

Blame the Rain

By Maya Banks

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The following story contains explicit sexual content, adult language, and is meant
for mature readers.

Blame the Rain

Part 1

Cameron Ducote sipped at his beer and listened to the thunder roll in from the west. It was quiet for a Friday night in hole-in-the-wall Texas. The locals were as subdued as the weather. Few people inhabited the run down bar as most had left with the announcement of a severe thunderstorm warning. Why he'd hung around, he didn't know, but it beat a night at home alone with only his badge and gun to keep him warm.

After a few minutes, the loud clatter of hail hitting the tin roof caused a murmur from the remaining customers.

"Hope to hell it's not a damn tornado," Clyde Jameson grumbled as he picked up Cam's empty bottle and shoved another one toward him.

"Nah," Cam said. "They said to expect small hail and strong winds. It'll blow through quick."

The not-so-sturdy door that guarded the entrance blew open with a crash and a woman ducked in, clutching her arms with desperate fingers.

She wrestled with the door until old Ben Jones patted her on the arm and closed it for her.

Cam watched in interest as she ventured a little further in, a wide, frightened look on her face. And when she looked over at him and their gazes connected, he felt like someone had kicked him right in the balls.

The most brilliant set of blue eyes he'd ever come into contact with sizzled right into his brain and promptly melted all his sensory receptors.

Most intriguing was the wariness that radiated from her like a beacon. Her stance was guarded, and yet she appeared so very fragile, as if the slightest touch

would break her.

Every one of his cop warning signals blared into overdrive. This beautiful woman, whoever she was, as running hard and fast from someone or something.

Before he even realized what he was doing, he was on his feet and walking across the creaky wood floor to where she stood. He took off his Stetson as he approached.

"Ma'am, you look like you could do with a stiff drink. I'd be more than happy to oblige you."

Her eyes flashed panic, and she looked like she'd turn tail and bolt right back into the rain. He backed off a foot and continued to survey her.

"I d-don't drink," she replied.

Her sweet, husky voice swam over him like the fine whisky Clyde kept for special occasions. He could see her trembling and knew she was cold.

"How about some hot tea then?" he asked. "You can come sit down over by the bar and dry off."

Her face was a study in indecision. He gave her his best good-ole-boy wouldn't-hurt-a-fly grin. She seemed to relax the tiniest fraction.

"That sounds nice," she said.

She wasn't from around here. That was for damn sure. She lacked the soft drawl of a native. He walked with her to the bar, careful to keep the distance between them.

As they sat, Clyde raised an eyebrow at Cam. Cam shrugged. "Can you get the lady some hot tea?"

Clyde looked horrified by the request and cleared his throat awkwardly. He gestured for Cam to walk to the end of the bar. With a sigh, Cam complied.

"Uh, how the hell do I make hot tea anyway? No one around here drinks that

shit. I guess I could warm up the sweet tea in the microwave.”

Cam nodded. “Do that. I’m sure it’ll be just fine.”

He returned to his mystery woman who sat shivering at the bar, hands clasped together in front of her. His eyes narrowed as he realized she didn’t have a purse or bag of any kind. But he supposed she could have left it in her car.

“Clyde will get you some hot tea...miss?”

“Carruthers,” she supplied. “Lily Carruthers.”

It fit her. Delicate, beautiful, so feminine. She turned her big, blue sad eyes on him. “Does the bar close soon? I thought it might be closed. No one was here it seemed.”

“Seen the weather out there?” he joked. “Everyone’s at home which is probably where you should be.”

She visibly retreated, pain sparking in her eyes. She turned away from him, effectively closing herself off.

“What are you running from Miss Lily Carruthers?” he asked softly.

She yanked her head around, panic burning brightly. Then her gaze settled on the waist band of his jeans where his badge hung. He could see her mentally backpeddling about a hundred yards.

“You’re a cop,” she blurted.

“Yes,” he said calmly. He put his Stetson he was still holding down on the bar and stuck his hand out to her. “Sheriff Cameron Ducote at your service. But you can call me Cam.”

