



Guilty Little Secrets

Lisa Renee Jones

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Chapter One

Lust.

That was what she had felt for Blake Alexander so many years ago. It had been lust, and nothing more.

She refused to believe that it had been something bigger, more meaningful. Biting her bottom lip, she fought the disbelieving laugh that threatened to erupt, directed at her own stupidity. Why, if it had been nothing more than lust, did hearing he was coming to her brother's Super Bowl party make her heart race and her palms sweat?

Sitting on her brother's sofa, Laura Cameron took on the tedious task of peeling the label from her beer bottle. Desperation spurred the need to do something with all the nervous energy pouring through her body. Any minute now, Blake would walk through the front door of her brother's house.

She would be face to face with the man who had inspired pretty much every nighttime fantasy she had been privy to as a teen. Back then, she had easily conjured hot, wet, steamy images involving her and Blake naked. Compliments of a wild imagination—and good dream recall—she had done things with him she had yet—not then or now—to do in the flesh.

Reality made her sink her teeth into her bottom lip, almost drawing blood. Okay, so her little fantasies about Blake had lasted well past her teens. She just didn't like to admit it, even to herself. Years after he had joined the army, leaving her behind—and angry—she would wake wet with need. The times she had woken up, a near-orgasmic ache between her legs, were too many to count.

Once she had gone away to college, her fantasies grew more explicit. The more she evolved into womanhood, the more she played out sensual, tempting scenarios in her sleep.

And sometimes even in the waking hours.

And he, Blake Alexander, her brother's best friend, the man who was about to be in the same room with her, would be the focus of her arousal. It had been the move to Manhattan that had seemed to calm her need for him. Her new life had brought with it a refuge of sorts. She had been freed from her “Blake haunting.” She almost laughed at the thought. That's how hot she had been for Blake. She had dubbed her obsession a haunting.

She didn't want it to consume her again.

Shoving the thought away, she reminded herself that things were different now. She was twenty-five and a grown woman with life experiences under her belt. Now back at home in San Francisco, she was the proud owner of a corporate job with Martin's Department Store. Blake would probably be nothing like she remembered. His impact on her would be a big, whopping zero.

She frowned and tossed a piece of label on the coffee table. It was just so damned ironic that Blake had left the army, and returned home only weeks before her arrival. When her brother had told her Blake had bought a skydiving school with several army buddies, she had been floored.

“Boo!”

Laura jumped so hard, her beer splattered out of the top of the bottle. Her brother Matt, now sitting next to her, laughed. "You are too easy to scare, little sis."

She made a face and wiped at the dampness now on her jeans. "And you are just as childish as I remember, Matt Cameron."

Linebacker big and teddy-bear cute, Matt had blond hair, blue eyes, and a funny sense of humor to complete the package. He winked at his sister. "But you love me, and you know it."

That was the truth. She did love him, and had missed him immensely. "Yes, you big lug, I love you." She gave him a nudge that bordered on a shove.

He wrapped a big arm around her shoulder. "It wasn't the same, having football parties without a girl here."

Laura laughed. "Mom would have filled in for me if you'd asked her. She loves football." They both knew why he didn't want Mom present. Football made her get a little crazy.

"Yeah, well, I get all I can take of Mom during the season," Matt said with a grimace. As a high school football coach, Matt often entertained friends with stories about players and fans. Unfortunately, their mother had created a few of his funnier stories. "It's no wonder Dad took a dislike to the game. I've never seen a woman act like that over football. Back in my days on the field, the referees knew her by name. She was lucky she wasn't banned."

Laura laughed. "I remember Dad taking nerve pills before your college games, afraid she would embarrass you."

Matt grunted. "Me?" he said in disbelief. "He was afraid she would embarrass him."

The room was already bustling with activity, mostly male in nature. The doorbell rang, and someone yelled for Matt. He kissed Laura's forehead. "Good to have you home."

He was up and gone, but not without showing off a contented smile on his handsome face. It was good to be home. For a long moment, she savored the thought.

"Laura?"

She looked up to see the very man she had been fretting over just minutes earlier. Blake.

He stood before her, looking every bit the sinfully handsome male she had remembered. But better. Experience and age had given him a mature quality that clung to him like a second skin; made him seem like he knew things. She could almost bet he knew plenty about pleasing a woman. Laura inwardly cringed. He was already making her have naughty thoughts.

"Blake." She said his name as if confirming he wasn't a part of one of her dreams.

Try as she might, her eyes wouldn't stay fixed on his face. They traveled the length of what had become a delicious display of pure male power. Blake had always looked good, but now ... now he was like a work of art.

His powerful legs rippled with muscles beneath his faded Levis. And then there was the snug, black T-shirt. She had a new appreciation for the basic tee as of now. At least this particular one. It did a mighty fine job of hugging a chest so broad and hard it made her mouth water.

On his six-foot-two frame, his physical presence could easily be considered intimidating. To Laura, it was like being injected with an instant dose of desire. With

lightning speed, she became aware of the prickling in her nipples. Her arms crossed in front of her body, reacting to the tiny ache. She prayed her aroused state couldn't be seen through her thin, pink tee.

Only Blake did this to her. It was crazy.

Forcing herself to meet his gaze, Laura found Blake's blue eyes darker, and far more intense than she remembered. "It's been a long time, Laura," he said, in that deep, baritone voice that she had always loved so much.

Simple words, but they evoked much more than a simple response.

Her body quaked with the potency of her attraction to him; so long in the making, so alive despite the darkness of time apart. All the while, her heart raced with the emotional intensity seeing him evoked.

She sat her beer on the coffee table, forcing herself to unlock her arms from their defensive posture, and praying her hands didn't shake. "Yes, yes, it has."

He was staring at her with an indiscernible look in his eyes. She resisted the urge to cross her arms again, feeling self-conscious under his scrutiny. What did he see? Little girl ... or woman?

"You've changed," he finally said in a hushed tone.

Her knees were pressed primly together, a reflex reaction to the dull ache that had traveled with excruciating accuracy from her breasts straight to her core.

She barely found her voice. "Have I?"

A slight smile played on his lips as he stepped forward. Anticipation rushed across her nerve endings. Would he hug her?

"Yes," he said as he sat down next to her. Close. He sat really, really close. She could smell him. She'd always found his scent to be arousing. To touch him would take nothing more than a raised hand.

It was tempting. Her fingers twitched with the need.

Instead, he reached for her.

Her breath caught in her throat as his hand gently touched her hair. Basking in the moment, her lashes fluttered shut as his fingers traced a long strand of red. "You changed your hair."

Nervously, she forced her eyes open and a smile to her lips. He'd only seen her hair short. In her youth, she'd wanted to fit in with everyone else. The bright auburn color had seemed too bold, so she had kept it short to downplay its existence. She would have colored it had her mother allowed it.

Now, as a grown woman, she felt the freedom of being unique and loved it. Her hair was long, below her shoulders, and she liked it that way. Her voice was soft as she replied, remembering his old comments about her fire-red temper to match her hair. She wondered if he was thinking the same thing.

"It's been like this for years," Laura told him.

His eyes seemed to go to her lips. It took effort to resist the urge to wet them. "I can't believe how grown up you are."

She wet her lips. She couldn't help it. His eyes followed the action, lingering and then lifting to hers. What passed between them in that moment made her breath catch in her chest. Hot, primal passion burned in Blake's eyes, and she forgot everything but him. Their attraction danced between them, alive and charged with heat.

It couldn't be real. Could it?

“Blake?” His name was a question. Did he want her like she always had him?

Memories seemed to walk from her mind to his and his to hers. All the times they had spent together over the years...

Late night talks when her brother was asleep on the couch ... those had been her favorite times. She and Blake would sit on the floor talking for hours. Then there were the nights when she, Blake, and Matt would make popcorn and watch scary movies.

Sometimes Blake would force her to watch the same old movies over and over. Her brother would bail time after time, saying he couldn't watch the same movie again. But even then Laura had loved Blake. They had been friends, and so much more.

Watching a movie ten times with him was fun.

Yes, there had always been something between them. They simply hadn't allowed it to bloom. No. He hadn't let it. Suddenly, she understood why she had never been able to dismiss Blake as a crush. He had been so much more. But he hadn't let it evolve, holding her at arms' length. She had been forbidden, and he had known it.

She had been his best friend's sister. That made her untouchable.

But that was then, and this was now.

And there was no question they wanted each other. It was like a low, hot simmer that threatened to go up in flames.

“Hey, Blake, Laura, come check out the pre-show. That damn quarterback from Utah is in a monkey suit, acting like he knows football when he can't even complete a pass.”

Matt, as usual, had crummy timing, appearing beside them. He had successfully ruined the moment. Blake looked away. Laura scowled in Matt's direction, fighting the urge to throw her beer on him.

Matt looked at Laura, and then at Blake. “I can't believe you're both here. It's just like old times. Us guys can cut up, drink beer, and listen to my kid sister tell us we don't know what we're talking about.” He made a cheering motion with his beer bottle. “Life is good.”

Blake looked at Matt and then eyed Laura. There was none of the prior warmth in his look. She'd been shut out. “Yeah,” he said. “Life is good. I guess it is just like old times.” He paused. “I need a beer.”

As Blake walked away, Laura tried to calm the explosion of thoughts erupting in her brain. He had just dismissed her like a bad habit. No matter what had just passed between them, she was Matt's kid sister. Always was, and always would be. But Blake was wrong. Everything wasn't just like old times. She was older and wiser. In the past, she had dismissed their attraction as schoolgirl fantasies.

Not anymore.

She saw what was in his eyes. He wanted her. And damn it, she had wanted him a long time.

All she had to do was prove just how womanly she was, and the kid sister would be forgotten. And why wait? She'd start today.

Chapter Two

The main group of Super Bowl watchers had gathered in Matt's living room. Among the group were seven rowdy guys, all with beers in their hands, eyes on the television, and smart-ass comments blurting from their mouths. Laura sat amongst them, shocked that she wasn't the only female for once. One of Blake's partners, Bobby, had brought his wife, Jennifer.

"We need a beer run," Matt yelled from the kitchen.

Laura had almost forgotten. "I have a couple of cases in my car."

"Way to go, Laura," Joey, another guest said, and then winked. He pushed to his feet. "I'll carry it in for you."

To Laura's surprise, Blake stood. "That's okay, I got it, man." He exchanged a look with Joey, who quickly sat back down, bowing out of his offer to help.

Her eyes narrowed as they met Blake's, noting his silent intimidation of the other man. But she didn't say anything. Interesting. She wanted to see where this was going. Turning on her heels, she let Blake follow her outside. With every step she took, she felt him behind her, watching her, moving with her. She hit the clicker to her car, and popped the trunk. When they were both standing behind the raised lid, he turned and faced her.

He fixed her with a stare, but his expression was unreadable. Damn him for having a good poker face. His tone was equally hard to read. "Joey's a dog. Stay away from him."

She laughed. He had to be kidding. "I'm a grown woman, Blake. I hardly need you to tell me who I should stay away from. Besides," she added, purposely dismissing his warning, "he seems nice enough to me."

His hand came out and touched her shoulder. She looked down at it, and then up at him. "He's not just a dog, he's a junkyard dog."

She let out a breath. "How do you suppose I survived all those years while you were gone without your warnings?" She screwed up her face. "I can decide who I date—or don't date, for that matter—very well on my own, thank you."

She started to turn, but his hand gently closed around her arm. "You're considering dating him?"

She wasn't. "Maybe."

His eyes darkened. "That's crazy. Matt will have a fit."

Her eyes narrowed. "Matt, huh? So you are doing this for Matt?"

"Not for Matt." He spoke the words softly with a hint of discomfort ringing in his tone. "You're like a sister to me as well, and you know it."

That made her angry. No way was she letting him get away with this. "Funny," Laura challenged. "That look you gave me in the living room didn't look too brotherly."

She stepped forward, bringing them so close their thighs were almost touching. Her hand flattened on his chest. She was so nervous her insides were shaking, but Blake had avoided what was between them far too long.

Her voice was a soft, seductive purr, and she inwardly complimented herself on her exterior façade of composure. "You looked at me like a man looks at a woman, Blake."

His eyes were half-veiled as he looked down at her hand on his chest. For long moments he stared before once again making eye contact. She could smell his spicy

cologne, and fought the temptation to bury her nose in his neck.

He didn't move, nor did he deny her words. "Your brother is my best friend."

She ignored his statement. "Does that mean you know how you looked at me?" The muscles in his chest flexed under her fingers.

His voice was low. "Seeing you again caught me off guard."

She took this as a small admission. "You caught me off guard, too."

"Meaning?"

She had to go for it. "Meaning I had hoped my schoolgirl crush was gone."

His eyes flashed with surprise. "What crush?"

