Even the Lionheart attorneys had to go home at some point. If only to shower. She was the only one foolish enough to stay so late.

The moment she stepped into the hall she scented him. The soft perfume of his male essence caught her off guard and held her in its web. Brooklyn immediately felt the muscles in her sex and belly clench in arousal.

She tried to reason with her libido. The aroma was faint, a residual of the last time he had walked down the hall. It was hours old, but her pussy didn't care. It was hungry, full of desire, and only cared that it be satisfied.

One hand slid down her torso to settle against the soft valley above her cunt. Her belly muscles fluttered at her own touch. "He's not around. Please, don't do this," she muttered to her vagina.

She took another step forward, closer to the vending machine that promised sustenance, but her body only took in the fact that she was moving closer to his office. Brooklyn took a deep breath, swallowing his scent, consuming what was left of him.

She blinked hard when she found herself standing in front of his door. It felt like she had floated there. She grabbed the gold knob and turned. It didn't move in her hand. It was locked.

Brooklyn stared down at it for several seconds. Then her full lips spread into a sultry, mischievous smile. She slowly slid the onyx pin from the short strands of her hair and inserted it into the knob's lock. With a few quick maneuvers she had the office unlocked. It was amazing what a girl could learn hanging out with the bad kids in high school.

She flipped the switch that was embedded in the oak wood panel. The office was immediately bathed in a blinding white light. The intensity of the light seemed to fit the emotions inside her. She felt immensely better now that she was in his office. Brooklyn's lips spread into a slow smile. She fairly danced to his seat, plopped herself in his chair, and settled in for a long night.

Within a few moments Brooklyn was wearing only her panties and bra. She shocked herself with the speed with which she'd undressed. She lifted her hands until both palms settled on her breasts. Brooklyn found her nipples hard, almost diamond points on the sensitive mounds of her breasts. She slowly moved her hands over her breasts in a circular motion, teasing the flesh, torturing herself with the touch that was not nearly as demanding as she needed.

The silver rings in her nipples stabbed her palms as she lifted her breasts, massaging them. When her breathing became choppy, when her arousal soaked her panties, making her seat slick, she pinched the firm buds, pulling the tips taut. Her body was strung so tightly, so high, that the slight pain sent her roaring toward an orgasm, but she staved it off.

Brooklyn knew that the anticipation would make the pleasure all the more intense when she reached her climax.

One hand drifted down her body to settle over her sex, right above the full lips of her pussy. She caressed the flesh there, moving her hands in a circular motion, careful

to avoid actually touching her cunt. Her eyes fluttered closed as the pleasure slammed through her system.

This is what it felt like to be in heat and deny oneself satisfaction. Waiting until the workday was over to come had been sheer torture.

“Fuck.” Her fingers settled over the slick, lace covered lips of her pussy. She pinched the lips together, closing them over her clit. Her legs immediately started shaking, jerking under the powerful pulses of pleasure that shot through her body.

Her hand slipped into her panties. Brooklyn spread her legs, giving herself more access to her cunt. Her pussy lips spread, her index finger swirled around her clit.

“Shit.” Two fingers pressed against her clit, swirled around the swollen head, and dipped low, slipping into her soaking sheath.

“Oh my...” Brooklyn gasped. She was so slick, so hot, and so sensitive, she was afraid her body wouldn’t be able to handle the pleasure. Her legs were shaking so badly she feared falling out of the damned chair.

Brooklyn hooked her legs over the arms and thrust three fingers deep inside her pussy, imagining they belonged to Khalid. His long, thick fingers would fill her up, stretching the tight walls of her cunt. Finger-fucking her hard and deep as his teeth pulled on one of her nipple rings, he would force her to come for him over and over and over again.

Brooklyn’s lips opened on a breathless scream as her body erupted with the vision of her dream lover’s hard face in her mind.

“Bloody fucking hell.” Brooklyn slowly pulled her fingers from her moist sheath and ran her fingers over her clit. She shivered from the after-shocks of her powerful orgasm and the touch to her sensitive flesh.

Brooklyn’s breath sawed in and out of her lungs as her body calmed down from the most intense orgasm she had ever felt.

Khalid scented her the moment he entered the building. It didn’t occur to him until he was halfway to her that her scent was unusually strong.

He couldn't ignore her arousal.

Khalid blinked hard when he found himself standing beside his door. For a second he stood there debating about whether or not he wanted to take that last step and solidify his future.

He stepped forward, and felt his heart skip in his chest with shock and potent need.

Brooklyn was sitting in his chair, spreading her cream and scent all over his seat. His hungry eyes ate up the sight of her barely clothed lush body. His eyes couldn't seem to decide if he wanted to feast on the sight of her beautiful breasts or her lace covered pussy. With a deep groan, Khalid settled on her cunt.

Her fingers were thrusting in and out of her slick heat, making him burn with the need to replace her fingers with his own. He would stretch Brooklyn, fill her tight pussy until she could take three, maybe even four of his fingers. And when her body was prepared, Khalid would stretch her cunt further with ten hard inches of thick cock.

Khalid watched Brooklyn fuck herself hard and deep. With every breath he drank in the scent of her sweet, musky pussy. One hand unconsciously drifted down his body and grabbed the heavy weight of his erection, massaging his cock through his jeans.

Her scent was so strong, so intoxicating. It drew him like a flower did a bee. But he wanted to do more than smell. He wanted to taste her, run his tongue over the slit in her sex, drinking in her cream, getting his fill of her arousal until he had memorized her taste and then when she screamed for him, Khalid would run his tongue down the length of her slit, run it back up her pussy until he reached her clit. He would suck her swollen bud hard until her pussy erupted into a fury of spasms. Then and only then would he thrust himself deep into her climaxing pussy as the last of her tremors ran through her lush, pliant body.

Khalid took a step toward Brooklyn. He blinked when he found himself in front of her.

The thick onyx fan of her lashes fluttered as she looked up at him. Her full lips, tinted a dark red from her nipping teeth, parted on a question. Before she could get a sound out he captured her lips, thrusting his tongue deep into her mouth.

Khalid wanted her so badly his heart thundered against his ribcage, trying to break free. For the first time in his life, he wasn't thinking, just feeling. And the feelings he had for the woman in his arms were hard, unyielding, demanding, and he planned to appease them with the taste of her voluptuous body.

"Yes, Khalid." She moaned against his lips before capturing his face, tangling her fingers in the midnight strands of his hair as she kissed him back with all the pent-up passion she obviously felt. Her tongue tangled with his, feeding Khalid the sweet, honey taste that was distinctly Brooklyn.

Long, strong fingers grasped her waist, lifting Brooklyn until she could wrap her legs around Khalid's mid-section. Lips fused, he walked a few steps until his legs collided with the desk. They both groaned in satisfaction when Brooklyn's bottom landed on top of the hardwood.

Khalid growled when her small, delicate hands moved between them, over his torso, quickly unbuttoning his simple dress shirt until they reached his belt. Before he could formulate a thought she had his pants unbuckled and un-zipped.

The first touch of her hands on his cock seared him straight to his soul. He knew then that his fantasy of tasting her pussy would have to wait. He had to be inside of her.

Khalid broke off their kiss and pressed at her shoulders until she lay on top of the desk.

He immediately felt bereft of her touch. But it was better this way. This way he could keep some semblance of control.

As if she heard his thoughts and wanted to test them, Brooklyn leaned up and grasped his hand. Khalid growled when she tangled her fingers with his and placed them against the moist lips of her pussy. Her cream had soaked right through her panties.

"I burn," she moaned. "Make it better."

He leaned low. "I'll make it feel good, sweetheart." He ran his tongue over her areola, staying away from both her nipple and piercing.

"No, Khalid." Her fingers tightened in the silky strands of his hair. "I need more."

And he wanted more. He wrapped his lips around the tight, swollen bud of her nipple and suckled hard. Brooklyn shrieked and tightened her grip in his hair. The slight pain turned him on more. He sucked her nipple harder and nipped it, dragging his teeth against the sweet, sensitive nub.

"Oh God, yes."

He grasped one of her nipple rings between his teeth and pulled lightly. Brooklyn gasped and wiggled her hips beneath him, spreading her cream across his torso. Khalid grabbed her hips, stilling them, and slowly made his way down her body, placing openmouthed kisses against her belly. When he reached the waistband of her panties he dragged his teeth across the rounded flesh of her lower abdomen.