She didn’t take his hand. She seemed frozen in place. Then she spun around on the barstool and slid off. She all but bolted for the door, her hands clenched into little fists at her side.

"Lily," he called out as he started after her. "Lily, wait."

She flung open the door and stepped into the driving rain. By the time he caught up to her, she was across the parking lot and heading down the county road. Where the hell was her car?

He reached his hand out to grab her elbow and spun her around. "Lily, stop, I'm not going to hurt you. Where the hell do you think you're going in this weather? Where is your car?"

Her chin quivered as the rain pelted them both. Goddamn he was getting wet.

"I don't have a car," she said. "Now let me go. Please."

The plea was tinged with desperation, and he felt it deep in his chest. He didn't get to where he was in his career by being taken by a pretty face and a sob story, but something told him this woman hadn't done anything illegal. She was running from someone or something that had hurt her badly.

"Come on," he said, guiding her toward his truck parked back by the entrance.

"Wh-where are you taking me?" she said as she tried to pull away.

"I'm taking you home with me," he said.

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Part 2

Cam watched Lily clutch the blanket he'd given her closer around her slight body as he puttered around the kitchen preparing her some hot soup. He'd offered her a change of clothes so he could dry the ones she had on, but she'd refused.

Now that he had her here, he wasn't altogether sure what the hell to do with her.

When the microwave dinged, he pulled the bowl out and gave the soup a quick stir. He carried it over to the table where she sat and placed it in front of her.

"Eat up."

Her small hand appeared from the folds of the blanket, and she gripped the spoon between her fingers. He sat down beside her and reached out his fingers to tuck a damp strand of hair behind her ear. She flinched and pulled away, but the urge to touch her was all consuming. He couldn't even explain to himself much less try to come up with a plausible reason he could say out loud.

She was, in a word, beautiful. Haunting eyes filled with pain and sadness. He'd never wanted so badly to take away someone else's suffering.

"I want to help you, Lily," he said before he could think better of it.

She dropped the spoon on the table with a clatter, and he could see tears welling in her soulful eyes.

"You can't," she whispered.

He pulled her into his arms and waited for her to resist, but she didn't. She sagged into him, and he pressed his nose to her fragrant hair. "Stay with me tonight," he said simply. "Let me take away your pain. You're safe here with me."

She pulled away and stared at him, a spark of hope lighting her eyes. She

wavered on the brink of indecision, her lips pressing together. Then she ran her pink tongue over her bottom lip and sucked it between her teeth.

He leaned down, unable to resist nibbling on that plump lower lip. He coaxed it from her teeth and sucked into his own mouth. She shuddered against him, her hands trembling as they touched his face.

“Stay with me,” he whispered against her lips. “Let me love you.”

As he pulled away, she stared into his eyes and nodded her acceptance. He shook his head. “I want to hear you say it.”

“Love me. Please.”

With a groan, he swept her into his arms. He let the blanket fall as he carried her to his bedroom. He placed her on the bed and then stepped away. “I’ll go start a shower. You’re freezing.”

He hurried into the bathroom and flipped on the shower. Then he rushed back, half afraid she’d be gone. But she was where he’d left her only she was sitting up, legs drawn to her knees, the damp denim hugging her legs.

He walked over and gently maneuvered her down on the mattress. He reached for the fly of her jeans, and she froze.

“I’m just going to get you out of those wet clothes so we can shower,” he said soothingly. “I won’t hurt you, baby. I’ll never hurt you.”

He was humbled by the trust that shone in her eyes. It wasn’t something she gave easily, he knew. How he knew he didn’t know, but he didn’t want to stop and analyze the situation or get into a discourse about how he’d never in his life jumped headlong into something like this. It just felt right. Like this was a woman he’d waited a lifetime for.

He unbuttoned her jeans and began pulling them down her legs. Her small, lacy

underwear came into view. Only slightly less damp than her jeans, the sheer material clung to the V in her legs, and he could see the outline of her dark curls.

When the denim was free of her legs, he tossed the jeans aside and reached for her hand. She paused for only a moment before placing her hand trustingly in his. He pulled her upright and reached down for the hem of her shirt.