"We both know there has always been something between us."

"We were kids."

"We're not anymore."

His hand went to her hair as it had earlier. "I love your hair like this."

The touch of his hand made her insides flip-flop. "I want you to like it."

His eyes went to hers. "Your brother..."

She finished his sentence for him. "Knows I'm a grown woman."

"Would kill me."

"No," she insisted. *And if he did she'd kill him.* "He won't."

"He will."

"Kiss me."

He stared down at her, and then to her complete, utter shock, he did as she asked. Not only was he kissing her, his arms had slid around her waist. He pulled her tight against that hard body of his, and she got a taste of heaven on earth.

Instantly, she melted, molding her softness against those delicious muscles. Her hands slid around his neck. The action pressed her aching nipples against his chest, and she moaned softly into his mouth.

Divine, soft caresses of his tongue played sensual havoc with her entire body. It was just a kiss, but it was also much more. Years of pent-up desire had been set free in both of them. Wetness dampened her panties as if there had been twenty minutes of foreplay instead of simply this one tease of a moment.

God, how she wanted him. Her leg went up and wrapped around his calf, pulling his hips against her. Feeling the evidence of his arousal press against her stomach added fuel to the fire. She wanted to be alone with him, naked and intimately joined.

He nipped at her lips. "We shouldn't be doing this."

"Why not?" she asked breathlessly.

He raised his head just enough to look into her eyes. "You know why."

"I want you, Blake. Is that wrong?"

He made a low sound, much like a growl, and then kissed her again. This time, his kiss was different. He seemed more primal in his need, taking her mouth with more hunger, his tongue sliding along hers with long, sensual strokes. The potency of their shared desire consuming. Hot. On fire.

A door slammed somewhere in the distance, but it hardly registered. Her mind and body were both completely focused on Blake. "Where's that beer?"

The voice—Matt's—was a jolt of reality.

They froze, lips pressed together, eyes flying open. Then, at the same moment, they moved away from each other like two bad children caught with their hands in the cookie

jar.

Blake ran his hand through his hair, and muttered a curse. The crunch of Matt's shoes on gravel indicated he was about to round the side of the car. Blake reached for the beer, and Laura forced a smile.

This wasn't how she would have wanted their first kiss to end. Still, she had finally kissed Blake. And it had been a damned good kiss. Very fantasy worthy. She hoped he thought so, too.

** **

Half-time brought with it a scurry of activity. Laura found herself sitting in the kitchen with Jennifer, Bobby's wife. Bags of chips and empty beer cans littered the counters. Laura took a bite of a Cheez Doodle, closed the bag, and set it aside.

She eyed Jennifer, who was finishing off a Dorito herself, and smiled. She was a pretty woman, blond and curvy, the type that would have made Laura insecure in her younger years. But not now. Now she was proud of who and what she had become. And she knew what she wanted out of life, and had done a good job of turning her goals into realities. Blake was the one exception.

She had always wanted him. And he had always been beyond reach.

Vulgar yelling came from the living room. Laura rolled her eyes. "Men."

Jennifer laughed, and closed up her bag of chips. "We're outnumbered."

Laura's eyes widened. "Ya think?" she asked, laughing.

"Mmm," Jennifer said, sipping her beer. "It's all good, though. I like being with Bobby."

"Newlyweds tend to be that way," Laura said, offering Jennifer a half-smile.

"It's not like that," Jennifer told her. "We grew up together, but..."

Now Laura was curious. "But what?" she asked, and then realized she was being rude. "Oh, sorry. I didn't mean to be nosy."

Jennifer gave her a friendly smile, clearly not upset. "It's fine. It's just a long, complicated story. The bottom line is we spent some years apart, and well, I guess you could say, rediscovered each other. I want to enjoy every moment I can with him."

Laura studied her a minute, shoving a lock of hair behind her ear. "So do you like football, or just being here with Bobby?"

"Both," she said with a smile. "I used to watch Bobby's football games in high school and it kind of grew on me."

"Really?" she asked, walking to the fridge and pulling out a Coke. She held one up to Jennifer, who nodded her acceptance. "I used to watch Blake and Matt play, too. That's how I took to liking it. I don't remember Bobby from back then, but I'm quite a few years younger than the guys are."

Jennifer nodded, reaching for the can of Coke and popping the top open. "Bobby and Blake are the same age. In fact, Blake followed Bobby into the Rangers, from what I understand."

Laura thought back as she took a long drink. "I don't remember why he joined the Rangers. Just that it made me miserable." She set her cola can on the counter.

"So," Jennifer said, curiosity in her tone. "What's the deal with you and Blake?" She smiled. "I don't mind being nosy."

"Nothing," Laura said, trying to seem nonchalant.

One of Jennifer's brows rose, disbelief in her look.

"Okay, something." Laura made a face. "He has a problem with me being Matt's kid sister. He says I'm like a sister to him, too."

"Ah, hah," Jennifer said, and then added nothing else.

Laura gave her a look. "What does 'ah hah' mean?"

Jennifer gave her a sly smile. "There is only one way to handle the 'sister syndrome'."

Laura leaned forward eagerly. "I'm listening."

"You'll have to make him think of you as a woman, not a kid. Of course, there is Matt to consider as well. I'm sure Blake's worried about how he'll respond."

Laura frowned. *Tell me something I don't know.* "How to change his viewpoint is my question?"

"Jealousy," Jennifer said quickly.

Come again? No. That sounded dangerous. "What do you mean?"

"Make him jealous. If he really wants you—and he does, I saw how he looks at you—he'll take the bait."

Laura perked up forgetting the jealousy ploy. "How does he look at me?"

"Like he wants to have hot, wet sex with you."

Laura sighed wistfully. "Yeah?"

Jennifer laughed. "Yeah."

But Laura didn't join in the laughter. This was serious business to her. "I need to make this happen."

Jennifer eyed her with interest. "The sex or the jealousy?"

She wasn't sure about the jealousy but sex sounded good. "Anything and everything."

"Okay," Jennifer said softly, wiggled her finger at Laura so she would come closer. "There's this charity auction..."

* * * *

Laura stepped into her bathtub, and let out a big sigh of pleasure. All her life, her place of escape had been a bubble bath. Tonight, she needed escape more than ever. At first, Jennifer's idea of making Blake jealous had seemed the way to go. But now, alone, thinking things through, it didn't set well. Blake was special to her.

Playing games wasn't her style, and certainly she had never been anything but honest with Blake. She liked what they shared. She didn't want to change the tone of their relationship just to change the nature.

Still, the direct approach hadn't worked. After sharing a hot, tingle-to-your-toes kiss, he hadn't so much as said a word to her. In fact, he had avoided her like the plague. Sinking against the tub wall and deeper into the water, she mentally replayed the party. She was certain Blake had been watching her.

He hadn't so easily ignored her. That gave her hope.

Her eyes fluttered shut as she relived the feel of his lips pressed to hers, soft, sensual, and warm. In her mind, his mouth traveled down her neck, and she could almost feel his breath on her skin. She moaned softly as she imagined how it would feel to run her fingers through his hair. To have him touch her would be pure bliss. One of her hands moved up her stomach, but in her mind it was his hand. She cupped her breast, thinking

of the rough, perfect texture of his hand. Pinching her nipple, she whimpered, calling out his name in her mind, and bringing her other hand upward. Both breasts in her hands, she kneaded them, nipples aching with cries for her touch.

No, his touch.

Blake's.

A dull ache built between her thighs, begging to have him, wanting him inside her. Her fingers touched the sensitive flesh, and her thighs spread, knees bending above the water. She needed a release, and her fingers gently answered her body's cry. Images of their bodies, naked, legs entwined, drove her need. She whimpered with the thought of Blake sinking deep inside her body. And of that first slow move that would open her wider as her body begged for his.

He would call out her name, and she would gasp from his first hard thrust. Her fingers moved more fervently along her sensitive flesh, urgency growing as images of her and Blake made her hotter for reality.

The tingling of arousal grew to the burn of pure need. Her mind raced with images of Blake naked, inside her, touching her. Her hands moved, trying to feel what he would do to her, trying to satisfy her desire for him.

She bit her bottom lip as the build to release came upon her. Her body ached for that release and with each touch of her hand she yearned for Blake. Tumbling over the wall of build-up, her muscles contracted in orgasm. For long moments, she tensed as pleasure rushed from her core to her limbs.

When she finally collapsed, Laura whispered Blake's name, wishing for what had never been.

Chapter Three

Blake pulled his SUV into his driveway and turned off the lights. But he didn't get out. His mind was far too focused on Laura to do anything but sit there. Lost in thought, he didn't notice the interior lights dim. He was too busy trying to make sense of what was happening to him. And something was happening.

Compliments of Laura. She was still in his blood, like some kind of jungle disease. Neither time nor effort lessened the impact she had on him. She had invaded his mind, body, and soul. He had thought it would be different now, years later. But he had thought wrong.

The younger Laura had been impossible to ignore, with her vibrant personality and skin of ivory perfection that begged for his touch. Moving away had been the only thing that had kept him from acting on his attraction. Time and age should have improved his willpower.

The reality was, maturity hadn't done anything to improve his resistance to Laura. Nothing. Not a damned thing. In fact, he found the new, grown-up Laura devastatingly beautiful and downright tempting.

Her power to entice him had increased, not the opposite. Kissing her had been like tasting the ultimate woman. Never had he been aroused so easily. The minute that sweet little tongue of hers had touched his, he had been hard as a rock. He closed his eyes. He'd spent years wondering how she would taste. He could still taste her now. The real life experience had been addictively sweet, like the purest of honey.

Her red hair, now long, was like a shimmering halo of silky temptation to his fingers. Her body had developed curves meant to make a man's heart race. Damn, his was racing all right.

Having those curves pressed against his body had made him want to rip her clothes off right there and then, in her brother's driveway. Damn, how he had wanted to feel the soft silkiness of that gorgeous skin.

If Matt hadn't walked up when he did...

Blake didn't even let himself finish the thought. All he knew was that by the time the game was over, he had been so on edge he was ready to rip his hair out strand-by-strand. Absentmindedly he ran his hand over said short hair.

After he had kissed her, he had felt guilty as hell. Matt trusted him like a brother. Blake knew even as he was kissing Laura how wrong it was. At the time, he had silently reasoned with himself. Just one kiss wouldn't hurt. In fact, it might end his years of pining. Instead it had fueled his desire for her.

He had become completely lost in her. He pounded the steering wheel with the palm of his hand. If Matt had caught them ... he'd have lost his best friend. Matt would think he was about as good as dog shit. And damn it, that about fit how he felt. Like dog shit.

Laura was like a sister to him. What right did he have to kiss her? Cursing softly, he knew damned well he had to talk to her. They were going to be bumping into each other in social settings. It was inevitable. That meant they needed to set some ground rules.

He knew she was staying in the house that used to be Old Lady Walker's. Blake had heard Matt teasing her about it being haunted. Turning the key to the ignition, he made

his decision.

He had to talk with her tonight.

* * * *

Laura's eyes popped open at the weird scratching sound.

The bath water was still warm, her mind relaxed, but her heart was racing. There it was again. Could it be a tree on the bedroom window?

Of course it was. "Damn it," she muttered, and stood up, water dripping down her body. "Matt and his damn ghost stories."

She grabbed a towel, stepping out of the tub and drying off. As she pushed an arm through her white silk robe, she heard the noise again.

For an instant, she froze, listening, heart beating double-time in her chest. Several seconds passed, and she heard nothing. She tried to laugh at herself as she pulled the robe on fully and tied it around her waist.

With trepidation, she stepped gingerly towards the bedroom. The lights were out. Hadn't they been on? Her hands slid to the wall, eager to get to the switch, but she couldn't find it.

"Damn, damn, damn," she muttered, feeling around more urgently for the switch.

That was when her eyes caught on a flash at the window. No. More like a shadow.

"Oh, God," she whispered.

What now? Think, think, think. The phone. Yes. The phone. Braving the darkness despite the way it gave her the creeps, she inched towards the phone. Just as she was reaching for the receiver, she heard the doorbell.

Her brows dipped. No ghost or bad guy rang the doorbell. Okay, so bad guys might. She looked for a weapon as she grabbed for the phone again.

She made a disgusted sound. It wasn't in the cradle. Carrying off the cordless was a bad habit. She heard the doorbell again. Her teeth worried her bottom lip. It could be Matt. If it was, she wanted him inside the house, protecting her. That's what big brothers were for. Scaring you, and then making you feel better.

But what if it wasn't Matt?

Her cell was in her purse by the door.

Padding her bare feet across the carpet, she looked for a weapon. Her gaze went to an umbrella propped against the wall. Her visitor knocked as she fumbled for her cell phone. "Who's there?" she yelled, weapon in one hand as her search continued with the other.