Brooklyn jerked and lifted her hips. His fingers curled around the sides of her lace panties and slowly pulled them down her hips. He threw the drenched fabric across the room and spread her legs farther apart. His tongue followed the line of her hipbone, licking her from her hip to her cunt and back again. Khalid repeated the action on her other hip, licking and sucking until he reached her pussy. One hand lightly pressed against the mound of her sex.

"Damn you, Khalid. Stop playing, stop the burn."

The hand on her pussy spread her moist lips, revealing the engorged bud of her clitoris. He dipped one finger deep into the well of her cunt and spread the creamy liquid proof of Brooklyn's desire over her clit.

She broke out into shivers beneath him. Khalid increased the frequency and depth of his strokes, increasing the fever in Brooklyn's veins, making her pussy wetter.

Her quivering body pressed against him, molding itself to the hard planes of his own larger frame. Her lonely nipple scraped against his chest, her thighs moved against his hips, and her feet caressed the moist flesh of his back.

He'd never felt closer to another woman. And yet he was so far away from her, too far away. "I can't wait anymore, Lyn." He groaned and fitted the head of his cock to the leaking slit in her pussy.

"Yes, better."

Khalid stared down at Brooklyn's face. Her mahogany skin was slick; her muscles were tight, and she was in the midst of a heat that seemed to have burned away her every inhibition.

No woman had ever wanted him as she wanted him. A tiny voice in his head told him it wasn't right, it was almost unnatural just how badly she wanted, no, needed him.

The voice was silenced when Brooklyn swiveled her hips, caressing him with the sweltering, sticky warmth of her cunt. "Now, Khalid. Now," she moaned as she moved against him. The bulbous head of his cock caught in the wet folds of her pussy. The heat there incinerated his control.

He thrust the full length of his cock deep into Brooklyn's pussy in one stroke.

"God, yes." She lifted her hips for his thrust, pushing him deeper into her.

Khalid couldn't wait any longer. He wanted her. He wanted to come. He wanted to hear her scream his name as she shattered.

He simply wanted.

He withdrew from her slick warmth until only the sensitive head of his cock remained inside of her before thrusting back into her pussy with all the need that had been clawing at his control since he first scented her.

Brooklyn screamed his name and clawed his back, begging with murmured words for more, for harder thrusts, demanding that he fuck her like he had never fucked a woman before. "Khalid, I need you," she whispered, eyes closed, her body bowed, as she undulated on the table. "It burns too much."

His arms slid beneath her, lifted her torso so that her back no longer lay against the desk. Her eyes fluttered open. He held her gaze. "Together, Brooklyn. Come for me," he whispered against her lips before thrusting his tongue past her parted lips.

Thick desire-scented air flowed over them. Musk clung to their every pore. Together they moved to a rhythm older than time. Brooklyn met him, there to receive Khalid's thrust, following his every withdrawal.

The frenzy of their kiss deepened, passion exploded, and the lit fuse between Brooklyn and Khalid detonated as they climaxed at the same time in a blinding orgasm that left them both gasping for air.

After a few moments of steady breathing, Khalid pulled himself from the slick heat of Brooklyn's body and stared down at her. Her eyes slowly opened. He stood motionless as she watched him for a few moments. Her smile was slow, tantalizing and full of so much sensual promise. His cock twitched at the sight, hardening immediately.

He wanted her again.

If anything, the single taste of her had intensified his hunger. He wanted to take her harder, fuck her longer, make her scream more. He wanted her seconds after spilling his seed deep inside her hot body. With a savage growl he turned away, walked out of the room, and practically ran down the hall. He had to get out of there before he did something truly stupid.

He started stripping when he was halfway down the hall. When he reached the corridor that led to the back exit he was naked. Khalid broke into a run, heading straight for the back door. He pushed the door open and jogged outside, morphing in mid stride. The pain that came with the quick transformation was relished. The pain gave him something else to focus on.

Something besides the feel of Brooklyn's tight pussy.

The skies opened over him, washing his feverish skin with ice cold water. Khalid hoped that after a few miles of running he would have his emotions under control.

He refused to let Brooklyn get the best of him.

With every step, he tried to outrun the memory of Brooklyn calling out his name as he fucked her into a shattering orgasm.

Chapter Twelve -- Can't Trust Those Rainy Days

Stupid, fucking, useless piece of shit men!

The bastard had literally fucked her and ran.

Brooklyn pulled up to the empty parking lot at her motel room. The building wasn't appealing in the least, but it was her home. For now. Lancaster hadn't liked the idea of her moving out of the mansion. To put it lightly, he had been livid. But Brooklyn hadn't backed down.

She needed someplace where she could be alone. Even if it was a hole in the wall.

Brooklyn looked up at the dark clouds. The sky had opened up, pouring buckets of ice cold water everywhere. She turned off her ignition and glanced at the door numbered 24 and considered how far away it was.

Too far to chance it.

She leaned across the divider in her rented car and shoved her hand under the passenger seat. After a few moments of searching she found the large umbrella she had placed on the backseat earlier.

When she straightened something caught her eyes. For a moment she could have sworn she saw a large black cat. She almost immediately dismissed it. She was seeing things.

Again.

Brooklyn snorted to herself as she held the umbrella over her head and ran to her temporary home. She was of course losing her mind, seeing things, feeling ridiculous emotions.

She was in heat. There was no doubt about it now.

Brooklyn knew it was going to be hard as hell and emotionally draining to leave town. Every other departure had been easy. Hell, even leaving her home had been a

quick, efficient act with little emotional effect. She wasn't exactly close with her family members.

Brooklyn slammed the door behind her and closed the umbrella, leaving it beside the door.

But leaving the Lionhearts wasn't going to go so well. Leaving Khalid was going to be impossible. Two days and already she felt him tugging on her heartstrings. Even if the bastard was an asshole.

Brooklyn dropped her bag beside her side of the queen bed and headed to the shower. With every step she stripped. Running was definitely going to break her heart and theirs.

Another run, another attempt to salvage a life that was quickly becoming worth less and less. Eventually she was going to have to stop playing her game of charades. But not until she reached a safe place. "Not until I'm out of the country, out of his grasp," Brooklyn muttered to herself as she grabbed her Palm Pilot from her purse.

"Come on, love. You know you'll never be out of my grasp."

Brooklyn chilled at the sound of the voice. Cold. Raspy. Cultured. She had once clung to that heavily accented British voice as if her life depended upon it. She had been foolish then.

She hadn't known she'd placed her trust in the hands of a cold-blooded killer.

Brooklyn cursed herself and her foolishness. She had been so lost in her thoughts of Khalid and the Lionhearts she hadn't scented or heard him. Then again she had never scented The Asshole. Why should tonight be any different?

"After all that we've shared, I can't believe you would think that I would let you leave me so easily." The words were soft, chilling. Brooklyn shivered and took a cautious step back.

"Don't tell me you're afraid of me, Brooklyn. We're friends, almost family."

"We have never been and will never be family." Brooklyn's voice was steady, calm, lacking all of the clamoring emotion inside of her.

He smiled at her, slow, tempting, and devoid of all emotion.

Brooklyn was prepared when he lunged for her. She darted across the room and reached for the doorknob.

Brooklyn didn't care that she was only wearing her black lace bra and panties. She only cared about escaping him. Brooklyn figured she had better take her chances with the perverts on the street.

His hand latched onto her waist just as her fingers skimmed the doorknob. Brooklyn's heartfelt cry cut through the air when he pulled her hard against his chest. The other hand landed on her heaving chest, cupping a breast. "I told you not to run from me. We could have been so good together, Brooklyn, but you went and dated the boss instead of me. And to top it off, you found out my secret."

She jerked in his grasp, desperate to separate herself from his clammy hands. "Get your fucking hands off me, you bastard."

The grip on her breast tightened. "You shouldn't have run, Brooklyn. But since you did... I'm going to have to extract my pound of flesh and I know just what I want."

Brooklyn's shrill cry vibrated off the plaster walls when she flew through the air to land with a thump on the large bed. She scrambled and headed off the bed. Before her foot could reach the ground, he was upon her. Large, meaty hands grabbed at her, pulling her bra, ripping the lace fabric, digging into her flesh.

Brooklyn screamed with potent feminine fear when his fingers cupped her breast and tightened painfully over the mound. "Please, God. Vern, don't do this. Please don't." Her frightened gaze caught his. The sight of his feverish, wild eyes made her shudder with dismay. He was like a wild animal. There was very little of the man left.