He pulled at the material clinging to her curves. "Raise your arms," he murmured. She complied, and he tugged the shirt higher until it rolled over her head. He sucked in his breath when he looked down to see her clad in only a sheer white bra and panties.

She looked nervously up at him and attempted to cover herself with her hands.

He knelt down in front of her and pulled her hands away. "Don't hide, Lily. Not from me. You're beautiful."

He leaned in and kissed her. A hum of arousal stirred in his veins, spread out in a warm rush and flooded his body. His cock hardened and strained against his jeans.

"Come into the bathroom," he said, taking her hand in his.

She followed behind him, and when they walked into the bathroom it was foggy with the steam pouring from the shower. He quickly shucked his pants and shirts, and with a quick glance in her direction to gauge her reaction, he slid his underwear down his legs to pool at his feet.

Her gaze seemed frozen on his distended cock. She reached out her hand as if she wanted to touch him but pulled away and curled her fingers into a tight fist.

He smiled and reached for the straps of her bra. As he tugged them downward, she stirred restlessly as if she was getting nervous all over again. As one of her pink-tipped nipples came into view, his mouth watered and itched with the need to taste her.

He reached around and unclasped the bra in back and let it fall to the floor with

his clothes. Her breasts bobbed free, and he reached out to touch the tempting peaks.

She stepped back, and at first he thought she was retreating, but she reached for her underwear instead and pulled them down her legs.

She stood before him, naked, her body trembling. Her expressive blue eyes shone with an array of fear, longing...uncertainty.

He scooped her into his arms and elbowed his way into the large shower stall. The warm spray hit them both, and she let out a sound of pure feminine appreciation. Her body warmed under the deluge, and some of the color returned to her cheeks.

He didn't waste much time. He reached for the soap and began lathering her body. He did it mainly to relax her tense muscles and give her time to adjust to the situation. The last thing he wanted was to move too fast or to frighten her.

As he turned her away from him to rinse her, he kissed the curve of her neck and watched as tiny goose bumps raced down her arm.

"Warm enough now?" he asked.

She nodded, and he turned the water off, leaving them both dripping. He tugged her out of the shower and wiped her damp body down with a towel. Unable to resist, he followed the towel down her skin with his mouth. He kissed each newly dried area, and a soft sigh escaped her when he pulled one nipple into his mouth.

She tasted as sweet as she looked, and he couldn't wait to further sample her delectable body.

He dropped the towel and picked her up again. He walked back into the bedroom and over to the bed where he laid her down. He stood for a moment, enjoying the sight of her lying on his bed, her damp, honey brown hair splayed out on his pillow.

"Love me," she whispered.

With a groan he lowered his body to hers. The shock of her skin on his sent

waves of desire singing through his blood. She was so soft, a perfect contrast to his hardness. She fit perfectly, melded to his body as if she was the missing piece of him. His other half.

He levered himself onto his elbows so that he didn't crush her. He stared down into her eyes then lowered his lips to kiss her, taste her. He swallowed her sweet sigh of surrender, and it fueled his blood like nothing else ever had.

He moved down her body, and she arched into his kiss as he brushed his lips over the swells of her breasts. He tongued one turgid point and then the other. He licked a lazy circle around the puckered flesh then sucked it into his mouth and worked it rhythmically over his tongue.

Then he ran his tongue down her midline to the shallow indentation of her navel and finally lower to the soft curls nestled between her legs. He kissed the spot just above the fine hair, and she flinched in reaction.

He trailed his finger into the curls and slid it into her wetness. She moaned as he found her clit. He parted the folds with his other fingers as he flicked lightly at her sensitive bud.

When he'd opened her to his satisfaction, he bent his neck and put his mouth to her sweetness.

"Cam!"

He growled his satisfaction as his name fell from her lips. He wanted her to know exactly who was taking her, who was making her his.

He lapped lower, exploring every hidden spot of her femininity. He flicked over her opening, swirled around it and then plunged his tongue inside her.

She bucked and writhed beneath him, and he held her hips, locking her in place as he continued his lazy exploration. Light nibbles, tiny licks and kisses. He grazed her

erect clit with his teeth and felt her shudder with pleasure.