"It's me, Laura."

She stopped looking for her phone. "Blake?"

"Yeah," he said, with irritation lacing his tone. "How long are you going to leave me standing out here?"

It really was him. Relief washed over her. Safe. She was safe. She dropped her purse on the table, and flung the door open. Stepping towards him, she didn't stop until she was flat against his chest, umbrella falling to the ground.

Her breath was uneven, her words a bit shaky. "Oh, thank God you're here!"

"What's wrong?" he asked, looking behind her, tension suddenly evident in his big body.

Her palms flattened on his chest, as she tilted her chin upward to look at him.

"Someone was outside my window."

His expression didn't change. Calmly, he asked, "Did you call the police?"

"No, my phone," she knew she was rambling, but she couldn't restrain her mouth, "it wasn't on the charger, and I couldn't find my cell, and then you showed up."

He looked down at the ground. "And the umbrella was supposed to do what?"

"Poke the bad guy, of course," she said frowning up at him. "That thing is sharp at the end."

He laughed.

"Or I could have hit the person with it."

He smiled. "I see."

Realizing it did sound silly, she laughed as well. It caused enough movement that the front of her robe fell open. The sash loosened and the silk folds slipped downward. Now open to the waist, her chest was exposed. She felt the cool air hit her nipples, followed immediately by the heat of his gaze.

She stood there, feeling like a fool, unmoving, making no effort to cover herself. The shock of the exposure along with the potential prowler or a ghost had her brain in overload. This was not the way she wanted Blake to see her naked the first time.

He seemed to realize her need for assistance. He reached down and pulled the fabric over her breasts. Gentleman that he was, he didn't say a word. Softly, as if trying to be discreet, he cleared his throat before speaking. It seemed as if he couldn't quite find his voice. "I'll go check around the house. You go inside and lock the door until I tell you otherwise."

"But what if someone's inside? I heard something."

"What did you hear?" he asked, his voice monotone, giving no hint as to how he might feel about just seeing her half naked.

"A scratching sound." He arched his brow as if questioning her. "I did! Several times."

He stared at her, his eyes intense, dark, and unreadable. "Have you been talking to Matt?"

She glared at him. "Matt has nothing to do with this. Give me some credit for knowing when I hear a noise or not."

He studying her a moment, and then said, "I'll check inside first. Where did you hear the noise?"

She swallowed. Suddenly, being scared didn't seem such a bad thing. "In the bedroom," Laura told him.

Laura started following Blake into the house. He turned and looked at her. "Stay here."

"Are you kidding?" she asked in complete disbelief. "I saw someone outside my window. I'm not staying out here alone."

"Laura..."

There was a hint of irritation in his voice, and far too much authority. She pointed at him, cutting off his words. "Don't take that tone. I'm going with you. No way am I staying out here."

Definite frustration showed in his face. He leaned down towards her ear. Then he half mumbled, "You are the most difficult woman I have ever known." More directly he added, "Stay just inside the door."

She nodded, and followed him, hands on his arm, not about to stay anywhere he wasn't. Blake was strong and obviously unafraid, and she wasn't going to let him get away.

He stopped in the doorway of her very dark bedroom, and she tentatively peered around his very large, safe-feeling body.

And then she saw the movement outside the window. She gasped and pointed. He stood completely still, looking towards the window as she ducked back behind him. After several seconds, he turned and faced her.

She grabbed his arms. "What do we do now?" she whispered in a hoarse voice.

He didn't whisper. "Are we speaking of before or after I call and yell at your brother for scaring the hell out of you?"

"Shh!" She put her finger to her lips. "Are you crazy?"

He sighed as he reached behind her and flipped on the light. "It's a tree limb, Laura."

She blinked several times, trying to digest his words. Instantly, she started feeling the embarrassment of her own stupidity. "It can't be."

"It is."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite."

She blinked several more times. "Oh."

He pulled his cell phone from his pocket. Maybe he was only trying to calm her down with the tree thing. "Are you calling the police?" she asked earnestly.

"No," he said giving her a look. "Your brother."

She grabbed his hand. "Don't do that." Then she frowned. "How would you explain being here?" In fact, she wanted to know herself. "Why are you here?"

He put his phone back in his pocket, and let out a breath. "We need to talk."

She crossed her arms in front of her body. "About what happened earlier, I assume?"

He didn't so much as blink. Damn, how she hated how hard his face was to read.

"Exactly," he affirmed.

His gaze drifted towards the bed, a sure indicator he wasn't feeling cool and collected even if his exterior seemed to indicate that he did. When his eyes returned to hers, he said, "I think we should take this talk to the living room."

She marched towards the bed, sat down, and curled her legs up beside her, careful to keep the robe in place. She wanted to allude to an invitation, but not offer herself up on a platter. He still needed to work for it. "I'm comfortable here." She arched her brows. "Go ahead." She paused a split second. "Talk."

He stood completely, utterly still. It was as if he was a stone statue. "I'm going to the living room, where I'll be waiting to talk to you."

Then he actually had the nerve to turn and walk out of the room. She sat there stunned for a few moments. Now what? Did he expect her to follow him as if she was taking orders?

Not happening. No way. So where did that leave her? Her mind was racing with possibilities. She could drop the robe and walk out there naked. That drew an instant no. She didn't have the courage, and it sent the wrong message. She wasn't the slutty type. She was ... well ... a woman who—oh, God, she had never let herself go there—but now, seeing him again, she knew. She was in love with Blake. Okay, so she had gone there before, but she always talked herself out of it later. Now, there was no question.

Which meant she wasn't about to let him walk away from her. So think, woman, think!

And then it came to her. She knew how to handle him. A smile turned up the corner of her lips as she put her plan into play.

* * * *

Blake paced the living room a full fifteen minutes before he finally cursed brusquely and marched towards Laura's bedroom. He found the door open, and the lights out. What the... "Laura?"

Nothing. Not a peep. A rush of adrenaline pumped through his veins as fear crept into his heart. What if there really had been an intruder?

Urgency laced his voice. "Laura?"

Moments passed as he prepared to act. He reached for the light switch.

"I'm here," she said.

His hand froze. "Where?"

Two beats. "In bed."

Shit. What was she trying to do to him? "I thought we were going to talk?" She didn't answer. "Laura?"

"Hmmm."

"We were supposed to talk," he said, irritated at both her and his own thoughts. Laura, in bed, her soft curves invitingly pressed between the sheets... Damn. He was hard just thinking about it, like some randy teenager.

"You scared the hell out of me," he complained, meaning it.

"Don't yell at me, Blake," she called through the darkness. "I'm sleeping. Go home."

"I didn't yell, but *I am* irritated." He flipped on the light switch, determined to get control once again. Whatever game she was playing, he was losing. "We need to talk."

She sat up the instant the light came on, sheet hugged to her body. "Go home, Blake."

His was already walking towards her, intending to demand they clear the air. "You knew I was still here, but you went to bed."

His eyes fixed on that sheet then his gaze traveled upward to her creamy-white, bare shoulders. A mass of her lush, red hair fell in silky waves down her back. Her green eyes were fixed on him, angry and alive with her emotions.

Full realization hit him as he reached the edge of the bed. "What are you wearing under that sheet, Laura?"

Her lips were parted, and he could have sworn they trembled just slightly. "You really want me to answer that, Blake?"

He swallowed, trying to calm the pounding of his heart with mind power. It wasn't working. After all his years of combat, it was this tiny, delicate redhead who threatened to steal his composure.

They stared at each other, the intimacy of passion thickening with each passing moment. They both knew she was naked. "I can't do this. We can't." His voice was hoarse with desire, and lacking in conviction. He wanted nothing more than to take what she offered.

This woman, the one he had wanted for so many years, was the temptation of his lifetime. And she was naked, a mere few inches from his touch. She moved then, rising to her knees and dropping the sheet. "I want you, Blake."

His eyes stayed locked with hers, and he grasped for control. But he was a mere man, only human. His gaze lowered to her full, perfect breasts. Tantalizing rose-colored nipples, plump and already pointed with arousal, begged for his mouth.

And he damn sure wanted to take them in his mouth. But he wanted what he shouldn't. His best friend's sister. Almost a sister to him. An internal battle raged between his common sense and the things this woman did to him. His cock throbbed, pressing against his zipper. Physical needs threatened to cloud his judgment of what was right and wrong.

Laura called to him in so many ways.

“Touch me, Blake.”

And those were the words that sent him over the edge.

Chapter Four

Blake's knees hit the mattress as he faced Laura. As much as he wanted to touch her with hungry hands, to ravish and devour the focus of his need, he held back. It took effort to harness his desire, but he knew it would be worth it. This was too important to rush. He wanted to savor each moment, and make it last.

This had been in the making for so very long. He had wanted her. She had wanted him. Gently, his fingers touched her cheek.

"Blake." Her whisper was etched with a silkiness that spoke of desire. Her lashes fluttered to her cheeks as her hand covered his.

God, he had waited his entire adult life to hear her say his name that way. Both his hands found their way into her hair, his palms framing her face.

Their eyes met and held. There were many years of friendship and understanding between them. It changed what he knew as intimacy, and in fact, seemed to redefine its meaning.

There was something far beyond physical desire that moved between them. He felt it from head to toe, in every inch of his body. It was lust, hunger and hot sexual heat, yet it was also tender, gentle, and giving.

It defied reason while it pressed him forward with a growing ache to be skin to skin with her, touching her, tasting her, burying himself deep inside her. Lowering his head, the need to kiss her consumed him like a fire raging inside. It made him want to take her mouth, hot and hard. But he found himself merely brushing his lips over hers, loving the soft wetness as they trembled beneath his own.

His eyes shut, forced closed by the pure ecstasy of the moment. Gently he moved his mouth against hers; once, twice, three times. He tasted her sweetness, needing it like a drug.

Needing her.

When he slid his tongue between Laura's teeth, she whimpered. Her hands went to his wrists, tightening around them. He intentionally kept his body away from hers as he held on to what little control he still maintained.

Her tongue eagerly swept a trail along his, wearing down his willpower. She moaned into his mouth. The sound was like a seductive play on his nerve endings, zapping his remaining control.

Giving into the passion that burned inside, he deepened the kiss, pulling her close and pressing her breasts against his chest. He tasted her with the hunger of a starving man, and she met his need with a passionate response like none he had ever experienced.

They clung together as if they wanted to be under each other's skin. His hands traveled her bare back, loving the soft, silky feel against his palms. Sliding his hand between their bodies, he found one of her breasts and gently kneaded it.

Again, she whimpered.

He swallowed the soft, sexy sound like a reward that only made him hungrier for her. He wanted more and more, his body growing harder with urgency. He tweaked her nipple, and she rewarded him with another soft sound of pleasure.

She tugged at his shirt. Helping her efforts, eager to feel her body naked against his

own, he pulled it over his head and tossed it to the floor. Like a ravenous animal, her hands touched him, fingernails scraping his nipples, mouth pressed against his chest. His hands went to her hair as she flattened her tongue on his nipple.

This time he moaned, low and deeply felt as pleasure danced along his nerve endings.

Her exploration continued with her hands moving up and down his sides as her lips, tongue, and even teeth tempted and teased. As much as he loved what she was doing, he needed to kiss her again. Urgently, in fact.

His hands closed on the side of her head, urging her to look up at him. He saw the question in her eyes, but didn't answer with words. Instead, he kissed her. It was a passionate kiss, his tongue stroking hers. He lingered, drawing out the kiss with sensual moves that allowed him to savor her.

Her hands went to his pants, and again he was more than willing to oblige. Blake reached down and undid his button, but the shock of her hand cupping his erection made him freeze.

There was no doubt he grew in her hand, the pure and simple heat of lust making him press against her palm. "Damn, woman," he murmured against her lips. "You're killing me."

She laughed, soft and sexy, nipping at his lips even as she moved her hand against his erection. "Good."

He looked at her, eyebrows raised in mock astonishment. "You have an evil side, I see."

"No," she said. "I waited far too many years for this. It's just good to know you want it, too."

Her words went straight to his heartstrings. In some far corner of his mind, a flash of concern touched him. He shouldn't be here, with her. But common sense didn't seem to apply. Instead, he wanted her to know how badly he wanted her, both now and in the past.

His hands went to her neck, his thumbs caressing her cheeks. "You know I wanted you too, right, Laura?"

"Yes," she mouthed, barely making a sound with the word. Then in a hoarse whisper, she added, "Deep down, I always knew." A devilish half-smile appeared on her lips. "But you could prove it by getting rid of your pants now."

He laughed, amazed at the wild array of feelings Laura evoked in him. As hot as he was, he would never have thought he could laugh.

No wonder no other woman had ever been able to compare to her.