His hand moved up her torso to settle on her neck. The fingers tightened, warning her as he cut off her breathing. The second hand grabbed her panties and pulled. At the sound of the fabric ripping a single tear slid out of her eye.

Vern moved down her body, pulling off the remains of her panties as he went. Brooklyn waited, heart pounding. She counted to three and kicked hard, hitting him under the jaw. Vern's head snapped back with a sickening sound as Brooklyn jumped off the bed and ran toward the front door.

Brooklyn was seconds away from the door when it flew open, banging against the wall. Her shocked scream cut off suddenly when she realized who was there. In the doorway, chest heaving, stood the man she had been silently begging God to send to her as she lay beneath Vern.

Khalid.

She damned near leapt upon him with relief. But he wasn't seeing her. He had eyes only for the wiry, muscular man behind her. And those eyes were full of livid fire.

Khalid threw something at her. She caught it automatically. It was the keys to his car. "Lock the door. Now."

Brooklyn gaped at him for a second. The light in his eyes, the sound of his voice, was alien. His voice was a mixture of sand, granite, and glass. The anger in his tone had her running out the door.

Khalid breathed deep, drinking in the scent of the intruder. He paused for a second to watch Brooklyn run out of the room. The moment she was out of danger he turned back to the intruder.

The Black Panther.

Khalid ran his tongue over the top of his lip. The long length of his canines scraped against the sensitive flesh. His incisors had come out. The beast was riding him, barely waiting for the moment when Khalid would let him free.

Khalid wasn't surprised Vern hadn't scented him yet. The bastard had been too focused on Brooklyn to notice his presence. And that failure would cost him his life.

By the time Vern turned to him Khalid was halfway through his transformation. His canines and claws had come through the moment he heard Brooklyn scream. His limbs shortened, his face broadened, and fur covered every inch of his body. He burst through his clothing with the power of the process.

The wiry bastard growled and instantly shifted. Khalid's long incisors sunk into the panther's back, taking the beast by surprise before Vern had full control of his bestial form. The panther howled in pain.

Khalid took delight in the sound and sunk his teeth deeper. Vern instinctively bucked, trying to throw Khalid off him. His canines slipped out a little. As Khalid felt his grip weaken he drew one paw, nails sharp and deadly, across the panther's left flank.

Vern growled, turned his head, and latched onto Khalid's shoulder. The pain barely sunk through Khalid's mind as the beast dug deep, tearing through his skin to reach the muscle. All Khalid could see was the fright on Brooklyn's face.

Khalid shook himself furiously, bucking Vern and throwing him a few feet. Before the panther could fully collect himself, Khalid was there. He roared, an angry, pain-filled sound as he opened his jaw wide and sunk his teeth in the panther's neck.

Vern howled and lashed out, talons aiming for Khalid's eyes. He instinctively took a step back, letting go of Vern's neck. Before Khalid could strike back, the panther retreating, paws pounding the carpeted ground as he ran for the door. Unprepared, Khalid's talons were only able to swipe the beast's flank before Vern jumped across the doorway.

Khalid followed him out of the room, even though he knew it was useless. Chest heaving, he stood on the stairwell trying to figure out where the beast had gone.

But there was no scent trail.

Khalid ran down the staircase, forced to move more slowly than he would like because of his bestial form. When he reached the bottom of the stairwell he realized the bastard hadn't even left a single paw print.

Khalid transformed back into his human form. "Son of a fucking bitch," he growled as the pain of the transformation and the anger of losing his prey surged through him.

When he stood, Brooklyn was before him, mouth open. "Dear God, what the hell did he do to you?" Her fingers skimmed the already healing torn flesh on his shoulder.

"You should see the other guy."

Chapter Thirteen -- Whenever, Whatever, Wherever

Khalid Lionheart was furious. He had done his best to keep his rage under control until both he and Brooklyn had taken a shower and gotten dressed. He hadn't even blinked at her when she told him she was not going to stay at his place. He had even kept his anger under control during the dark, endless ride to get the extra set of clothes he kept at his office.

But as they sat in silence in Brooklyn's shady motel room, his rage bubbled over. Luckily Brooklyn had been fully aware of the tenuous hold Khalid had on his anger and was waiting for the leash to snap.

"What the hell was he doing here?"

"Besides the attempted rape?" Brooklyn snapped. She was grateful to Khalid for saving her, but she didn't want to hear him give her the speech. She hated The Speech.

Brooklyn knew damn well she was fucking up her life. She didn't need someone to tell her that. She needed someone to tell her how to get the bastard off her back.

Brooklyn suddenly needed a smoke. Thankfully, there was a vending machine on the first level. She had stopped smoking years ago, but that night she desperately needed a light. It was either smoke a cig or do something asinine, like jump Khalid. She was not only grateful to him, she was horny as hell. And right now she wanted Khalid to claim the prize he had won from Vern.

Her.

And she knew that he wanted to claim her. He couldn't quite hide his hard-on. Though he was doing one hell of a job trying.

Which made the need bubbling deep inside that much more demanding.

When she turned around the corner from the vending machine she found him blocking the doorway to the stairwell. She tried to walk around him, only to have him push her back against the wall. "Don't push me, Brooklyn."

She stared pointedly at the hand on her stomach. Khalid snatched it back like Brooklyn had burnt him.

Khalid growled. The sound was distinctively ferocious. His long, strong fingers pressed into the tender flesh of her shoulder. Khalid shook her twice. "Damn it. Use your brain. Tell me what the hell is going on. Why the hell is The Black Panther after you? Let me help you."

Brooklyn shook her head no. She had watched Vern rip the throats out of two different shape shifters during a fight. When Brooklyn found out the two cats were undercover government agents she knew she had to run.

Vern wasn't going to trust her to keep that secret.

Khalid took a menacing step forward. The act brought him closer to her body. Brooklyn instinctively took a step back.

One callused hand reached up and caressed her cheek. Her eyes fluttered at the soft touch. It was jarring to the senses after the ordeal she had been through. "Please, sweetheart, let me help you. Let me protect you," he whispered against her lips.

Brooklyn gasped and drank in the peppermint scent of his breath, the musky, masculine aroma of his skin, and the strong perfume of his anger. There was so much concern in his voice, more concern than any other man had shown for her. She lifted her gaze and stared into eyes as dark as espresso.

"I can't tell you. If I do..." Brooklyn's words finished on a sob. She couldn't bring him into her dangerous world. She was too afraid of what Vern and his friends would do to get to her. And as much as she hated to admit it, Brooklyn cared about Khalid.

He growled and opened his mouth.

Brooklyn licked her lips and tasted him. She stared into his eyes as she savored the soft flavor of Khalid on her tongue. His eyes narrowed and he stared at her mouth for endless seconds, minutes, hours. And then when Brooklyn was sure that her heart

couldn't take any more he leaned low, crossing the small distance that separated their parted lips, and pressed his mouth against hers.

Brooklyn felt every tense, inflammatory emotion she had carried inside for the past year leap out of her heart at the touch of his lips against hers.

The kiss was so soft, so tender it broke through the walls that had guarded her emotions. As his mouth moved over hers, she felt the stone walls crumbling under the sweet onslaught, just as her resistance to the man shattered. And then he was inside her mouth, touching, tasting, and devouring her with his devastating kiss.

Khalid took a step forward and pressed her back against the brick wall. She gasped. Khalid took the chance to nip her top lip, scraping his teeth against the sensitive flesh. Brooklyn groaned his name, lifted her hands, and ran her fingers through his hair.

"God, you taste even better than I remember," Khalid growled against her neck before licking a scorching path from her jaw to her collarbone. He bit her, holding the flesh between his teeth, as his tongue caressed the tortured flesh. At the touch of pleasure and pain Brooklyn felt her arousal spike. Her hands drifted down his back to settle on his ass. Brooklyn's short blunt nails dug into the firm flesh she found there as she pulled Khalid closer to her.

"Fuck. I'm trying to be good, but --"

Brooklyn ground her hips against the large bulge between her splayed thighs.

"Fuck. Forget it." Khalid growled. The sound was distinctly bestial. It turned Brooklyn on almost as much as his devastating kisses. His gaze caught hers. The fire she saw burning in his dark gaze made her heartbeat skip with anticipation. He was going to fuck her. He was going to fuck her hard and deep, make her scream until her voice was hoarse from crying out her pleasure.

She shivered and licked her lips in anticipation.