With infinite gentleness, he slid a finger inside her small opening, testing her wetness to see if she was ready for him yet. He added another finger, stretching her slightly. She let out a breathy sounding “oh” as he ran his fingers along the walls of her pussy.

“Please, Cam,” she begged. “Don’t make me wait any longer.”

He rose up on his knees and hooked her legs over his arms, spreading her wider for him. He settled between her thighs and let go of one of her legs long enough to position himself between her folds.

He rubbed his cock up and down, coating himself with her moisture. Then he breached her opening, pausing as he pushed an inch inside.

He let go of her legs and leaned over her, pressing deeper as he bent to kiss her. She stretched to accommodate his length, and he came to rest against her, fully buried inside her snug channel.

Their soft kisses filled the night. He pressed his forehead to hers as he arched his hips, withdrew and flexed forward again. He set a slow, sensual rhythm that was destined to drive them both crazy.

She wrapped her arms around him and pulled him closer. He melted against her, loving the feel of her wrapped so solidly around him. It gave him a sense of peace he hadn’t felt in many years.

He buried himself in her over and over, each thrust a soothing balm to his soul. She was his. It was inexplicable, but this woman who appeared out of the rain was destined to be his. He wouldn’t entertain any alternative.

She kissed him, taking the initiative for the first time and he let her, giving himself over to her tentative caresses. She put one hand on his cheek and kissed him

deep, rolling her tongue lightly over his. Her other hand dug into his shoulder, her fingers flexing into his muscle.

He felt her quiver around his cock, tiny little flutters that became stronger as she convulsed. Her thighs shook, and her legs tightened around his waist. She was close, and he was determined to take her there.

He withdrew and plunged deep. Not pausing, he pulled back and thrust deep again. She let out an agonized cry as her entire body tightened into one long arch. A surge of liquid heat flooded his cock, and he could no longer control his own orgasm.

They came together in an explosion of heat and passion. He held her, wrapped himself around her, protecting her from the outside world.

She moaned softly as he kissed her. He shuddered against her, spilling himself deep. He felt his release to his toes. Never had an orgasm felt so strong, so incredibly sensational. So very right.

He lay there catching his breath, and then he rolled with her in his arms, pillowing her head on his arm.

"Sleep, my love," he whispered. "Nothing can hurt you here."

He drifted off himself as she snuggled deep in his arms.

Many hours later, he woke, groggy as sunlight hit him smack in the face. The bed felt oddly cold, and he glanced to the side to see that Lily was no longer in his bed.

He felt cold panic creep into his heart. He knew. Knew before he even got up to search the house. He knew without a doubt that she was gone.

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Part 3

Cam sat at the bar just as he had every single night for the last three months. His behavior bordered on pathetic but ever since Lily had disappeared, he'd harbored the secret hope that she'd return.

He'd searched for her, used every resource at his disposal but he hadn't known anything more than her name, and he'd found nothing on her.

And now, here he sat, and for the first time, he began to lose hope. He was deluding himself if he thought she was ever coming back. He flipped a ten at Clyde and got off the bar stool, ready to head home.

He was halfway across the room when the door to the bar opened and in stepped a woman wearing blue jeans, ragged tennis shoes and a worn t-shirt. Her hair was pulled back into a ponytail, and she had absolutely no makeup on. And he'd never seen such a beautiful sight in his life. Lily.

Her wary gaze connected with his, and then she looked down and away, her expression sorrowful. Even as anger buzzed in his veins, sweet relief poured over him like maple syrup. Lily. His Lily was back.

He strode over to her, and without a word, pulled her into his arms. "Thank God," he murmured.

Before she could say a word, he whisked her out of the bar and into his truck. He wanted her home. With him. In his arms and he wasn't letting her go again.

He held her hand during the drive. He wanted to talk to her. Wanted to ask her where she'd gone, where she'd been, but his throat was too tightly constricted. They'd have plenty of time for talking later.

When he drove up to his house, he jumped out and walked around to lift her down from her seat. He carried her inside and never stopped until he got to the bedroom.