He knelt down and started unlacing his boots. Without warning, Laura maneuvered off the bed. Her full breasts shifted with the movement, drawing his hungry stare.

Surprising him, she reached out, touched his hand. "Let me," she said, referring to the laces. His brow inched up in a silent question, but he let his hands fall to his sides. There was a unique intimacy to her actions. Perhaps because she was naked. He was struggling to keep his hands to himself. His eyes took in the full view of her curvaceous body with admiration.

It felt like a lifetime before she finished unlacing both boots. Her eyes lifted to his, and her hands settled on his knees. "Take them off."

He wasn't thinking about his boots. He was thinking about her breasts pressed

against his knees. Unable to resist, he reached around his legs and rolled her nipples in his fingers.

She moaned, and tilted her head back slightly. "Stop," she said with a tremble in her voice, as she dipped her chin and pinned him with a sultry stare. "I can't function when you're, um, oh, doing that."

He wanted to know how turned on she really was. "Doing what, baby?" Blake asked, kissing her ear and cheek, and then her mouth.

"I'm trying..." He never found out what she was trying to do because his actions froze the words on her lips.

His fingers were on her thighs, walking their length with intentional slowness, teasing her, and enjoying his power over her. "I need to know how hot you really are."

"Blake..." She whispered only his name, stopping as his index finger found her slick readiness.

He let out a low growl. "God, baby, you are so damn wet."

Two fingers stroked her, while his other hand gently inched her legs farther apart. She fell backwards and caught herself on her hands. The action thrust her perfectly peaked nipples in the air.

So fucking beautiful. Squatting didn't allow him to reach her easily, so he moved to his knees. He wanted to lean over her body and touch her nipples with his tongue.

But her wetness called to him with a stronger force, drawing his eyes to the red triangle between her thighs. Long, sexy legs spread wide, she was deliciously open to him. He was damned thankful for turning on the lights. No way would he want to miss seeing every inch of her.

His fingers explored her, spreading her wetness around her body, and gradually working his finger a little inside her ... but just a little. He wanted to make this last. Her head was dipped backwards, her hair draped behind her. She looked like a sexy poster designed to his exact taste.

"Blake." It was some sort of plea. For both pleasure, and rescue from his scrutiny.

He looked up to find her looking at him, a hint of embarrassment in her face. "Oh, baby," he said tenderly, reaching for her, and pulling her towards him. One of his hands inched into her hair, framing her face. "You're beautiful. I love looking at you."

She shut her eyes, and then opened them again. "I guess I'm just a little nervous."

"Why?" he asked feeling a hint of urgency. "Do you want to stop?"

Chapter Five

Blake waited for her response, feeling the tenseness of the moment with a sort of urgency that beat at his mind and body. He repeated his words. "Do you want to stop?"

Laura's hand tightened on his arm where she held it. "No, it's not that. I ... I guess it's just, well, with you things seem so much more..." she paused a minute, "I don't know ... important, intimate." Her eyes flashed with some emotion. "All kinds of things."

Relief rushed over him. She didn't want to stop. And he understood exactly what she meant. What she was saying. Years of being friends and wanting more made this a unique experience. But a damned good one.

"I know." Lightly, he brushed his lips across hers. "I know."

Their lips were almost touching, breaths intermingled. "You do?" she asked in a hushed whisper.

"Oh, yeah."

Blake kissed her then, or maybe she kissed him. He wasn't sure. It felt like he was sinking into a haze of need so quickly, he couldn't quite decide what was what.

"You're amazing," he said as his tongue dipped into her sweet temptation of a mouth. God, she tasted good. Addictive. Sinfully so.

She pressing into him, arms wrapped around his neck as she sank into the kiss. Her breasts brushed against his chest, and he felt the hard little pebbles of her nipples. He felt the throbbing of his erection with renewed power. Raging heat threatened to consume him. Damn, how he wanted her.

Here.

Now.

Always.

The word hit him like a ton of bricks. Damn it, he loved Laura. Always had, always would. He kissed her with the passion of the words in his head, stroking her tongue with sensual play.

"You feel so good," he told her, kissing her, and then adding, "I need you, Laura."

She answered him with not only her words, but her body. Kissing him back with a sizzling fierceness. As if she was afraid it would be their last kiss.

"I need you, too, Blake." She pulled back enough to look at him, breathing labored, hands on his shoulders. "I have for a long time."

His eyes closed with the impact of her words. They had denied themselves so long. She was the answer to that small void he had always felt inside. Only as of late, it hadn't seemed so small. It was as if their time had been coming, and his heart knew the truth.

She stroked his cheek. "Blake?"

Laura was a part of his future, and the truth of his existence. His second half. They had parted physically, but never emotionally.

When his eyes opened she was staring at him. Anticipation filled those beautiful green eyes as if she was afraid he might turn her away. And no matter what the consequences, he couldn't walk away from her again. Not after tonight. Not ever.

"I've wanted you a very long time, too, baby." He brushed his lips across hers. "Too long."

They both reached for his pants at the same time, and laughed as their hands collided. But the laughter lasted mere moments, replaced by mutual hunger. Their eyes locked, heated with their shared passion.

The need to feel each other as close as possible was a silent understanding. He pushed to his feet, eager to discard the only barriers left.

Laura stayed on her knees looking up at him, dark eyes watchful and hot with desire. He couldn't get undressed quickly enough. As soon as he stepped out of his pants and underwear, she was there, at his feet, hands wrapped around his legs. The sight of her there below his cock was like a fantasy come true. And he had done his share of fantasizing over Laura.

It was a major turn on, seeing his erection throbbing with readiness and her mouth only inches away. He knew what she was about to do, and his body raged with expectations.

Her fingers moved up and down his calves, sending a rocket of sensation directly to his bloodstream. Every nerve ending he owned was on alert. Still, even knowing what was coming, he wasn't prepared for the impact of her tongue touching the tip of his penis. Nor had he recovered before her hand circled the base and squeezed.

"Laura," he whispered in a needy, hoarse voice. She responded by tasting him.

Blake watched her, loving the view, as she ran her tongue around the sensitive tip of his erection. He was shocked at her bold eye contact. Yet he also liked it.

Every man wanted a good girl in public and a bad girl in bed. Laura seemed more than eager to fit the bill on both ends. She was like the perfect good girl gone bad. Only he knew it was just for him, that she would be different with someone else.

He sensed it. Loved it. Felt turned on by it.

She began making long stokes up and down his erection with her tongue. His breath seemed to catch in his throat as pleasure sizzling all over his body, centered on his throbbing cock.

He could hardly believe Laura was giving him a blowjob. His Laura. His best friend's little sister. He should have felt guilty. Instead, everything about the situation aroused him.

The teasing of her tongue lasted long moments before she took him into her mouth. The sensation rocked his body, and made him want to thrust. He didn't, but his eyes closed and his hands settled in her hair.

She was sucking him with delicious pressure, moving her mouth up and down his length. The sounds she made and soft little moans, as if she was really enjoying herself, made him move with her. He couldn't help it.

Her tongue continued to stroke the underside of his penis even as she began sucking him faster and harder. Soon he was so near release he knew he would come if he didn't stop her. This was not how he wanted to come his first time with Laura.

"Wait, Laura." She looked up at him. "No more." Before she could object, he pressed her gently backwards and bent down in front of her. He lifted her and sat her on the edge of the bed. "It's your turn."

There was nothing more he wanted than to please her, to show her the kind of pleasure she had shown him.

"But..."

"No buts," he told her, pressing her legs apart, and inching between them. "I want to

taste you.”

Chapter Six

Leave it to Blake to take away her control.

He'd done it all her life, even when they were apart. Lord only knew she'd never forgotten him. The thing was, she didn't mind. If it was anyone else, she would stay in the power position. But not with him. She wanted to give herself to him.

He had a nice way of rewarding her submission...

His mouth closed down on her sensitive nub, and Laura gasped as he suckled. Sizzling with awareness, she felt as if she was on fire. Taking him in her mouth had been more arousing than she thought possible.

Never before had she found the act so pleasing to perform. She hadn't done it just for him. It has been for her, as well. Already raging with need, the flicker of his tongue on her nub was like fuel to a flame simmering with urgency.

It wouldn't take much to make her cum.

Blake urged her to lie back on the bed, which she did gratefully. The things he was doing with his tongue made sitting almost impossible.

He placed her ankles on his shoulders, and pulled her closer to the edge of the bed. She didn't fight him. Didn't want to. It felt too damn good. His hands slid under her backside, lifting her so he suckled her more fully.

There was pure perfection in the way he licked and teased. Her hands grasped for the bed sheets, as she started feeling the build to orgasm. Yet every time she was about to go over the edge to bliss, he stopped her.

She moaned, and called his name.

"Soon, baby, soon," he said. "But not yet."

Again and again he took her to the edge of ecstasy until she squirmed with urgency, arching into him, tense and eager for release. Finally, when she knew she could take no more he let her escape to pleasure, her body shuddering with ecstasy.

Ripple after ripple of the most amazing orgasm of her life rocked her body.

Slowly, he rolled his tongue in soft little circles. He brought her down with gentle, absolute perfection.

Blake eased her legs down, and rotated her until she lay on her side. He slipped behind her, his front to her back, his erection nuzzling her bottom.

She could feel his warm breath on her ear, and his fingers in her hair. "I have always wanted to do that to you," Blake confessed in her ear.

Laura snuggled closer to him, legs entwined with his. "You did it very well," she said, amazed at how easy it was to talk openly with him about sex. Maybe because it felt like making love, not sex. There was a comfort level that shouldn't have been the first time they were naked together.

His arm slid under hers, and his palm covered her breast. "You feel so damn good."

"So do you," she whispered, shocked at how ready she was to feel him inside her.

Even having a devastatingly intense orgasm, her body wanted more. It wanted him. Her head fell back on his shoulder as her mouth searched for his. He kissed her, and even as her tongue darted against his, her backside pressed against his hips.

"I need inside you," he said kissing her face, her neck, and then her ear.

“Yes,” she whispered, desperately wanting the same thing.

His hand was instantly on her hip, but he didn't immediately enter her. She looked over her shoulder to find him admiring the view. “You're looking really good.”

She found herself almost blushing, despite everything they had already done and her ultimate comfort level with him. The look in his eyes, and the tone of his voice was just so raw and potent.

His hunger fed hers, and as the tip of his erection slid to her wetness. Her modesty was instantly forgotten. She arched into him, eager with need. He rewarded her and slipped inside. She gasped at the immense pleasure having him inside her brought, and immediately moaned.

Penetrating her to the core, he slid his hand up her stomach and caressed her breast. He stilled, pinching her nipple, and kissing her neck. “I can't believe I'm inside you.”

She moaned in response to his intimate words. He began a slow, sensuously rhythm, in and out of her body. It was like a dance of seduction, their bodies molded together, aching more.

This moment had been so long in coming. Urgency played itself out in her body, crying for him in each movement, making her arch into him. A torrent of sensations pulsed from her core to the rest of her body.

His hands roamed her body, exquisite in their path. They were joined snugly, the need to be closer making them both moan with the bitter sweetness of need.

“Blake,” she cried, not sure why. Her breathing was fast, but so was his.

Suddenly, he moved away from her, pulling his hard body from hers and leaving her gasping. His mouth was on her back, kissing her gently, seductively. She wanted him back inside her. Still, there was no denying how arousing the touch of his lips and tongue were as they trailed down her spine. She tensed and then sighed when his tongue trailed down her hip.

“Turn over, baby.”

Before she could process what was happening, so lost in her fog of pleasure, she was on her back and he was sliding between her legs.

His tongue found her mouth at the same moment he slid back inside her. She moaned her approval, and he swallowed it. Breasts pressed into his chest, she clung to him, demanding more with her body's movements even as he eagerly complied.

They pressed together with desperation to the rhythm. In and out, and back and forth, they were on fire. Then, as if in silent agreement, they slowed, and looked at one another.

Those few moments were the most potent she had experienced in her lifetime. It was as if they connected on a soul-deep level. She was one with him. No one else existed.

“What are you doing to me, woman?” he asked, his mood suddenly seeming more aggressive and urgent as his lips pressed against hers. He rode her hard, pushing deep inside her, moving with the energy of a man who knew what he wanted. Her. And she was more than happy to give herself to him.

Wrapping her feet around his calves, she raised off the bed, meeting him with her own thrusts. To her utter surprise, her body clenched his penis, and she tumbled into a breathtaking orgasm. No warning. Just pure pleasure, fast and hard.

Blake cried out as her body gave way to spasms, grabbing him, and milking him as he shook with his own release. As he slowly relaxed, he rolled to his side, pulling her close. He held her like a precious gift, carefully stroking her hair. She felt like she was

receiving a gift. The two of them were finally together. This was the beginning of something beautiful, and timeless. This was a true mating of friends who were lovers, of two kindred souls.