Khalid gave a harsh smile. "Don't worry, sweetheart. I'm going to give you exactly what you want."

One of the hands gripping her ass tightened. Khalid leaned low and captured her lips, thrusting his tongue into her mouth to tangle with her own tongue. Brooklyn groaned his name even though his kiss robbed her of thought.

She moaned at the first feel of his hands on her. She thanked the heavens she had decided to wear a dress when Khalid's long fingers skimmed the scalloped edge of her lace panties.

"Damn. I wish I could see you... in these... in only these."

Her eyes closed and she sighed at the tender tone that laced his arousal-deepened voice. She opened her eyes to find him watching her. His fingers were splayed at the top of her pussy.

Brooklyn was so wet, creamy arousal leaked from her pussy, trickling down her legs. Impossibly she felt herself getting wetter thinking of all the things Khalid was going to do to her. "Don't make me wait. I need you now, Khalid. Now!"

He grunted, grabbed a handful of her panties and pulled, tearing them right off her body.

"Oh yes. Yes." Brooklyn moaned when she felt the cool night air caress her heated naked skin. It was perfect. It was decadent. But it was not enough. "Touch me, Khalid. Touch me now." She rubbed her sex against him. His fingers brushed against her furred mound. She gasped his name when his fingers parted the swollen lips of her pussy.

"God, you're wet." He spread the creamy evidence of her arousal against the engorged head of her clit. His feverish gaze captured hers. "Is all this cream for me, Lyn?"

The finger against her clit pressed hard. Her eyes fluttered at the lightning streak of pleasure. His finger moved north before swirling around the fat bud. Her teeth nipped her bottom lip. Her breath came in shallow gasps. "Tell me," he demanded. "Tell me you want me."

He spanked her clit.

Brooklyn shrieked. "I want you. I want you."

“Good,” he growled and there was such masculine satisfaction in his voice, Brooklyn couldn’t help but smile. Whether she liked it or not, the man had every reason to smile.

“Bloody hell.” Khalid thrust two long, callused fingers deep inside her pussy. She was so wet, so hot, she actually heard her body sucking him deep. And then he twisted his fingers. She cried out as her body erupted. The heat spread through her pussy to land in her chest, leaving her breathless, hot, and spent. The orgasm came out of nowhere, blinding her with its intensity.

When she opened her eyes, Brooklyn found Khalid watching her. The smile on his face was smug. “I hate you,” she spat out before lifting her hips, thrusting his fingers deeper inside of her.

“No. No, you don’t, Lyn. That’s the opposite of what you feel, isn’t it?” Khalid withdrew his fingers from her tight sheath. She groaned at the feeling of emptiness. Khalid thrust three fingers deep. His lips caught her gasp of shock and pleasure.

“That’s it, baby. Ride my fingers. Make yourself come,” he murmured against her mouth.

Brooklyn could feel his every breath against her lips. She could feel the staccato pounding of his heartbeat against her chest. She could feel his body moving with hers, his hips following her every retreat, accepting her every thrust as she rode his fingers like her very life depended on it.

Brooklyn closed her eyes, bit her lip, and groaned low and deep as Khalid’s fingers thrust in and out of her pussy, pushing her into an orgasm she knew was going to wrench her very soul apart.

Forgotten was the fact that they were outside, leaning against the back of the motel’s red brick building. Forgotten was the fact that they were outside in the rain. Forgotten was the fact that Khalid didn’t want her, didn’t want to have anything to do with her.

The only thing Brooklyn could seem to remember was how good she felt every time Khalid touched her.

He had woven a beautiful, magical web around her. And she had no desire to untangle herself. With every thrust, with every lift of her hips she fell deeper into the dark abyss of alluring desire that lapped between them. "Damn it, Khalid," she growled low. The sound became distinctly dark, when a particularly strong lightning flash of pleasure streaked through her body, buckling her knees.

She was close to coming again. But she wanted Khalid there with her when she found the ultimate satisfaction.

"Say it, Brooklyn."

Heat infused her face. "I want you," she whispered. "I need you."

"Thank God." Khalid slowly pulled his fingers from her tight, hot sheath and grabbed at his pants. Within moments he freed himself from the confines of his jeans and poised the swollen, bulbous head of his cock at the entrance of her cunt.

Brooklyn couldn't wait any longer. She jerked her hips, slipping over the first few inches of hard dick.

"Greedy, aren't we?" Khalid grabbed her thighs, preventing her from impaling herself on the rest of his thick, long length. He slowly moved into her, sliding past the clenching walls of her cunt to fully embed himself deep in Brooklyn.

He gave her a moment to adjust to the full, tense feeling of having ten inches of cock deep within her, their breaths moving in and out of their mouths with each sawing gasp for air. Brooklyn opened her eyes. Her gaze collided with Khalid's smoldering eyes. She tentatively moved her hips.

"Fuck."

"Oh God."

"Let's try that again." One large palm grabbed Brooklyn's right leg and notched it at the small of Khalid's back. The other leg was forced to hold her up as he moved his hips, pushing past the tight walls of Brooklyn's cunt to thrust his cock deep.

Brooklyn's eyes fluttered closed as untold pleasure streaked through her system, making her legs shake. Her nails dug into his waist, holding Khalid to her, keeping her

anchored to the ground as he surged in and out of her pussy at a relentless pace that left her quivering with every touch, every thrust.

His lips pressed against hers, capturing her breathless pleas for more in a soul-wrenching kiss that devoured her, leaving her needing.

Needing the touch of his lips against hers. Needing the feel of his body thrusting into hers. "Oh God, Khalid," she groaned as pleasure shot through her every erogenous zone. Her nipples were painfully hard, moving against the smooth plane of Khalid's chest. Her pussy felt unbearably tight, clenching, closing around the long, hard length of Khalid's cock with every thrust.

Brooklyn's nails dug into Khalid's waist, scratching the skin despite the barrier of his shirt as the length of her nails increased under the force of her impending orgasm.

"Fuck, I'm coming. I'm coming," she cried out, her body exploding as pleasure overwhelmed her.

"That's it. That's it, baby. Come for me. Come for me." Almost as if from a distance Brooklyn heard Khalid's gruff voice spurring her on, stretching out the feeling of pleasure as she shivered through her endless orgasm.

Then Khalid was shouting her name, furiously pumping his hips as he poured his seed inside of her.

Chapter Fourteen -- When It Hurts So Bad

She gave him butterflies.

It was the most insane emotion Khalid had ever felt but there was no denying the truth. As he stood in the bathroom, contemplating going back into his room and lying beside her, he felt butterflies in the pit of his stomach. With an angry jerk he threw the hand towel onto the rail, shut off the light, and strode from the room.

He knew even before he entered his bedroom that Brooklyn was awake. The bedside light shined on her amber eyes. Khalid suspected the color had changed when they had sex outside her motel. The chance of fertilization had brought out her inner beast. The lioness inside of her was alive and well. At the moment she was more animal than woman.

She was dangerous.

Not for the first time that night Khalid considered how smart it had been to bring her back to his place.

Khalid sat in the chair across from the bed. He was on duty just in case Vern and whoever else Brooklyn was running from got ideas. Plus, he couldn't trust himself to lie beside her.

"Khalid." Brooklyn's soft, throaty voice had taken on a velvet edge, an edge that slid down his skin and grabbed his cock by its head. It twitched underneath his cotton pajama pants.

Khalid bit the inside of his mouth.

"Khalid." She knelt up on the bed. The little light streaming from the table lamp provided just enough illumination to catch the glint of the silver rings in her nipples and the one in her belly.

Khalid ran his palms over his face. He was doing battle with the need to take what she so freely offered and put them both out of their misery, but his conscience kept reminding him that she had been through too much tonight. He'd already taken advantage of her once already. And now he knew without a doubt that she was in heat.

He felt like an ass for not realizing it sooner.

"Go to sleep, Brooklyn."

"Why? So you can stay up all night regretting what happened between us?"

"Please go to bed, Brooklyn." Khalid was surprised he could get the words past his clenched teeth. She was right. "We both know..." Khalid's words trailed off when he looked up to find her standing in front of the lamp, her body silhouetted by the light. As if she hadn't been tempting enough...

He swallowed thickly as the butterflies in his stomach became dragons, angry, vicious dragons with talons that ripped at his self-control.

"I want you. And you want me." She took two steps toward him.

Quickly, Khalid realized the chair was not far enough away. And he couldn't move the chair without letting her know how much she tempted him.