He dropped her onto the mattress and quickly divested them both of their clothing.

They came together in a tumultuous clash. Hot. Breathless. With unrestrained passion. And he didn't stop there. He made love to her all through the night, bringing her to one orgasm after another. He was insatiable. All the nights he'd spent dreaming of her had come down to this. He loved her over and over, branding her, making her his own once more.

Finally in the predawn hours, they drifted into sleep. And when he awoke just a few hours later and felt the empty spot beside him, his heart sank to his feet. He flew out of bed and ran through the house.

His knees nearly buckled when he found her in the kitchen, looking out the window, a glass of orange juice in her hand. He had to collect himself before he could even walk the few steps to her. God almighty, he'd thought he'd lost her again.

He slipped his arms around her and nuzzled her neck. She sighed and leaned further into him.

"I thought you'd left again," he said hoarsely.

She sighed. "There's something I have to tell you, Cam."

He tensed and waited with dread for her to speak.

"I'm married," she said quietly. "Or at least I was."

His arms tightened around her. "Was?"

"I was still married that first night. The night we met."

"And you're not now?" he asked, unable to sort through all the conflicting

emotions. He didn't fuck around with married women. Ever.

"No," she said softly. "It's why I left. I had to settle things."

He turned her around to face him. "Make me understand, sweetheart. You showed up that night looking hurt and alone. Did your husband..." He had to break off and collect himself before he continued because his train of thought was building a murderous rage inside him. "Did he hurt you? Were you running from him?"

She closed her eyes for a moment. "I was forced into a marriage that I didn't want. But no, he didn't abuse me if that's what you're asking. Not physically."

"But he hurt you," Cam said grimly.

"Yes, he hurt me."

"What did he do, Lily?"

She looked away and then back at him. "He made an arrangement with my father. He's very wealthy. I mean my father. Well, so is William."

"William was your husband?"

She nodded. "William wanted a trophy wife. Someone well versed in the art of high society. I fit the appearance. William wanted good connections. I didn't want to marry him but my father didn't give me a choice, and I was too weak to stand up to either of them. I wanted his approval too badly."

"Your father's?"

"Yes," she said painfully. "I thought...I thought that if I did this that I could build a happy life and finally make daddy proud of me. But there was no pleasing William. He wanted a baby and I couldn't conceive. He was furious and called me a miserable failure. When I went to daddy to ask him for help in getting out of the marriage, he called William and told him to do a better job of controlling his wife."

"So you ran?" Cam asked softly.

She shuddered. "That last night. I thought he might actually get violent. I mean he'd never even hinted that he might hurt me physically, but the last night we were together, I was very afraid. The next day I went to see a lawyer and filed for a divorce, and then I left. I knew if I stayed that I'd never get my divorce and that he and daddy would make my life hell. They would be furious over the scandal."

"And so you ended up here," Cam said. "With me."

"With you," she agreed.

"And what was I?" he challenged. "A quick fuck to relieve your pain?"

She winced. "No... Cam there's something else I have to tell you."

He cocked his head, curious over the worry he saw in her eyes. It couldn't get much worse than her being married could it?

She put a hand protectively over her stomach and swayed a little. He put out a hand to steady her.

"I'm pregnant," she said in a shaky voice.

"But you said...you said..." He couldn't even finish.

"It's not his baby," she said softly. She looked into his eyes. "I don't think he could have children. Or maybe I just never got pregnant. I haven't had sex with him in over six months, since before I left. Cam, the baby is yours."

He opened his mouth and then snapped it shut again. He placed his hand over hers then moved hers aside so he could touch her belly, still flat underneath her shirt.

"Mine?" he said in wonder.

She reached up and touched his cheek. "Cam, I left because I knew I couldn't stay and bring so much trouble to your doorstep. I had to go back and face William and daddy, get my life together and end things permanently. I was coming back. The baby has nothing to do with that."

“And why were you coming back, Lily?” he whispered as he turned his face into her palm.