She loved Blake. And she knew, even though he had yet to say the words, that he loved her.

No more pretending they didn't want each other. She sighed with satisfaction, and kissed his chin.

Seconds later, her eyes drifted shut.

* * * *

Laura woke, her eyes fluttered and then shut. Forcing them open, she squinted into the darkness. Reality seeped into her mind with a surreal, perfect, feel to it. Beneath her palm she felt soft hair, and a hard chest.

Blake.

Her nostrils flared with his spicy yet sweet, very male scent. She let out a sigh that was filled with the satisfaction of being with the man she loved. Finally, after so many years, she was waking in Blake's arms.

This was a dream come true.

"You're awake."

She turned towards him making her bare chest press into his. "I am," she responded. "I didn't know you were, too."

His smile was incredibly tender as he reached up and touched her cheek. She was thankful her eyes had adjusted to the darkness so she hadn't missed it. "I was just lying here thinking how amazing it is to have you in my arms."

"I was just thinking how amazing it is to be in your arms."

His tone was serious, but gentle. "This isn't what I planned when I came here tonight."

She smiled. Of course, it wasn't. That's why she had to be bold and get naked. "I know. Do you regret how it turned out?"

"Ah, baby," he said softly. "How could I regret something I have wanted for so very long?"

She moved so her face was closer to his, intending to kiss him soon. Right after she asked the question that had always put an ache in her heart. "Then why did you move away and leave me behind like there was nothing between us?"

A flash of torment showed on his face. "We were kids, and your brother is my best friend."

"Yes, that's true," she agreed, "but it doesn't change how we felt about each other."

He didn't respond immediately. "We never verbalized or even truly acted on our feelings."

That didn't matter. "But we wanted to."

His lips thinned. "But we didn't, and I knew it was what was best." He paused. "At least then."

"And now?" she asked, almost afraid to hear the answer.

He laced his fingers in her hair, and urged her mouth towards his. "Now is different, and you know it."

Before she could ask how it was different, he was kissing her. Pressing closer to his

body, she melted against him, and forgot everything but the moment.

* * * *

Blake woke as the sun peaked through the window shade. He opened his eyes and sucked in a deep breath. The smell of jasmine, Laura's fragrance, filled his nostrils, and made him smile. She was pressed to his side, hair spread across his chest.

Brazen and bold during waking hours, she was soft and delicate in sleep. With an eye of appreciation, he studied her face. Her dark lashes rested against her pale skin, skin as perfect and creamy as new snow from head to toe. Closing his eyes again, he soaked in the moment with the glory of a man who was in love. Next to him, Laura made a soft, sleepy sound and snuggled closer. It seemed like a fantasy having her naked, in bed, with him after a night of lovemaking.

Laura stretched next to him, her warm body a silent calling to his own. "Hmmm," she moaned. "What time is it?"

"Nine. Got plans today?"

Her eyes were shut again. "Hmmm, plans?"

He wasn't due into the Jump Zone until after lunch. It would be nice to have a few extra hours with her. "Like work?"

Her eyes opened instantly. "I have to be to work at eleven." She sat up instantly. The movement left her bare from the waist up. "What time is it?"

Being human, and also quite aroused by Laura, it was only natural that he was now fixated on her breasts. He was also rock-hard. "Nine, baby."

She looked down at him. "I have to get my dry cleaning."

He rolled towards her, arm crossing her body, and mouth attaching to her nipple. He nipped at it with his teeth, and teased it with his lips and tongue.

"Oh, um, I can't, I..." She stopped talking as his mouth found her other nipple.

He lapped at it with his tongue. "You can't what?"

"I... I can't be late." Her eyes fluttered as he tweaked a nipple with his fingers.

He pulled the sheet away from her body, and maneuvered between her legs.

"What are you doing?" she asked weakly, very little resistance in her voice.

Nudging her legs a bit farther apart, he had perfect access to the sweet spot between her legs.

"Blake..."

He cut her off with his mouth as he suckled her nub. She fell back on her palms with a moan escaping her lips as she did. Hair dangling down her back, nipples pointed in the air, she was a delicious sight.

"This won't take long," he said with a smile before running his tongue in a circle around her nub.

She sighed. "Take your time."

Chapter Seven

Laura stood in the kitchen, sipping her coffee and feeling on top of the world. Any second now, Blake would come walking out of her bedroom, freshly showered, and now a part of her life. Not that he wasn't before. Now, it was a new, much improved way of being in her life.

She poured another cup of coffee, laughing at her creative dressing. Turning two different outfits into today's attire had been a difficult task, but Blake had made it well worth her while. Setting her cup on the counter, she was reaching for the sugar when the front door opened. Turning towards the sound, Laura wondered absently if Blake had snuck past her. Her brows dipped. But why would he want to?

"Hey, Sis. What's cooking?"

It was Matt looking rumpled, athletic, and younger than his age in a baseball cap, jeans, and a Forty-Niner's T-shirt. Laying her spoon on the counter, she tried to calm the racing of her heart, which had kicked into marathon speed.

Once again, Matt proved he had the worst timing of anyone she had ever known. Always had, always would. Mind racing with possibilities, she discarded option after option. She hadn't talked with Blake about how to deal with Matt yet. How would he react to his presence? This wasn't how she wanted her brother to find out about her and Blake.

Taking a deep, calming breath, she braced her hands on the counter behind her for stability. With a forced, not very impressive smile plastered on her face, she tried to sound nonchalant.

"What are you doing here?"

Delivering the words through gritted teeth didn't help her cause much. Realizing her error in judgment, she gave up on the fake smile. Matt wouldn't be fooled after the pained delivery of her question. He knew her too well.

He gave her a mock wounded look. "Well, now, from that tone I'd have to think you aren't glad to see me. How could that be?" He walked straight to her cabinet, pulled out a coffee mug, and reached for the pot.

"I'm truly wounded at the less than tender reception," he jibed. "After all, you did invite me." He poured his coffee, and set the pot back on the burner. "I'm fixing the broken fence out back, remember?"

She did remember. Now that he reminded her, of course. He was fixing it so she could get a dog to protect her from things that went bump in the night. "Yeah. Well, I, uh, changed my mind."

She took the spoon from his hand. Had noticed Blake's truck? He'd had to have. Yet, he didn't ask about Blake. Why? "I need to go to work. You better run along."

He grabbed the spoon from her hand with a quick, irritated motion. "Give me that."

"I was using it." Which she had been. Right when he came in the door. The one he needed to walk right back out of. Besides, she needed that damn extra cup of caffeine with a huge spoonful of sugar more than ever right about now. Or she might just kill someone, namely him. If he only knew this, surely he would give her the spoon, and leave quietly. Pondering the possibilities of telling him this directly, she grabbed for the

spoon again. Responding like the sibling she was, she simply couldn't resist the urge to take it from him.

He pulled it out of her reach, and shifted his weight to look at her more fully. He gave her a disbelieving look. "What is your deal?"

"I want my spoon," she said through tight lips, pausing a moment to bite back anger before continuing, "to dip my sugar in my cup of coffee that is now getting cold." She looked at the cup, and then at him. "Go home, Matt. I changed my mind about the fence."

As soon as she finished speaking she knew she had been bad. Indeed, she had been way bitchy. Pressing two fingers to the bridge of her nose, she sighed heavily and then looked at him.

Tone much softer now, she said, "I'm sorry. It's a bad morning. I appreciate the thought, but..."

He cut her off with a roar of a laugh. A knowing, brotherly tease of a smile appeared on his face. "You have company, don't you, little sis?"

Oh, no. All hopes of negotiation or a smooth cover-up were gone. Begging was her natural response when her brother turned to a hard-ass tease. "Matt, please go home."

"Do I smell coffee?" It was Blake.

Both Matt and Laura froze, eyes locked. The smile slipped off Matt's face as he slowly turned. "Blake?"

Laura watched Blake turn pale in the count of two.

"Matt," Blake said in a flat tone, and gave a friendly nod of his head.

His short reply told Laura his mind was racing. To his credit it didn't show.

Blake fixed Laura in a steady gaze, no emotion evident.

Okay. What was happening here? She waved him forward. "No, of course not."

Matt leaned against the counter, watchful, and no longer showing any signs of a good mood. "What brings you here so early, Blake?"

Heart pounding at a million miles an hour, Laura opened her mouth and then quickly shut it again. Blake was reaching for the coffee pot, directing his attention towards Matt. "You do, actually, Matt."

"Me?" Matt asked with surprise in his tone. "What are you talking about?"

"Laura got spooked last night, and asked if I would come check all of her locks this morning." Blake laughed. "I guess all those ghost stories of yours got to her."

Laura almost had to pick her jaw up off the floor. "Blake?"

Try as she might, she couldn't keep the edge from her tone. He had pissed her off, and she knew it wasn't just in her voice. It was written all over her face.

Matt laughed. "Oh, no, Blake." He sat his cup down as if he thought he might spill it. "You weren't supposed to tell me she was scared."

"Blake." Again she said his name, hoping he would come to his senses and claim their relationship. This might not be the way they would have planned telling ... wait. They had never talked. Maybe she had just assumed there would be more to their relationship.

"I thought those stories didn't scare you," Matt teased, but Laura ignored him. Right now, all that mattered was Blake's intentions.

Matt however, seemed determined to put a nail in their relationship coffin. "Guess you called your other brother here to save face with me, huh?"

Laura all but physically flinched. Matt couldn't have said anything worse. Still, if

Blake was committed to turning the corner with their relationship and making it honest, he'd fess up now. Or he would at least put the ball in her proverbial court. Laura fixed Blake with a steady gaze, regarding him hopefully. He looked at her with a stare, his look inscrutable. And then nothing. Absolutely nothing. A sharp pain pierced her heart as if a dagger had been jabbed inside it. Averting her gaze, she crossed her arms protectively in front of her body, unable to fight her urge to withdraw.

"I have to go to work," she said under her breath, turning towards the door. In the back of her mind, she was certain Blake would come to his senses and follow her or even call her name.

He did neither.

Fighting emotional upheaval, Laura grabbed her purse from the hall table where she had put it earlier. She wanted out of this house, and away from Blake. In all her adult years, she had never felt quite so used. Blake was the last person she would have ever expected to make her feel such horrid things. He was also the only one she had ever given herself to so completely that pain of this sort could exist. Blake, her friend, now her one-time lover, had pushed all the right hurt buttons.

She opened her car door, and slid into the seat, pulling the door shut with finality. Never again. At least she had closure. She was done with her Blake fantasies.

Chapter Eight

Sitting in his truck outside of Martin's department store, Blake tried to decide the best way to reason with Laura. If this morning's episode had taught him anything, it was how poorly he could handle a situation when unprepared. Years of going into covert, fast-paced, problematic situations had not prepared him for the circumstances he had now created.

Falling for his best friend's little sister was like a death sentence. He couldn't have her without losing his best friend who happened to be more like a brother. On the other hand, Laura was the only woman he had ever loved. Walking away from her was a hard, heart-wrenching task.

He was damned if he did, and damned if he didn't.

Letting out a long breath, he pondered the impact all of this might have on Laura. As the possibilities materialized in his mind, his thoughts turned grim. Scrubbing a hand through his hair, he battled an internal war.

What if his relationship with Laura caused her and Matt to be at odds?

What had he been thinking, falling into bed with Laura? He made a disgusted sound. In retrospect, he could see he hadn't been thinking. At least not with the right head.

He reached for the door handle. All his life he had wished for a sibling, feeling envious of the relationship Laura and Matt shared. Being a part of that meant the world to him. The way he had potentially damaged their relationship was nothing shy of selfish. In fact, he found the word mild in describing his actions. Laura would never forgive herself or him once she was deprived of that relationship.

Slamming the door with more force than was necessary he steeled himself for the inevitable pain he was about to feel. Walking away from Laura was going to kill him.

* * * *

The view outside Laura's window was spectacular. A truly amazing picture image of the Golden Gate Bridge. Sitting behind her desk, she was thankful her morning meeting had been canceled. Some time to get her head on straight was a much-needed reprieve.

Her eyes lingered out the window, taking in the view. She tried to remember all the excitement she had felt just days before when she had first looked out this very window. Reaching deep, she simply couldn't muster the same feeling.

Never coming close to having Blake would have been better than having tasted what he offered and then having it snatched away. The choice of words, even though silently spoken, made her heat with awareness. Thinking of their bodies entwined, naked, sweaty, passion-driven...

The buzz of the intercom pulled her from her reverie. "Jennifer Evans is on line two."

Laura eyed the phone. Genuinely, she liked Jennifer, but she knew what she wanted. To plot against Blake. Truthfully, she just wasn't up to the whole jealousy game. After what Blake had done that morning, it seemed a worthless cause. He wasn't going to choose her over Matt.