"So what's the problem?" she whispered as she stood before him. Her dangling belly ring was right in front of his face, moving from side to side across her slightly rounded belly.

And he wanted to tongue it, wrap his lips around the cool silver and pull, stretching her skin tight, giving her just enough of the pain she liked to make her moan.

His eyes slammed shut. "You're in heat."

"Does that mean you don't want me?"

His eyes popped open to find Brooklyn staring at his crotch, a small smile on her full lips. There was one hell of a hard-on tenting his pajama pants. His cock was standing up and saluting her. He couldn't very well deny the fact that he wanted her.

Every inch of her luscious, voluptuous body drew him. "It means you don't actually want me. You just want a male, an unmated fertile male."

"I don't want Keegan." One thick thigh settled over his splayed legs.

Khalid could feel his mind working, could even hear the pleas it screamed in the background, but he couldn't focus past the pain in his loins. His cock was so hard it hurt.

"And I was never attracted to Kaden." The second thigh slid over him, so that she was sitting astride him. "And I never even looked at Kaiser."

He took a deep breath and took in the scent of arousal that clung to Brooklyn like the deepest, sweetest perfume.

"I... only... want... you." She peppered each word with a kiss.

A kiss to his chin.

A kiss on his cheek.

A kiss to his nose.

A kiss on his lips.

God, he hoped she really wanted him. Wanted him because of who he was, because he was Khalid Lionheart, an ornery bastard. And not because he was a man who could father her unborn child. Because Khalid wanted her. He wanted Brooklyn Barrister, bold, beautiful woman that she was. He wanted her with a desire that threatened to consume him. He wanted her so much it hurt. Khalid was very afraid he had fallen in love with her.

She pulled down the waist of his pants, freeing his cock. It waved in the air, heavy and full, a demanding symbol of his desire. "All this for little old me?"

With a heartfelt groan Khalid admitted the truth. "I can't seem to keep him down when you're around."

She gave a smoldering, sultry smile full of the power she knew she held as a woman. "Well, we're just going to have to find someplace to put him, aren't we?"

Before Khalid could respond, she settled her hips above him so that his cock pressed against the mouth of her pussy. His hands sought her hips, digging his fingers into the soft flesh as he held her above him.

Her gaze connected with his. The fire there seared his heart. Khalid loosened his grip and Brooklyn slowly lowered herself over him, until he was fully embedded in the wet, clinging heat of her tight pussy.

Air hissed out of his parted lips. Her pussy quivered around him in satisfaction as his cock hardened and thickened. He waited a moment for her to adjust to the depth of his penetration. When he felt her cunt clasp comfortably around him, he moved, thrusting deeper into her.

She felt like heaven. In a previous life he must have been a saint for the gods to gift him with someone as precious as Brooklyn.

She groaned his name as she slid down for his thrust.

Together they moved at a pace older than time. Brooklyn met his every thrust, groaned his name as he surged past the tight walls of her cunt, and Khalid desperately tried to hold onto his sanity as he plunged deep inside.

"Now, Lyn. Come for me, love." His fingers sifted through the tight curls at the top of her splayed thighs and found her swollen clit. He flicked it, once, twice, scraping his nails across the sensitive head.

She shivered in his arms and moaned his name as her pussy tightened painfully around him, milking his cock until he was forced to go over the edge with her.

Khalid growled her name against her neck as he pumped his hips furiously, trying to lengthen both their orgasms. With a final groan he gave up the fight as the tight fist of Brooklyn's cunt wrung him of all his seed.

Chapter Fifteen -- Boogie Man

They were in the garden again.

Khalid's dream-cloaked mind tried to think of what it symbolized, tried to figure out why they always met in the lush garden. He felt the answer on the edge of his mind when she stepped forward. But the sight of her beautiful body captured his attention, pushing away all other thoughts and just like that the answer became a mist, forgotten before ever realized.

His heart jumped at the sight of her, and he wondered if he would always feel this way. Would he always feel this excitement when she was around?

"I need you," she whispered softly.

Before he could tell her how he felt, how much he missed being with her, she drifted away, moving further into the shadowy mists that covered the garden. Like a puppet on a string he followed her.

When his arms wrapped around her softly curved shoulders, a thrill charged through him. It felt like it had taken forever for him to catch her. "I love you." For a moment Khalid was shocked the words had escaped from his mouth. He'd felt them, yes, but he had feared saying them for so long. It hadn't occurred to him that the words would ever come.

"I love you too. I always have. I always will."

"Then we should be together. Always. Forever." His voice choked on the words, but he had to say them. He wanted, no, needed to be with this woman. She was his everything. She was his mate.

"We can't."

He stumbled back, shocked at her words. "What the hell do you mean we can't be together? We love each other. You are my mate." The rushed anger in his tone was

only a slight indication of the pain that laid deep. She could not reject him, for her rejection could cost him his pride, his manhood, and worse, his soul.

"They will come for me and I will never allow them to hurt you. No, we can not be together."

As if "they" had heard her words, the grey mists surrounding them darkened, until their blackness obscured his vision, his vision of her. With a jolt, he realized they were swarming her, attacking his mate.

He shifted immediately. Heart-pounding adrenaline rushed through his system as his paws hit the ground with thundering steps. Finally, Khalid reached his mate. He swiped at the black ghoul that swam over her. His howl of outrage shook the skies when he realized he could not touch the grizzly ghost.

The apparition gave him a dark, slimy smile and sailed beneath him to capture his mate. The moonlight cast a glare on his extended claws, ready to tear through his mate's flesh. Without thinking, Khalid flung himself on top of her, shielding her with his mountainous frame.

But his body was not enough of a barrier. The black mist swirled around them, through them, touching her, cutting him even as he swiped at them, trying to protect his mate from the pain they brought.

"Khalid."

The sound of his name in her rich, honeyed voice jarred him for a moment.

"Khalid." He looked down to catch her gaze. "You have to let me go. You have to give me a chance to survive."

He misunderstood her. She could not be asking him to do what he thought. Or worse, he fully understood her request, and he could not do as she asked. He would never let his mate be the lamb led for the dark ghost's slaughter.

"You cannot ask me to do this. I cannot..."

"Trust me." Her words, whispered, sliced through him, cutting deeper than any knife.

"I don't want to let you go."

She smiled at him. The sight comforted him more than anything ever could. She grabbed his hand and placed it against her chest, above the hammering pulse of her heartbeat. "You are here. I cannot walk away from that."

Khalid slowly lifted himself off of her.

He watched mesmerized as she transformed into a golden mist, full of the light that the dark ghoul lacked.

She moved toward the ghoul, an Amazon ready to battle for her life, for her love.

He ran toward her, unable to stay away, unable to stand by and watch her take the chance with her life, but every step he took pushed him farther away from her.

Khalid woke with a gasp. Sweat poured from his pores, soaking his sheets. Suddenly, the garden made sense. Brooklyn was his Eve. He was her Adam and like the biblical man he could not save either of them from the serpent she had brought into their lives.

Only she could save herself.

But he wasn't going to be as foolish as his dream self. Khalid wasn't about to let his mate battle her demons on her own. He would be there for her. He turned to her, arms open, ready to pull her to his side. Right where she belonged.

But Brooklyn was gone.

Chapter Sixteen -- Hooked

He watched Brooklyn from the security of the shadows that moved over and across the dry, desert landscape. He could not seem to take his eyes off of her. She drew him like a lure and like a fool he followed her, headless of any harm to himself.

But maybe that was because the greatest harm came from her, from wanting her, from feeling like he needed to be with her. There was nothing he could do but follow her to the edge of the ledge. And if she jumped...

He smiled to himself despite his dark, angry mood. He would probably jump with her. Wasn't that exactly what he was doing? Standing there in the dark, watching her, watching a woman he knew danger followed.

She moved in front of the window and the fluorescent lighting from the small, rented house bathed her in a basking light, outlining her delicious curves. Suddenly Khalid was ravenous, hungry for her, for the taste of her skin, the feel of her tight body.

He couldn't help himself. Khalid stepped closer to her image, seeking Brooklyn, needing her on that dark, cold night. She was a temptress and only she could satisfy the ache that burned in his loins. Hell, she had put the fire there. He had never really felt desire until he saw her.

Khalid knew he felt so strongly for Brooklyn because she was his mate. She was his destiny, the woman who completed him, made him whole. With her by his side, he would be able to stand tall and strong. With Brooklyn by his side, Khalid felt like he could accomplish the impossible.