She looked scared, unsure, as if she was taking the biggest chance of her life. “I came back because I fell in love with you that night. I wanted to see if there was a chance for us, but I knew it wasn’t fair to come to you until I was free.”

His heart damn near beat out of his chest. With a groan he gathered her tight in his arms. “I love you, too, Lily mine.” He slid his hand back to her belly and cupped it lovingly. “I’ll take care of you and our baby. I swear it. If you’ll trust me, sweetheart, I swear I’ll never let you down.”

Her smile lit up the entire room, and he felt the warmth, the joy all the way to his soul.

“You’re free? Really free?”

She nodded.

“Good. I don’t want to wait a minute longer to make you mine. Will you marry me, Lily? Will you take a chance on me?”

She smiled and reached up on tip toe to kiss him. “I might be crazy, but yes, I’ll marry you.”

He gathered her in his arms and spun her around until her laughter filled the house and his heart. “We’ll make a great family, my love. I’ll make sure of it.”

Look for these titles by Maya Banks
(And keep scrolling for a sneak peak excerpt from Brazen!)

Now Available:

Seducing Simon
Colters' Woman
Understood
Overheard
Undenied

Coming Soon:

Brazen
For Her Pleasure
Love Me, Still
Into the Mist

Brazen

Coming September 4th to Samhain Publishing

One woman's campaign to win the hearts of the two men she loves

Jasmine left the Sweetwater Ranch and the Morgan brothers, no longer able to bear the painful dilemma of loving them both. After a year away, in which she gains new perspective, she returns home with one goal. To make Seth and Zane Morgan hers.

Jaz may have left an innocent girl, but she's returned a beautiful, sensual woman. Seth and Zane aren't prepared for the full on assault she launches and each battle an attraction they've fought for years.

She wants them both, but Seth has no intention of sharing his woman. It's up to her to change his mind because she can't and won't choose between two men she loves with equal passion. For her, it's all or nothing.

Excerpt

As they drove up the winding driveway to the ranch house, Jasmine dreaded the thought of confronting Seth. She didn't really care if he was pissed about the truck. She wasn't ready to face him after the way he pushed her away, and especially not after Zane had just performed oral sex on her.

"I hope Seth didn't wait up," she said with a sigh.

Zane chuckled. "Tell you what. You pretend you're passed out, and I'll haul you upstairs to bed. You can face Seth in the morning."

She grinned as she remembered so many other nights where Zane had covered for her.

They pulled to a stop outside the garage, and Zane cut the engine.

"Let's be quick about this," Zane said as he hopped out. He walked around to her side and opened the door. He turned her legs around until she faced him sideways and then simply picked her up, placing his shoulder into her belly.

She swung over his back, her nose bumping against his back pocket. His arm curved over the back of her legs just below her ass, and when he started walking to the door, his hand slid possessively over the curve of behind.

And sure enough, Seth met them as soon as Zane walked in. She guessed Zane must have held a finger to his lips and shushed Seth, because his question got aborted mid sentence and he quieted.

Thankful that her face was hidden in Zane's back, she held her breath until Zane mounted the stairs and headed for her bedroom.

A few seconds later, he deposited her on the bed and stepped back. "Okay, sugar, here you are. Now get undressed and into bed. Sleep off this drunk. I'll make sure Carmen has a good hangover remedy for you in the morning."

He turned to go, but Jasmine called out to him in a voice just above a whisper. "Zane?"

He swiveled back around and gazed down at her.

"I knew exactly what I was doing," she said. "I'm not *that* drunk. I wanted you."

His throat worked up and down as he swallowed. His breath escaped him in a long sigh, whether of frustration or unease she wasn't sure. Maybe a little of both.

Then he bent down and kissed her on the forehead. "Good night, Jaz. I'm going to go drive into town with Seth so we can get his truck."

She closed her eyes in disappointment at the significance of the tiny kiss. He was putting her solidly back on familiar ground.

When she opened them again, Zane was gone. She sighed and flopped back on the bed, arms spread. She tucked her hands behind her head and stared up at the ceiling.

They wanted her. She knew this. Knew that both Seth and Zane were attracted to her. Seth's words rang in her ears, and she wondered if maybe he was right. Maybe it was true for both of them. Maybe she could have been any woman.