Her face showed her guilt as her forehead crinkled. She loved Matt, and was glad he and Blake were friends. Still, why did their relationship have to impede the growth of her and Blake's feelings for one another?

"Laura? You want the call?"

She shook her head slightly. "Yes, sorry, put her through."

A click on the line later, "Jennifer?"

"Hi, Laura. How's your new job going?"

The crazy thing was, she loved her job, but it had lost some of its excitement. It would be so much nicer with Blake by her side. "It's good," she replied forcing her voice to sound bubbly.

A moment of quiet. "What's wrong?"

"Wrong?" Laura asked, trying to sound baffled. Actually, she was. How had Jennifer guessed so easily something was bothering her?

"You seem strained. Is it something to do with Blake?"

Laura let out a breath, and slumped over in her chair resting an elbow on the desk. Suddenly, she was relieved Jennifer was so perceptive. She really needed to talk. "Yeah," she admitted. "It's Blake."

Laura spent the next ten minutes telling Jennifer about the night before. "So there you have it," she said, feeling as if she had told some guilty secret never meant to be spoken.

"Wow. What a story. I can't believe he is letting the Matt thing control him. Maybe he's just scared."

Scared? Blake? "Huh?"

"Yeah, honey, scared. Maybe he's afraid he won't live up to your expectations, and then he will lose you and Matt. You guys are like family to him. You need to give the boy an eye-opening experience. Make sure he knows he's about to lose you. He needs a jolt to make him see the light. I promise you, if he sees someone else pining for you, he will want to claim you. I've seen how he looks at you."

"No," Laura said rejecting everything Jennifer had said. "I don't like how he has handled this. Clearly, he doesn't think I'm worth risking his relationship with Matt. The crazy thing is, Matt would never hold what happened between me and Blake against him. He's not like that." She let out a heavy breath. "The bottom line is," she hesitated because saying the words hurt, "we're over."

Jennifer made a frustrated sound. "Are you going to give up so easily? Look at all the years you've invested in him. You love him, don't you?"

The question took her off guard. Was she so transparent that this woman could read her inside out? "I..."

"Love him. Just like I loved Bobby for too many years to count. His absence did nothing to hinder my feelings. Blake has valid reason for his concerns. Think of it this way, he doesn't want to lose you completely."

Jennifer was perceptive but still... "He shouldn't have slept..." She cut off the word appalled at what she was about to say.

Ignoring the incomplete sentence, Jennifer seemed to understand. "The children's hospital charity event I told you about is the perfect chance to get Blake's head on straight. He already promised me he'd come, since I am coordinating the whole thing. If you're one of the bachelorettes being auctioned off, I bet he won't want to see someone

else win you. He needs to know if he doesn't act, someone else will.”

“I don't know. I am...”

“Oh, the doorbell is ringing,” Jennifer inserted urgently. Laura almost thought it was a ploy to stop her arguments. “Listen, one of the women in the show backed out. I really need you. Think about it. I'll call you back after while.”

“I guess...” Jennifer spurted out a quick goodbye and the line went dead.

She drifted into thought again, thinking about Jennifer's advice. Maybe she couldn't even make Blake jealous. If she did as Jennifer said, and failed, it would be a painful endeavor.

A knock on her door made her jump. Hand on her chest, breathing elevated, she forced herself to let out a calming breath before calling to her closed door. “Come in.”

Shelly, Laura's assistant, opened the door and poked her head inside the office. “You sure are quiet in here this morning.”

Laura smiled, albeit stiffly. Shelly was cute as a button and sweet as people were made. The, twenty-something woman wore a short bob of blond hair, and had a liking for flared skirts, and ruffled shirts. The combo fit her bubbly personality to perfection.

Shelly was quickly becoming a friend, and for that Laura was grateful. “Thinking through the advertisement for the fashion show next month.” She picked up a pen and nervously tapped it on the desk. “I'm new. I want it to go well.”

Shelly stepped through the entrance and shut the door, leaning her back against the wood. “I'm not buying that, missy. No,” she said, with a hint of a knowing smile on her lips. “I'm betting it has something to do with the very handsome, highly intense looking,” she held up a finger, “and if I do say so myself, sexy, man in the lobby.” She lifted her brows, and tilted her chin to fix Laura in a stare. “The one asking for you.”

Laura frowned. “My brother Matt?”

“Nope. This is not your brother.”

How would she know?

As if she heard the silent question, Shelly pushed off the door, and walked to a picture on the wall. Pointing, at a particular photo, she said, “That's Matt.” She looked over her shoulder at Laura. “The guy in the lobby isn't.”

The pitter-patter of anticipation began in Laura's chest. It couldn't be, could it? “Is it one of the models for the Valentine's show?”

Shelly turned towards her, arms crossed in front of her chest, eyes filled with heavy regard. “This is a full blown man, not some teen model.”

Laura's mouth went dry. A nervous laugh escaped her lips. “Send in Mr. Sexy. Maybe it will brighten my day.”

Shelly held her in a steady gaze for a long moment. “I think he might just do that.” With that said, she turned on her heels, and headed towards the door.

Laura watched her exit. The minute she was gone, she stood, not knowing what else to do with the sudden surge of nervous energy that was dancing through her body like some sort of malfunction. Every inch of her body pulsed with anxiety.

A knock sounded on the door.

In, out. Breathe. You're mad at Blake. If this is Blake, why are you so nervous? You're pissed, plain and simple. Right. “Come in.”

The minute he walked into the doorway, her heart sank to her stomach. A mixture of too many emotions to count took over. It was impossible to pin down just one. Before she

even began the process, he consumed her with his mere presence. Something about Blake always rocked the female part of her all the way to her core. Tightening her fingers around the edge of her desk, she gave him a direct look and though she didn't mean to, she went on the attack. "You can't just drop in when I'm at work."

He shut the door with a definitive thud that said he had no intention of leaving. "We never had that talk I wanted to have."

Now that got her riled. "No, we didn't." she flattened her palms on the desk in front of her, and leaned forward, anger darting at him from her eyes. "You seemed to have your hands too full to talk."

His eyes flashed with surprise at her brazen remark, but she didn't care. "I didn't mean for that to happen."

She shrugged, mocking him with her eyes and words. "But a guy can't turn down what's offered, right?"

Blake was moving towards her now, his steps rapid, his stance angry. When he got to the opposite side of the desk, she pointed at him. "Stay right there."

His hands clenched the edge of the desk much like hers had moments before. "Are you going to keep throwing out nasty remarks or can we talk reasonably?"

Biting back more angry words, she sucked in a breath. When she let it out, she was no calmer. "You were never willing to..." She stopped herself from finishing.

"Willing to what?"

She waved off his words. He was never willing to tell her brother they were a couple because the reality was, they weren't. Never had been. Never would be. She had jumped to conclusion like some silly schoolgirl. Suddenly, the wind was knocked out of her sails. She hurt deep inside, but didn't want to show her pain. Looking towards the floor, she forced her burning eyes to stay dry. "Please leave."

"Laura."

She almost jumped out of her skin when she realized he was now standing behind her. "Don't do that." Her hand was on her chest as if her heart needed the comfort. And maybe it did. Blake was causing her way too much trauma in a variety of ways.

In a low, even tone he said, "We need to talk."

Turning, she faced him, her back to the desk. Dismayed she found him standing way too close for comfort. No wonder his spicy male scent was penetrating her senses. "I want you to leave."

"Not until we talk."

An awkward silence fell between them as their eyes locked and held. Tension, sexual and emotional, danced between them. One heated, and one chilled. It was the opposing impacts that seemed to make them both remain silent. Laura didn't want to talk. She just wanted him to go away.

Finally, Blake spoke. "I know I haven't handled this very well, Laura."

She made a disgusted sound. "At least we agree on something." Then, a need to lash out, made her add, "No, make that two things. We both know sleeping together was a mistake." And though she meant it as a jab, it was also the honest-to-God truth.

Something flashed in those dark eyes of his, but he quickly slid back behind that damnable mask of his. "I care about you, Laura. That's why we can't be more than friends."

She laughed, but it was humorless, even mocking. "Whatever, Blake," she spat

nastily. “Thanks for caring. So glad you aren't an enemy.” She let out another laugh, and this time it sounded almost bitter. “No telling what you might do to me.”

He touched her shoulder then, and she recoiled, backing into the desk. The last thing she needed was to fall into a stupor of lust over his touch.

“Come on, Baby. You know me better than that. I would never hurt you.”

“Baby?” she exclaimed suddenly pissed again. She had gone from lustful, pained, pissed, and back through the range too many times to count. She was like the Energizer bunny. She apparently just kept going. Now it was time for him to get going. “Baby? What right do you have to call me that?”

His eyes went wide at her outrage “Laura...”

“No!” She pointed at him. “Stop.” She delivered the word as an order, biting, and delivered through clenched teeth. “Sleeping with me one time does not give you the right to call me Baby.” And now she needed out of the tiny little space she was in. Pushing past him, she had every intention of getting to the opposite side of the room.

Blake clearly had other ideas. He reached for her, securing her waist with his hands in a far too intimate way. The next thing she knew, her backside was on the desk, his legs straddling hers so that they were pinned between his. Her skirt was halfway up her thighs.

His gaze, however, were fixed on her face. “We have to talk, even if I have to physically hold you here to make it happen.”

“You already are.” Her eyes threw metaphorical daggers at him, but her body was singing to a whole different tune. His hard thighs pressed against hers, and his hands—the same ones that had touched her breasts, and pretty much her entire body—were resting on her very exposed knees.

She swallowed, her mouth suddenly feeling incredibly dry. “I think it’s best you let go of me.”

His eyes dropped to her legs. The heat of his gaze sent a warming sensation up her thighs and straight to her core. Her hands went to her skirt, and she yanked it down.

His eyes lifted and settled on her lips, and she knew he was thinking about kissing her. And Lord help her, she wanted him to. That man-woman connection they shared had kicked into gear threatening to crumble what was left of her good sense. “Blake.” It was a breathless plea.

For what, was the question...

Chapter Nine

His name sounded like a seductive invitation whispered by the woman he wanted, but couldn't have. Blake watched her lush, red lips tremble. He wanted to feel them against his own. They were a temptation as bitter as they were sweet. Because he knew he shouldn't kiss her. Because he knew he had to. He felt as if he might cease to exist if he didn't taste her.

Just one more time.

His hands rested on her knees. They burned to move up her thighs, and even more so, to feel those curvaceous legs wrapped around his waist. But that wasn't going to happen. It couldn't. But a kiss ... what harm could it do?

Just one.

Slowly, he lowered his head, feeling her need as he did his own. She wanted this, too. Knowing she reciprocated his feelings only heightened his desire, and made him burn like a red-hot flame—one he would have to contain, because a kiss was all he could take. Yet he wanted so much more. His body was hard with the fury of his denied passion.

She was all he had ever wanted, and everything he couldn't have. He lowered his head, giving her time to stop him, but knowing she wouldn't. The first touch of their lips sent a potent wave of desire straight to his groin.

Their lips pressed together and held. His hands slid up her thighs. Gallantly he fought the urge to linger. It would have been so easy to slide his fingers under her skirt, and sample her wetness. And she was wet. He knew it. Their mutual need radiated around them like a nuclear reaction. His palms skimmed her hips before he allowed them to settle on her tiny waist.

She made a sexy little sound that he felt in his groin. His cock pressed so damned fiercely against his zipper he thought the metal might break. Damn, but he wanted inside her, to feel her body squeeze him with urgency. He couldn't have her. All he had left was these few shared minutes. Not wanting the spell they were under to end, he rested his forehead against hers, resisting the urge to kiss her fully. The temptation to slide his tongue past her lips and taste her unique flavor was boiling inside of him.

Yet, his need to make every second with her last overflowed and conquered his urges. They breathed together, in and out, the sound filling the room as if it was magnified. Her presence wrapped around him like a compelling force, dominating his mind, making him forget reason.

Blake reached up and ran his thumb over her bottom lip. He nibbled at the same places his thumb had touched, making her moan and press her lips to his. Willpower gone, he claimed her mouth, tongue thrusting past her teeth, his hand sliding into her hair. Hungrily taking, he didn't hold back. His tongue slid along hers, aggressive in its exploration. Her arms wrapped around his back, moving along his spine as she pressed her breasts against his chest. His free hand slid up and around her knee, to her inner thigh. Warmth welcomed him, as did the soft moan that she made against his lips. He burned for her.

Unbidden, thoughts of taking her right there on her desk threatened to make him act.

The images in his head would make a nice reality. He'd just slide her skirt up, slip her panties to the side, and...

Suddenly, her phone buzzed to life.