He glanced at the Mark of the Mate on his palm. Tonight he needed to feel like he could accomplish the impossible, because he had to convince Brooklyn to stop running and allow him to stand beside her.

She came out to stand on the porch. From his hiding spot he could see her scanning the desert. It was at that moment, when her head turned, that he noticed she had altered her appearance. Long jet black hair cascaded over her shoulders, down her back.

He was smiling to himself, thinking about how he would love to grab Brooklyn's new locks as he fucked her from behind, when her gaze turned to where he stood in the shadows. His heart thumped in his chest. By the time she reached the bottom step, Khalid wasn't sure his heart was ever going to beat the same. It had been a week since he last saw her. A week of hell. A week filled with the nervous agitation that only a lonely mate could understand.

"Khalid." The soft sound of his name drifted through the sweet, clean air of the Australian outback.

He stepped out of the shadows. "Do you have any idea how hard I had to work to find you?" She shifted and his gaze immediately fell to her naked feet. Bright pink toenails. He had plans for those toes tonight. "If it wasn't for the fact that you called your friend from the office, I would have been shit out of luck."

"I was wondering how long it would take you to come after me."

"You knew damned well I couldn't stay away from you." He took several steps toward her.

She smiled at him, her soft, full lips spreading into a grin of understanding and amusement. "If I didn't know any better I would think you were mad at me. Good thing I know better."

He moved forward. "I am mad at you, just a little..." His fingers brushed over her naked shoulders. "How could you not trust me?"

"Leaving wasn't about not trusting you."

His index finger trailed over the thin strap of fabric that held up her lace baby-doll camisole. Every inch his hand covered broke out in goose bumps. Brooklyn wasn't immune to him.

For the past week, every horrible thought his mind could conjure up surfaced. Khalid couldn't stop himself from wondering if the desire and need he felt was one-sided. He couldn't stop himself from wondering if she was immune to him, if that was why she'd left him. "Then, what was leaving about?"

One small, soft hand reached up and touched the hard line of his square jaw. "It was about being strong enough to protect my mate."

He laughed, the sound self-deprecating and filled with the misery he felt wondering about her, what her desertion meant, and how he would survive it if he couldn't find her. "You do realize that in a year, without our joining, your mate would be little more than a eunuch."

She looked into his eyes for several moments. Then her gaze dropped low and she stared at his chest as she spoke. "My first obligation is to my cub."

For several seconds Khalid wasn't sure he had heard her right. "Your cub?" he stuttered. "You can't... Am I the..."

Brooklyn's head lifted, her stormy gaze catching his. "Of course it's yours. I'm in... I was... in heat, not a whore."

He smiled at her. She looked so beautiful when she was angry. The anger emphasized the fine lines of her sculpted face, making her even lovelier. "I never once assumed such a thing about you. I just couldn't automatically think that I was the father of your precious child."

"Oh." Her full lips made a perfect circle of surprise at his words.

And those lips were calling him, had been calling him since she had stepped onto the porch, and he could no longer ignore them. His long fingers wrapped around the nape of her neck, brushing over the softer than soft skin, over the baby fine hairs, and pulled her to him. His lips caressed Brooklyn's mouth, trailing over the soft valleys and ridges of her succulent lips, before his tongue thrust deep into the inner recesses of the sweet cavern of her mouth.

Khalid growled low, drinking in the taste that was distinctly his mate, and pulled her closer to the hard planes of his chest, crushing her breasts against his rapidly

beating heart. His hands drifted down the hills and valleys of her body, over the curve of her shoulders, down the defined ridge of her spine, until they settled on the full curves of her ass. He kneaded the flesh, testing the resilience, plumping the fine globes, tracing the devastatingly simple cut of her thong panties, before settling under her buttocks and lifting Brooklyn off her feet.

Behind his closed lids, his eyes damn near rolled in the back of his head when he felt Brooklyn's thick thighs tighten around his slim waist. Lips fused, limbs tangled, Khalid quickly walked them into the bungalow, slamming the front door behind them. He broke off the kiss. "Bedroom?" he growled, his voice thick with the demanding desire ripping at his self-control.

Brooklyn gave him a slow smile, evidently enjoying the fact that he was barely clinging to his sanity. She rolled her hips, brushing her barely covered mound over the ridge of denim-clad flesh between her thighs. "I think someone missed me," she purred.

When Khalid opened his eyes, he found her grinning at him. "Just for that you're getting a spanking."

She placed soft, peppered kisses against his face. "Yes. Yes. Yes!"

"Brooklyn. Bedroom. Now."

"Over there," she said with a slight tilt of her head before capturing his lips in a tongue tangling kiss.

When Khalid reached the bed, he slowly lowered Brooklyn onto it, even though what he really wanted to do was throw her on it and take her savagely.

And he would... take her savagely.

But first he wanted to make her scream his name, regret ever leaving him with his heart in his throat, wondering how he was going to protect the woman who had become his whole life. "On your hands and knees."

"Khalid."

"Now, Lyn."

She turned, giving him her backside. Khalid forced himself to take a deep breath to stem the raging arousal running through him.

A week. He'd gone a week without her. He'd only gotten one day with her. And he was already hooked, feeling like he couldn't wait to get deep inside the clinging wet heat of her pussy. He stepped forward, a few inches away from her bared backside. With the accentuating lines of her thong, the full globes of Brooklyn's ass looked like heaven to him.

Khalid smoothed one hand over the curve of her back, fingers tracing the line of her spine until he reached lace. He smiled to himself when he felt Brooklyn shiver under his touch. One finger slipped under the elastic band of her panties, caressing the hidden sensitive skin of her lower back. After a few moments he pulled the lace lower. A dark mark caught his eye. Khalid outlined the small shape of a female cub.

"I got it when I was eighteen."

"Hmmm." Khalid felt her gasp down to the soles of his feet when he placed his warm lips to the tattoo on the small of her back. "I love it," he whispered against the beautifully marked flesh.

"Thank you."

Smack. The sharp clap of his palm connecting with her naked ass cheek sliced through the air. "You're welcome."

Smack. His hand collided with the other cheek, giving the milk chocolate skin a red undertone.

Smack. Brooklyn groaned into a pillow. He lifted his head for a moment to watch her. Her small fingers clung to the white sheets. His long, strong fingers massaged her, easing away some of the stinging pain he knew Brooklyn felt. "Am I hurting you?"

"Oh God."

"Am I hurting you?"

Brooklyn shook her head, midnight strands flying around her face. "No... yes. It hurts in a..."

"A good way," Khalid finished with a slap against her ass. He watched mesmerized as the full globe jiggled. He suddenly wasn't sure who was getting punished. Him or Brooklyn? Waiting to take her was absolute torture.

"Khalid?"

"Yes, love."

"I'm sorry."

His hands moved low, slipping between Brooklyn's thighs to touch the crotch of her panties. The moisture there had his cock rearing its bulbous head. "Say it."

She shuddered at the rough sound of his voice. Or it could have been the fact that he had slipped a finger into her panties, so he could caress the swollen lips of her cunt. "Why? You feel it. I feel it," she moaned as she pushed her hips back, forcing his hand harder against her pussy.

Khalid's smile widened. That was what he liked about Brooklyn. She was fire and ice at the same time. Even as her pussy was leaking cream for him, she was giving him attitude. "Say it."

Instead, she moved her hips a little further back.

His fingers brushed against the head of her engorged clit, skimming back the hood that covered the almost painfully sensitive flesh. "Tell me this is all for me," he whispered as the pad of one finger rimmed her clitoris.

"Shit."

"Say it."

"Oh God."

"Tell me how wet you are. Tell me I'm the only one who makes you feel like this. Tell me how much you need me, damn it."

"Fuck," Brooklyn groaned. "I'm wet for you. I want you. I want you now, Khalid."

He smiled. "All you had to do was ask."

Before Brooklyn could respond to him, Khalid moved aside her thong underwear and thrust inside the clinging, wet heat of her cunt until he was balls deep. Caught by surprise, Brooklyn shrieked, the sound ending on a moan.

He started to ask her if she was okay, but the words caught in his throat when she thrust back, taking him deeper. "Son of a..."

Khalid stroked into her with the full force of the pent-up passion that came from a week of abstinence. The pleasure that surged through his system was so intense that he gasped out loud. "Shit."