That wasn't enough for her. She'd never be any woman. She'd be everything to them or nothing.

She sat up and struggled to get out of her clothes. Did she have any chance at making them love her in return? At making them see that she needed them both?

It won't be easy, chérie. The sort of committed relationship between the three of you that you propose is foreign to them. Aberrant. It will be up to you to show them how beautiful it can be.

Cherisse's caution floated around in Jasmine's mind. She'd discarded her friend's words at the time because she'd been too caught up in the idea of resolving her love for both men. Cherisse was right. It wouldn't be easy. But then what ever was?

She pulled herself up from the bed and trudged over to the window. Seeing Zane's truck gone, she deemed it safe to go crawl into the shower. She had a long night ahead of her if she was going to wait for Zane to return.

*

Jasmine watched from the window as the two trucks rolled up the drive nearly an hour later. She dropped her finger away from the curtain and quickly moved over to her bed. She crawled under the covers and waited.

Soon she heard the quiet footsteps in the hall and then heard them pause outside her door. She lowered her lashes until her eyes were half-lidded. To her surprise, Seth appeared around the doorway, his outline recognizable even in the darkened room. She shut her eyes as he moved closer.

She tried to breathe normally as he neared her bed. Then he stopped, and she was dying to know what he was doing. She opened her eyes just a crack, hoping that he couldn't see her in the dark.

He stood by her bed, staring down at her, and indecipherable expression on his face. Then he reached down to touch her hair. He ran his fingers over the strands and to her cheek. And like Zane, he bent and kissed her softly on the forehead.

"I'm sorry," he whispered.

He left the bed, his footsteps retreating across the room. She opened her eyes wider to see him walk out of her bedroom, closing the door behind him.

Her chest ached with the need to go after him. If only it was as easy as going to both of them, telling them she loved them and having them accept that her love encompassed them both.

Her fingers curled around the covers, and she let out a shaky breath, emotion knotting her throat. She turned over on her side and curled her knees to her chest. What if they never accepted it? What if they couldn't come to terms with the relationship as she saw it?

The idea sent panic swelling into her chest and stomach, twisting her insides until she clawed at her throat in an attempt to assuage the relentless ache.

She lay there for as long as she could stand it and then she got up. Silently, she cracked open her door and peered down the darkened hallway. Both Seth's and Zane's doors were closed. Her alcohol buzz long abated, she tip-toed down to Zane's door and slowly turned the knob.

When she entered, Zane looked up from his perch on the bed. He was sprawled on the bed, the covers pulled up to his waist. He held the TV remote in one hand and propped his body up on his other elbow.

"I thought you'd be long passed out," he said with a hint of discomfort in his voice. His hand clutched at the sheets and pulled them a little tighter to his waist.

She didn't speak. Didn't trust her voice not to betray her. Instead she walked over to the bed and crawled up onto the mattress, kneeling in front of him. With one hand, she reached out and tugged the sheet from his hand. It fell away, revealing an obvious erection.

"Were you thinking about me?" she asked softly, a hint of a smile twitching the corners of her mouth.

"Jaz, you need to go back to your room," he said in a near groan. He grabbed for the sheet, but she held fast. She was transfixed by the sight of his arousal.

Beautiful. Sleek. Yet completely male and rugged. She was staring shamelessly, and she didn't care. Dark hair surrounded the thick base, and his cock shot upward toward his firm belly.

"Were you thinking about me?" she repeated as she moved closer still.

"You know damn well I was," he said in a tight voice.

She ran her hand up his thigh, loving the hair-roughened surface of his skin. The muscles coiled and jumped beneath her fingers. Before she lost her nerve, she moved her other hand and curled her fingers around the base of his cock.

"Jaz..."

It was an intoxicating mixture of satiny softness with a core of steel. She slowly rolled her hand upward, marveling at how quickly it hardened even further in her palm.

"I want to taste you. Like you tasted me," she murmured as she leaned over his hips, her hair spilling over his groin.

"Jesus," he whispered with agonized strain.