It was Shelly. "Laura?"

Blake and Laura froze, neither saying a word. As if Shelly would know what they were doing through the phone.

"Laura?"

She leaned back slightly, and delicately cleared her throat. "Yes?"

"Your brother Matt really is here this time."

"Oh, shit," Blake said as his stomach started to churn in a most uncharacteristic way.

"Oh," Shelly said in a whisper. "Sounds like I better stall. Consider it done."

The line went dead.

Blake looked from the phone to Laura to find her glaring at him. "Nothing has changed, has it? You have no intention of telling Matt about us." She laughed bitterly.

"Correction. There is no us."

Damn, the hurt in her tone made his heart squeeze painfully. He had to make her understand. "Laura..."

"No, Blake." She pressed a hand on his chest clearly intending to hold him at bay. His fingers wrapped her wrists, gently as to not hurt her, but still firmly. They needed to resolve this once and for all.

"Hear me out," he said, pinning her with a stare and hating the dismay he saw in her eyes.

Her chin tilted up defiantly. "Save it, Blake." There was a slight tremble to her voice. Despite her clear effort to appear unscathed by his actions, she wasn't succeeding. "I get the drift. You aren't interested in risking the wrath of my brother just to be with me."

Yes. No. "No," he said firmly, needing to convince both her and himself. "I'm worried about how it will impact you, Laura."

Her eyes went wide. "Me?" She made a frustrated sound. "Don't tell me you're going to try and make this about me?" She tugged at her arms. "Let me go."

"You always have been a hothead, woman." He held her, not about to let go. "Will you be still, and just listen?"

She stared up at him, freezing him like an ice storm with those green cat eyes. "Let. Me. Go."

"What happens if Matt doesn't accept us? I won't come between you two," he said, meaning it. "I wish things were different."

Her eyes narrowed. "Do you?" she hissed, clearly angrier than hell.

"Yes," he said hoarsely. But they weren't.

His lips set in a grim line. Life for him hadn't included much family. Laura's family had, for the most part, been his. He had lost his mother as a young child, and his father had been a guy's guy with a dislike for open affection.

After all the years Matt and Laura had been there for him, he couldn't destroy what they shared.

"You shouldn't have slept with me if you were going to chicken out after." She paused a mere split second. "Or did you think since we're adults now, we could both handle a romp in the sack, and then simply forget it ever happened?"

Blake saw through her angry words. He wanted to reassure her, to touch soft ivory

skin, and comfort her. Instead, he held her wrists as she tugged.

"It's not like that, Laura. Baby..." The intercom buzzed making his brows dip with irritation. Damn it.

"Um, Laura," Shelly said. "Your brother is getting impatient."

Laura looked at Blake, a spiteful glint in her eyes. "Send him in."

* * * *

Laura had gotten the expected results. As covertly as possible, she wiped her lips to ensure she wasn't smeared with lipstick. When she told Shelly to send Matt in, Blake was off her in two seconds flat.

Maybe Jennifer was right, Blake needed a rude awakening. And she was going to give it to him.

Once he was on the other side of the desk, he gave her a desperate look. "What are you going to say to him?"

A feral smile turned up the corners of her lips. Wouldn't he like to know?

"Guess you'll have to wait and see."

Before he could respond, Matt pushed open her office door. He wore his normal, carefree smile. "Hey, Sis, thought I'd drop by and see if you could do lun..."

His words died on his lips when he saw Blake. He looked at Blake with confusion in his eyes. "Okay, man, this is too weird. You were at my sister's house this morning, and now you're here. Something I should know?"

Laura was watching Matt closely, inspecting his reactions. Whatever Matt inferred, he didn't seem upset about it.

Not giving Blake time to respond, Laura answered for him. "Seems Jennifer has called out reinforcements. She sent Blake over here to talk me into doing the charity auction she's coordinating."

Blake's eyes rested on her, beckoning her to look at him. But she didn't.

Matt eyed Laura, and then looked at Blake for an answer. "Doing, as in what?"

Laura answered again directing her response at Matt. She knew how he was going to respond. He might trust Blake, but other men were another story. Matt was a highly protective brother. "Would you believe she wants me to be auctioned off to the highest bidder?" Oh, yeah, she had both men's attention now. Two sets of male eyes were now fixed on her. "I was just asking Blake how she bribed him into talking to me."

Matt turned to Blake, his spine straight and stiff. "You're a part of this?" Accusation laced his tone.

To Blake's credit, he didn't so much as blink. "Actually," he said, looking at Matt, and then back at Laura. "I was here to tell her to help some other way. Selling herself off to some strange man simply isn't safe."

"Exactly," Matt said. "Help some other way. Don't sell yourself like some kind of..."

Laura cut him off in a biting tone. "Kind of what?"

Matt ran a frustrated hand through his hair, and looked at Blake. "Make her understand, man, will you?"

Blake stared at Laura, his eyes darkened with a glint of something indiscernible. Something about the way he looked at her always got to Laura. Feeling the flip-flop of her stomach, she pressed her palm to her belly.

"I'm a big girl now, Matt," Laura said in an irritated voice, but her eyes were locked

with Blake's. She couldn't seem to look away.

"What if the guy who buys an evening with you gets the wrong idea?" Blake asked. "Don't they get sunset to sunrise with you?"

Laura rolled her eyes, to hide the satisfaction in them. He most definitely didn't like the idea of the auction. "It's a charity event, for God's sake, Blake. Get real. These are respectable businessmen."

Matt let out a bark of laughter. "I hear Jack the Ripper was respectable, too. He sure wasn't safe."

Laura squeezed her eyes shut tightly and muttered under her breath. When she opened them again, she moved her hands to the arms of her chair. "I make my own decisions, boys. And I've done quite well without you two looking over me." A secret smile played on her lips. Blake didn't want her to do this. She waved her hands at them. "Shoo, flies. I have work to do."

"I still want to take you to lunch," Matt objected.

"Can't," Laura said, looking at her watch. "It's not lunch time for me. I didn't get to work until eleven. Besides, you'll just ride me about this some more. I can't take it."

"Don't do the auction," Blake said quietly. Laura looked at him, drawn by something she heard in his voice.

"Too late. I already promised. It's two days away, and someone important dropped out. Jennifer needs me. Besides, it's a good cause."

Matt chimed in, eager to join forces with Blake. "There are other ways to help."

Laura smiled, placing her elbows on her desk, and resting her chin on her palms. "I appreciate the concern, you two, but I assure you I can take care of myself."

Laura's intercom buzzed. Thank God for the reprieve. She reached for her phone, and lifted it to her ear. She didn't bother with hello. It was Shelly, of course. "Hold on a sec, okay?"

Covering the mouthpiece with her hand, she looked at Blake and Matt. "I have to work."

Matt looked irritated, but turned to leave. Blake followed, not looking at her at all. She wasn't about to let him off that easy. "Oh, Blake, will you tell Jennifer I'll call her after my meeting?"

He turned and looked at her, eyes narrowed, as if he was assessing her motives. "Yes, I'll tell her."

Chapter Ten

With a dangerously intense look in his eyes, Blake shoved open the door of the Jump Zone lobby. He had made himself promise not to talk about Laura with Jennifer. And damn it, he meant to keep that promise.

Jennifer, unexpectedly, was standing behind the counter. She wrote for the local newspaper, and rarely came by during the early part of the day. "What's wrong with you?"

He stopped at the counter, and reached for the day's student line up. Focusing on the paper, he didn't look at her. "I thought you had a real job to go to?"

Jennifer's made a face. "Nice to see you too, Blake. Underwear on backwards or something?"

Blake set down the clipboard with a harder thud than necessary. "Something, that's for sure." Like her and her damned auction. Biting back his thoughts, he turned and started towards his office.

"Blake?"

He stopped walking but didn't turn around. "Yes?"

"If you need to talk, I'm always around."

And he knew she was. Jennifer was truly a sweetheart. She didn't mean to screw up his life. But she had, and that made her the last person he would be discussing his problems with. Raising a hand, he simply said, "Thanks," and reached for his doorknob. As soon as he was in his office, he walked to the window, and leaned both palms on the glass. "Damn it," he mumbled under his breath.

How in the hell had things gotten so out of control?

He fully intended to walk away from Laura, but the auction had brought to the surface unexpected feelings. His gut tightened just thinking about another man touching her, tasting her.

He wanted to be the man who shared not only her body, but her life. He laughed bitterly. Fate had dealt him an impossible hand. There was no option. He had to stay away from her, and let her lead her life. Watching her do it was going to hurt. But he loved her enough not to risk screwing up her family life.

Love. The word danced in his head.

Yes, he did love her, with all his heart and soul. Probably always had.

And always would.

* * * *

Tucking her feet under her backside, Laura took a sip of her raspberry hot chocolate. It warmed her insides, but not her heart and body. The auction was tomorrow night, and Blake hadn't so much as called.

Maybe this was a bad idea.

She didn't really want to know he didn't care enough to be impacted by Jennifer's little plan. She let out a heavy breath, feeling the tension slip out for a mere instant, before returning. A knock on the door, made her still. Slowly, hope building inside, she

set her cup on the coffee table and uncurled her legs.

Could it be... That hope was blown as the door opened before she could move.

Matt.

"You really should keep the door locked." He sat down next to her, turned his baseball cap backwards, and picked up her cup. Taking a big sniff, he said, "Hmmm." He slanted her a glance. "I see you still drink this stuff." He took a sip. "God, I see why. Good stuff."

"My doors were locked. We both know you used your key." Her lips pursed.

On another occasion she would have slugged him one for drinking out of her cup, and told him to get his own. Tonight, his presence instead of Blake's made her heart ache so badly, she didn't have it in her to argue. She sank back against the cushion, tucked her feet beneath her, and concentrated on not crying.

Matt set down the cup. "You aren't going to yell about me drinking your chocolate?"

Laura eyed him momentarily, and then looked away. "Nope." She didn't look at him. Couldn't. She was still grasping for tear control. She felt the shifting of the couch, and cast him a covert glance.

Casually, he dropped his bomb. "This is about you and Blake, isn't it?"

Instantly, her eyes turned towards him. "What about me and Blake?"

Matt crossed his arms in front of his body, his expression expectant. "You tell me."

She wasn't admitting anything. "I don't want to tell you." She'd turn the tables. "You tell me."

His brow inched upward. "Don't know how much I know, right?"

She made a disgusted sound, and turned towards him, back hitting the arm of the couch. "Just say what's on your mind."

His eyes fixed on hers. "Are you seeing Blake?"

Honestly, she answered. "No."

"But you want to." It wasn't a question.

"No."

His face showed his disbelief. They had always been honest with each other.

"It's the truth," she exclaimed. "At least, now it is."

"Ah," he said. "Now we are getting somewhere."

"No, we most certainly are not. I am through with this subject." Laura turned and started to get up.

Matt reached for her arm. "I know you two have always had a thing for each other."

Laura stilled, shocked by his words. Slowly she sank back into the cushion. "You do?"

He laughed. "Neither of you hide it well. You didn't in the past, and you most certainly don't now."

Stunned, she asked, "And how do you feel about it?"

"I've just been wondering when you two would cave and become a couple. When I showed up at your place and he was here I thought, damn, finally." Matt frowned.

"Obviously you've hit a snag. What happened?"

Laura leaned back against the couch cushion and pulled her knees to her chest, hugging them. A painful twist in her stomach made it hard to talk.

"Laura?"

"Yeah," she said, attempting a small smile and failing. "He thinks you won't want us

to be together.”

“I can see where he might be concerned. I'm cool, though. Want me to talk to him?”

“No,” she said, a muscle flexing in her jaw. “I don't want you to talk to him. I might have before, but not now. I need to know...” She didn't finish. Couldn't.

“Know what?”

She turned to face him. This was her brother who she had always told everything too. Unless Blake was involved. She needed to explain. “This is the thing,” she said. “I decided to do this auction thing to make him see he could lose me if he didn't act.”

He shook his head. “Playing games is not nice, Sis.”

“I had to do something,” she argued, her voice a bit louder. “It was one excuse after another. He said, you and I might fight over him. He's afraid it would ruin our relationship,” she motioned between herself and Matt indicating the two of them, “and we might never be the same together if you weren't cool with me and him. Then I would blame Blake and...”

“I get the picture,” he said interrupting her, “but games never pay off.”

She bit her bottom lip, knowing he was right. “I am feeling the pain of my actions.”

“Meaning you haven't gotten the response you hoped for?”

She nodded. “He doesn't seem to care that some other man is going to buy me.” She eyed Matt, and looked away as a burning started in the back of her eyes.

“That's not true,” he said his voice a bit softer, no longer scolding. “He came to your office, and it was easy to see he didn't want you to do the auction.”