Two strokes in and he could already feel himself reaching the end of his limit. He was going to come soon, and judging by the shuddering moans that came from her lips, so was Brooklyn.

He sifted through the midnight brush between her dark thighs until he found the swollen pearl of her passion. His fingers brushed over Brooklyn's engorged clitoris, once, twice, thrice, making her body spasm with pleasure. "That's it, baby. Come for me. I need you there with me," he murmured as he worked Brooklyn over, thrust into her in time to the erotic melody his fingers played upon her clit.

Every thrust, every stroke, every caress drove them closer to the edge of abyss.

"Yes! Yes! YES!" Brooklyn screamed as her body erupted into a frenzy of spasms as her orgasm ripped through her. Her pussy tightened so forcefully that Khalid couldn't hold onto his control.

"Brooklyn," Khalid groaned as he pumped deep into her, releasing his seed. He slumped over her, burying Brooklyn beneath his heavy weight. After a few moments he realized he was crushing her and turned over, taking Brooklyn with him so they fell asleep together intertwined.

Chapter Seventeen -- American Nightmare

Lancaster woke with the stark clarity of mind that only fear could provide. He grabbed the phone on his bedside table.

Keegan picked up on the first ring. "Dad? What's wrong?"

The grogginess of his son's voice alerted Lancaster this was the first time in many weeks his son had slept a full night. For once the gift had not haunted him, preventing him from sleeping. For one moment he regretted waking him. But Khalid needed him and Kaden. Without the two, Khalid and his mate would not survive the night.

"Keegan, send your brother a message. Tell him the two of you have to go to Australia now. You have to meet Khalid."

"Now?"

"Yes, now. Tell Kaden to come get you and teleport the both of you to Khalid. Together you need to find him and Brooklyn. Find them now."

Chapter Eighteen --- Can't Take My Eyes Off of You

He watched from the shadows, taking in the sight of his prey with her mate. In the open window, one white panel blew in the soft wind, giving him unfettered access to the view of her beautiful face.

But every moment he watched her made him feel angrier, more desperate, and less of a man. She was supposed to be his. But she lay with another. He couldn't bring himself to tear his gaze away from her, despite the pain that came from watching her with another.

He was tired of waiting to claim his prize. The woman should have been his, but he had never had her.

And if he couldn't have her, no one could.

* * *

Khalid knew the moment he woke that something was dangerously wrong, but he could not put his finger on it. One hand drifted across the bed and found her side empty. He jerked up, sheets clenched in his fist. "Brooklyn."

"I'm standing right here," she called from the window on her side. She turned and gifted him with a slow, sensual smile. "Don't tell me you missed me already."

"I missed you the moment you left. I never want to let you out of my sight. I've got this vicious fear you just might disappear."

Her smile widened. "If I didn't know any better I'd say you were a romantic, maybe even a hopeless one."

Khalid snorted before giving her a mischievous grin. "I've got just the romantic interlude for you."

Brooklyn's laughter shattered the silence that permeated the cool desert air when he grabbed her, wrapping one arm around the back of her thighs, and threw her over

his shoulder. Before striding from the room he grabbed one of the thick blankets covering the bed.

One small fist beat at his back. "What the hell do you think you're doing?" The undertone of laughter in Brooklyn's voice ruined any and all pretense of anger. She was enjoying his caveman behavior.

"I'm taking my woman outside to be mated," he growled.

The pounding stopped.

"Khalid?"

He dropped the blanket and slowly lowered her to it. Brooklyn stood on her feet, facing him, her gaze searching his. "I'm not sure if we're ready for that, ready to be mated. We barely know each other."

"I've known you all your life."

She snorted. "First of all, I only saw you sporadically, when you came to visit your father. Second of all, you ignored me the first sixteen years of my life."

"And third of all, I love you. Why should we wait when we know that much. Plus, we're the perfect pair."

"Don't say that," she snapped, taking a step away from him.

Khalid grabbed her shoulders and pulled her hard against him. "Why not when it's true? I love you, Brooklyn Barrister. You're lovely, stubborn, outrageous, and mine."

For several endless moments Brooklyn said nothing. Khalid waited with his heart in his chest for her to speak, to say something, anything.

"Are you sure? Are you sure you feel that way... about me?"

He smiled into the dark strands of her hair, before lifting Brooklyn's face so that her gaze caught his. It amazed him that such a strong, resilient woman could be so insecure about something so patently obvious. "I can't breathe without thinking about you. I spend my every other waking moment wondering when you're going to realize I'm not the right man for you, because I'm not good enough for you. I spend the other moments trying to figure out how to keep you from realizing I'm not nearly the man

you need because I have no intention of letting you go. Yes, I love you. I couldn't love you more."

Tears swam in Brooklyn's dark eyes and her full bottom lip quivered. "Shit," she growled before turning her head. "Shit. Shit. Shit!" she muttered to herself.

One blunt finger pressed against her cheek, turning her back so she faced him. "I won't leave you. I'll always be here for you, no matter what happens. Hell, even if you do realize my secret."

Her heavy breasts lifted as she took a deep breath. "What is your secret?"

"I'm not man enough for you, but I'm gonna try like hell to be the man you need."

A slow smile spread across her face. Her lashes fluttered closed for a moment. When her eyes opened and her gaze connected with his, there was so much passion and pleasure in her gaze, Khalid shivered. "How could I not love you, Khalid Lionheart? We were made for each other. You're the only man I've wanted. I've been waiting for you my whole life."

Khalid took a step back and bent down. When he looked up into Brooklyn's wide shocked eyes, he found her shaking her head in astonishment.

He pulled the small, simple black velvet box out of the back pocket of his jeans. He opened the lid and revealed the sparkling platinum band with a single canary diamond. "Will you do me the pleasure of making me the happiest man in the world? Brooklyn Barrister, will you mate with me, marry me, and carry all my children?"

Brooklyn stared at the ring for a moment. In that moment, Khalid wondered if he had miscalculated. Was it the wrong ring? Did she hate it? Was she ready for marriage?

Then, she threw herself at him, arms open, wrapping around his neck, in a full on body assault that almost toppled the both of them over.

She placed hurried, butterfly kisses all over his face, neck, and even his chest. Her lips pressed against his and Khalid couldn't help kissing her. He thrust his tongue deep inside of her mouth, sweeping inside the sweet inner cavern of her succulent lips and tasting every inch of her.

Brooklyn broke off the kiss and whispered, "I can't believe you remembered. It was almost ten years ago."

"I remembered. I never forgot." He lifted up the ring, the same style she had admired as a teenager, when one of her cousins was getting married. Khalid had been visiting for the wedding, and had overheard her proclamation that she wanted a white gold or platinum ring with a yellow stone, something to go with her skin tone. When he'd walked into Tiffany's he had already known what to ask for.

"Sweetheart, you haven't given me an answer."

She laughed and mischief swam in her eyes. The joyful sound gave him hope. "Of course I'll marry you. Hell, I can't wait to be your wife and mate."

"Who says we have to wait?"

"Hell, yes," Brooklyn growled before claiming Khalid's lips. Her tongue thrust past the barrier of his lips to tangle with his tongue. After a few moments, he broke off the kiss and pushed at her shoulders.

"What... why did you stop?"

"Because this time I want to take it slow. I want to explore you."

Brooklyn slowly lowered herself until she was supine in front of him. She looked like a sexual feast from Aphrodite herself. And Khalid planned to take his time tasting her.

Khalid watched her for a moment, trying to decide where to start. There was nothing quite as heady and exhilarating as knowing the woman you loved was waiting for you to do anything and everything to pleasure her. A thought occurred to him, bringing him back to that moment when he watched her from the shadowy desert brush.

He started at her feet.

Kneeling down beside Brooklyn, he grabbed one of her feet and lifted it so it lay across his thighs. He massaged the small foot, running his fingers up and down the arch, pressed and caressing the heel until he heard Brooklyn moan and felt every inch of tension ease out of her body.

The moment Brooklyn relaxed he swiped his tongue across her brightly painted big toe. She shrieked in surprise and attempted to pull her leg from his grip. Instead of allowing her to go, Khalid tightened his hold, wrapped his lips around the single digit and sucked hard.

“Oh my GOD!”

Khalid continued to suckle her, full, firm lips moving over her feet, over her toes, until he had tongued every erogenous zone south of her ankle. Then he switched to the other foot, giving it the same attention he had given its sister.

From beneath her mass of hair, Brooklyn glared at him. “That’s just... wrong,” she groaned as she trembled beneath his touch. From where he sat he could watch the smooth petals of her passion blooming, as the dark color of her cunt deepened and her lips moistened with the dew of her desire.

Fingers continued to torture her foot, pressing against the heel, molding the arch, as his tongue swept a hot, wet path up her leg, over her thigh, until he reached the junction of her hips.

He kissed her, a slow tantalizing press of lips against her clitoris, before placing kisses on her belly and across her breasts. Brooklyn shimmied beneath him with obvious excitement when Khalid paused above her breasts for a moment. “Did they hurt?” he whispered above her swollen nipple. His tongue, hot and wet, licked a path around the silver ring. He clasped the piercing between his teeth and tugged lightly.

“Hmmm,” Brooklyn moaned. “A little... but I didn’t mind.” Her fingers tightened in his hair. He pulled a little harder on the ring. “Yes, harder, just like that.”

Khalid licked and suckled the other nipple, pulling just a little harder on the silver piercing as he tongued the engorged nub.

“Khalid,” she whispered, eyes closed, legs rubbing against one another. “Don’t make me wait anymore.”

He pressed slow kisses against her belly until he reached the midnight curls between her thighs. “Do you know how long I’ve waited to taste you, run my tongue

across your clit, tongue fuck you,” he growled against the parted, moist lips of her pussy.

Silently begging, Brooklyn raised her hips to his mouth, but he didn’t take the offer, not then, at least. Instead Khalid blew against her heated clit and watched in awe as she shivered from head to toe. Then and only then did he take her in his mouth and do all he had promised.

Khalid spread her thighs wide, giving his large frame unfettered access to Brooklyn’s body. His gaze caught hers and held it as he lowered his head and swept his tongue across one swollen lip of her sex. South to north. He repeated the caress against the other side, wet, velvet heat sweeping across the drenched, sensitive petals of her pussy until she shivered beneath him.

“Please, Khalid,” she begged through clenched teeth as her body broke out in hard spasms from the pleasure overload.

“Not... yet.”

“Yet! Yes, now.”

Long fingers spread the lips of her sex, revealing Brooklyn’s wet, swollen bud. Khalid wrapped his lips around her clitoris and suckled hard, keeping up the suction as she shivered and moaned beneath him. He didn’t stop until she had screamed his name, coming twice in his mouth. He kept licking until she had come down from her high. Only then did Khalid raise his head and smile at her smugly satisfied face.

“Now it’s my turn,” Brooklyn whispered before pushing against his shoulders. She quickly loosened his pants, pulling them down his hips until his cock, hard and heavy, bounced in the cool air.

Khalid stared up at her from his supine position. “I love you.”

“I love you too. I want to be with you forever. I want to be your wife and mate,” Brooklyn said softly before placing the inside of Khalid’s wrist, the side of the Mark, against her beating heart.

The soft melodic sound of her voice drifted through the air as she chanted the ancient words for the Spell of Joining in the tongue of their long ago ancestors. Khalid

felt the tingling sensation on the skin of his wrist the moment she finished speaking the first verse of the Spell of Joining. By the second verse he could feel the change in his heart rate. It sped up before slowing back down.

Khalid could see that she felt the changes in her own body. The acceptance that was in her eyes mirrored his. Their heart rates were changing rhythm, meeting, so that they both beat to the same pace. So that they lived from the same lifeline.

The moment she finished the third verse, Brooklyn threw her head back, curving her body as the energy of the ancient spell flew over her and through her veins, altering the composition of her body, changing her into the Mate of the Marked, a Lionheart's bride.

Brooklyn took fat gulps of ragged air into her lungs. Then she placed the hard length of Khalid's cock against the mouth of her cunt. It was the last and final step. The Joining would not be complete until she accepted Khalid physically as her mate.

Brooklyn slowly lowered herself over his cock, sheathing him in her wet, clinging heat. When he was seated to the hilt, Khalid ground his pelvis against hers and he reveled in the feeling of being fully surrounded with her moist heat. Moonlight shined over Brooklyn's milk chocolate skin, highlighting the beauty that permeated every inch of her being as she rode him, thighs thrusting up and down on the hard length of his cock as she took her pleasure.

She met his every thrust, ground her hips against his, and gave a throaty moan when his fingers stroked her skin, her flesh, before finding the swollen nubbin at the apex of her pussy.

"I need you to come, sweetheart," he ground out through clenched teeth.

She started to laugh at his obvious inability to wait, but broke off when he pressed hard against her clit.

Khalid groaned low and deep. Her pussy broke out in spasms in reaction to his harsh touch, clenching almost painfully around him. The tight, wet feel of her cunt was too much for Khalid to ignore. He gave in, spilling his seed inside of her. Brooklyn's moan followed seconds later.

Chapter Nineteen -- Death Do Us Part

The assault was so quick, so calculated, Khalid didn't have a moment to process it before he felt his flesh being torn. He had barely pulled himself from Brooklyn's hot body when the panther came running out from the desert shadows, claws unsheathed and ripping through his neck.

Khalid stumbled back. He was unable to catch himself and fell upon his knees. He was losing too much blood, too quickly from the gash in his neck. He tried staunching the wound by placing his discarded pants on it and pressing hard as he attempted to morph.

Only a few seconds had passed, but time ticked by slowly as his bruised body worked out the commands of his mind. Transforming was the only thing he knew to do to protect him and his mate. Khalid tried once, twice, and found he couldn't control his powers.

He'd been poisoned.

Fear permeated every inch of his body at this realization. He was nothing more than a human at the mercy of an angry, dangerously unstable panther. He whipped around frantically looking for Brooklyn.

You need to save her. You need to do something, Khalid's mind screamed, even as he felt himself falling forward from the loss of blood.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw something that made him wonder if he had already fainted. There was a lioness battling the black panther, fighting with the slick beast and making it howl in pain.

If he died, she died. And he could slowly feel the life seeping out of his body. Brooklyn was dying and there was nothing he could do about it. As his eyes closed he

wondered how it was that Brooklyn had never told him she was a female hunter, one of the very few female lion-shifters with the ability to morph.

* * *

He woke to the sting of pain across his face.

"Damn it, Khalid. Wake up. We need you awake." It took him a moment to recognize the voice. It was Keegan screaming for him to hold on.

"Son of a bitch. Don't you dare die on me. I will kick your ass if you do!"

He smiled to himself. At least he thought he did. That was his brother, Kaden. Only he could voice his frustration so perfectly.

"I love you both. Tell them all I love them," he whispered through parched lips. He wondered how long they had been lying there in the middle of the desert. How long had they been slowly dying?

"Tell Dad... thank you," he coughed out before succumbing to the bliss of oblivion that awaited him.

"Shit, we're losing him."

And Khalid knew without being told that he was losing his mate, Brooklyn.

Epilogue -- All Dressed in White

Lancaster stood on the top of the old Mission church's steps and watched Alan hug Mrs. Khalid Lionheart. Tears swam in both their eyes as they clasped each other tightly.

It was a moment both had waited a long time for. As Brooklyn and Khalid had lain in the hospital, healing quickly, but not fast enough for their miserable family members, Alan had visited his daughter several times. When word came that Brooklyn was engaged, the whole Barrister family had trekked across the nation to see the moment when outrageous Brooklyn would marry the decent, sensible Lionheart.

The sensible Lionheart clasped Lancaster on the shoulder. "Have I thanked you for sending her to me?"

He smiled at Khalid. "Yes, you have, several times in fact. If only you could get your brothers to stop fighting me."

Khalid laughed. "If we didn't fight you'd think something was wrong." One dark eyebrow lifted. "Do you know who's next on the list?"

The Old Man smiled. "I have an idea," he murmured. At his words, Khalid and Alan broke out in laughter.

Tuesday Morrigan

Tuesday Morrigan began her love affair with romance at an early age. As a child she was always infatuated with the romance novels she snuck from her mother. Later, in high school, the public library became her sanctuary with an endless array of romance novels. Tuesday is still an avid reader of books. Thanks to shows like *Buffy*, *Angel*, and her latest infatuation, *Supernatural*, Tuesday prefers her stories to have a little more grit. Her favorite genres have always been fantasy, mystery, romance and erotica, so as a writer, she tries to blend the genres to create her own personal niche.

You can learn more about Tuesday, including what's her latest project, at www.mochancreme.com and you can reach her at Tuesday@mochancreme.com.