“But I haven't heard from him since.” She looked up and a tear rolled down her cheek. Angrily, she swiped at it. “Damn it. I didn't want to cry.”

Matt sat down beside her, wrapping his arm around her shoulder and pulling her close. “Don't cry. I know he cares. I'll talk to him.”

Forcefully she responded, her hand gripping his shirt. “No! Promise me you won't talk to him. Promise, Matt. I need to know he wants me enough to fight for me. If he doesn't I don't want him.”

“Laura...”

She cut him off, her hand filling with a bigger wad of his shirt. “No, damn it. No.”

He looked down at her hand, and then back up at her. “Okay, but I'm not happy about it. I think I should talk to him.”

Matt was good for his word. Slowly, her grip on his shirt eased. “I don't want you to talk to him.”

Chapter Eleven

The Madison Hotel was elite, as was the ballroom where the charity ball and auction was taking place. Laura looked around the room, trying to focus on the beauty surrounding her rather than what might happen with Blake. Or not happen. Huge glass chandeliers hung from the ceilings, making light flicker against the many mirrors that adorned the walls. Flowers, all white, sat in vases in the center of table after table. She looked towards the front of the room, where people danced in front of a stage.

She didn't even want to think about standing on that stage, waiting anxiously to see how Blake would respond to her auction. Needing to get her mind off what was to come, she forced herself to mingle. Standing amongst the crowd, forcing a smile, Laura exchanged useless drivel about weather, politics, kids, and about everything else under the sun. With every word she heard or spoke, she was acutely aware of Blake standing across the room. He talked with several friends, laughing on occasion, and seeming unaffected by her upcoming auction to another man.

Yet she kept feeling as if his eyes touched her, warming her as they called for her attention. Every time she looked towards him, he simply wasn't paying her any attention. After an hour of thinking he was watching when he wasn't, she decided it was a mind trick created by her breaking heart.

The emerald-green dress she wore showcased her best assets. It had a V-neck that plunged suggestively. The fitted bra top hugged her well-rounded, very full breasts, as did the silky strip of cloth that wrapped her tiny waist. A semi-sheer, knee-length skirt teased viewers as it danced around her shapely legs with every step she took. She should have felt on top of the world. Instead, Laura reached for a glass of champagne, feeling butterflies dance an evil rhythm in her stomach.

She had danced many a dance out of obligation. All of the bachelorettes danced with men before the auction so they could meet the women before bidding. The auction was only fifteen minutes away, and she was through meeting her obligations. She needed a little space. Laura took a sip of the bubbly beverage and started to walk. Suddenly, Nathan Miers, an executive from some big clothing company, appeared. He had been at her heels all night.

"Laura," he said with flirtation in his voice, and obvious approval in his eyes. "One last dance before the auction. What do you say?"

Laura cringed inwardly. She didn't want to dance with him. She knew most people would call her crazy. He personified tall, dark, and handsome ... and he was rich. But he was the wrong man for her. The right man had zapped all of her energy.

She simply didn't feel like playing the male-female cat and mouse game. She was all played out, and the auction hadn't even started.

"Actually, she owes me a dance." The voice, Blake's, came from behind.

As Nathan's eyes went above her head, Laura turned to bring Blake into focus. The sight of him in his tuxedo literally left her breathless. Despite having seen him from a distance, the up-close and personal view was a jolt to her senses. If Nathan personified tall, dark, and handsome, Blake was the lighter side of masculine with an extra dose of sexy.

Forcing herself to breathe, Laura reminded herself of the cold shoulder he had given her. "My dances are reserved for those who are bidding in the auction."

His eyes were dangerously alert, and as usual, far too compelling. When she looked into his eyes, she always fell into a tunnel of emotion. She fought the feeling, and was pleased when her voice didn't quiver. In fact, she managed to sound a bit challenging. "Will you be bidding, Blake?"

He ignored her question, and looked at Nathan. "My dance, man."

Something in his tone rang with warning, though Laura couldn't be certain exactly why. It wasn't as if he raised his voice, or said something cutting. He simply threatened, effortlessly.

A muscle in Nathan's jaw jumped, but to his credit he kept a cool exterior. After a moment, he smiled, though it didn't quite reach his eyes. "No problem. I already know who I'm bidding on." He looked Laura in the eyes, and then gave her a quick nod. "We will most definitely be seeing each other soon."

Graciously, he turned without another word, leaving Laura with Blake. She turned to face him. "What was that all about?"

He reached out and took her hand. "Let's dance."

She wanted to say yes. She wanted to say no. Damn it. She wanted to say yes. It didn't matter either way, really. He started walking, sliding her hand under his elbow so they were close. Too close. Not close enough.

Hope fluttered in her heart. Was he going to say he wanted her enough to take a few risks? His body pressed against hers, lightly, but enough to invite images of their night together. Her body responded, surging with the heat of awareness, attraction, and desire.

As they stepped onto the dance floor, he pulled her into his arms. Her hands settled on his biceps, her eyes on his chest. She knew if she looked at him, her feelings would be transparent. The whole idea was to play hard to get. To show him what he was missing. The sway of their bodies seemed to unite in the same rhythm as if they called one another. She felt as if they did. She felt him tighten his grip around her waist, drawing her ever so slightly against his body. No will to resist, she melted into him.

"Laura." The word was spoken near her ear, his warm breath tickling her ear, and sending goose bumps along her skin.

Without thinking, she looked up. His face was near, his lips full and seductive.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"For what?" she asked, needing to hear the answer in an urgent way, but managing to keep her reply monotone.

He stared down at her, potent, dark eyes probing her expression. "I never meant things to turn out this way."

What did that mean? She tried for nonchalant. It came out hurt. "It's one of those things." Remotely, she was aware they stood in the center of the crowd, but had stopped moving.

"I wish things could be different," he said.

She now had his answer. In other words, he hadn't changed his mind about their relationship. She laughed bitterly, though the music swallowed the sound. "But they aren't." Her hands moved to his chest and she tried to push away from him. The first tingling of tears touched the back of her eyes, and she wanted away from him before it was too late to stop them. She didn't want him to know what he was doing to her. This

power he had over her ticked her off. Why did she let someone who cared less for her than she did for him cause her this kind of ache?

“Laura,” he said, holding onto her so she couldn't leave. There was a distinct emotional tone to his voice that made her still. Desperately, she searched his face, but all she saw was his regret. She didn't see any hope of more. “Just forget we ever happened, Blake.”

“What if I can't?”

Jennifer stepped onto the stage, and the music died. “Time to bring all the beautiful ladies up here.”

The announcement registered but she held his gaze. She was about to cry and now she had to go up on stage. It was a crummy situation in general. But she wanted him to know how she felt about his words. What if I can't? “You didn't leave either of us a choice, now, did you?” She looked down at his hands on her arms, and then back at him. He opened his mouth to speak, and she cut him off. “I need to get on stage.”

Just then, Jennifer called over the microphone. “Where's Laura?”

* * * *

Blake watched Laura.

She stood on the stage next to several other women, looking spectacular in a sexy dress that tempted the imagination. Jennifer was speaking over the microphone, explaining the rules of the auction. Blake hardly heard her. He was too absorbed in Laura, and how much he didn't want her up there.

“And what will dates include?” Jennifer asked the crowd.

That got Blake's attention. What did it include? His focus switched to Jennifer as he ground his teeth awaiting her explanation.

“The date includes dinner at an elite Paris restaurant overlooking the ocean, a midnight boat ride, champagne, and to complete it all, delicious chocolate-covered strawberries.”

His fist closed and opened several times. Just thinking about Laura enjoying a romantic night with someone else ate at his heart. His stomach felt like he'd been kicked.

“Let the bidding begin!” Jennifer called out to the room. “Our first beautiful lady...”

“Laura looks amazing,” Matt said beside him. Blake turned and gave him a quick look. He hadn't even noticed Matt standing there until he spoke.

“Yes,” Blake said, not willing to say more. Matt was too perceptive as it was.

“I wish she wasn't doing this,” Matt said.

A muscle in Blake's jaw jumped. His response was half mumbled. “You and me both.”

“What if she gets stuck with some jerk who thinks he bought more than dinner?”

He was trying not to think about it. “I'm sure she can handle herself.” He just didn't want her to handle anything to do with another man.

Matt made a disgusted noise. “I don't like this. Some strange guy should not be buying my damn sister.”

Blake kept his eyes on Laura. He had maneuvered close enough to the stage that he had a clear view of her, as she did of him. Not once had she looked at him. Under the lights, her skin was a creamy white, and her hair a brilliant red. He wanted to touch her, and make love to her again. He wanted ... her off that stage. The final bidding had

concluded for one woman, and Blake watched a happy sixty-something man join a sexy young brunette on the stage.

Blake could only hope Laura ended up with someone too old to tempt her.

Jennifer announced the next person on the auction list. Laura seemed to stiffen as her name was called out, and Blake did the same right along with her. For the first time since she'd taken the stage, her eyes found his. She looked at him with her heart in her eyes. At that moment, he knew she was testing him.

Would he let her be auctioned off to another man?

It was crazy. Love was never in question. He loved her with all of his heart and soul. In fact, that was why he was willing to walk away from her. And from what they could be. And he knew they would be amazing together.

Of course, he hadn't told her he loved her. Surely she knew? Under his breath, he cursed. What was he supposed to do? The situation hadn't changed. She was still his best friend's little sister, which made things complicated. But how could he walk away from the only woman he had ever thought about forever with?

Laura stepped up to the podium, and the Jennifer called for the first bid. Nathan was quick to raise his hand. The guy really irritated Blake. He looked at her like she was naked. The guy wanted her in bed, and planned to make it happen. The question was, would she go to him on the rebound?

As the bidding continued, several other men joined in the battle for a night with Laura. With each bid, Blake grew tenser. Feelings of anger and even jealousy ripped at his gut. Caveman-like feelings threatened. He wanted to run up to the stage, throw her over his shoulder, and yell, "Mine!"

No way could he let Laura get away. Hell, Matt would just have to understand. Matt's hand settled on his back. "Are you going to let another man leave with your woman?"

Blake turned to Matt, stunned. "What?"

"There isn't time for a big discussion, man. Don't be a fool. You love her, and she loves you. Get her off that stage, and don't you dare tell her I told you to."

Blake smiled. "I was about to say to hell with you anyway, man." Matt laughed with him, and pointed towards the stage.

"Going once, going twice..."

Blake raised his hand, and started walking towards the stage. "Final bid, and it's mine." He started up the stairs.

"It's an open bid," Jennifer said as several mumbles of protest came from the crowd.

"Not anymore." He said stepping on the stage. "Laura."

She was staring at him as if she didn't believe he was real. "What are you doing Blake?"

He closed the distance between them, and dropped to his knee. He took her hand in his. Ideally he would have wanted to do this with a ring in hand. Still, that could be easily remedied.

Her other hand, now trembling, went to her lips. "What are you doing?"

"Laura, I've behaved foolishly. You are everything I could ever want in a woman."

"Blake, get up."

"Not yet. Laura, I love you. I think I always have. I was just too young and foolish to know what to do about it."

Tears began to dampen her cheeks. "I love you, too, Blake."

"Marry me, Laura," he said softly. The room, as full of people as it was, had gone utterly silent. "We belong together."

Her tears fell harder now. He pulled her close, sitting her on his knee, and wiping her tears with his fingers. "Why are you crying?"

She sniffed. "Be ... because I thought you didn't want me enough to fight for me."

"Oh, Laura, baby, I was foolish. I thought I had to sacrifice because I love you so much."

Her bottom lip stuck out in a little pout, the rest of the room forgotten. "You never said that."

"I should have. You are so a part of me, Laura. How I thought I could walk away, I don't know."

"I don't know either."

He laughed. "I want to watch scary movies with you, and pig out on popcorn, take you skydiving, and celebrate your birthdays with you."

She laughed, her tears starting to fade. "You want a lot."

He nodded. "I want it all. Marry me."

She smiled, her eyes still a little damp. "I will marry you on one condition."

His heart threatened to miss a beat. "What?"

"I don't have to watch the same movie more than three times."

He laughed, starting to relax a little. "Three times is the limit." He said playfully. "You got it, sweetheart."

"Then yes, I would be honored to marry you."

They kissed as the room filled with roars of approval and applause, Matt making the most noise of all.

The End

About the Author:

Lisa Renee Jones lives in Austin, Texas, a college town where sexy cowboys and UT Football players almost seem to be the harvest. The eye candy produced stimulates the, um, well, mind. Needless to say, Lisa doesn't have trouble conjuring up new men for her books.

Having spent years in the corporate world, Lisa laughs at the shocked reactions her ex-peers have when they read her writing. Her response—every good girl has a fun, slightly naughty one dying to get out.

Hers is loose and loving it!

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