



# WHEN LIGHTNING STRIKES

By  
Sydney Somers

© copyright October 2004, Sydney Somers  
Cover Art by Amber Moon, © copyright October 2004  
New Concepts Publishing  
Lake Park, GA 31636  
[www.newconceptspublishing.com](http://www.newconceptspublishing.com)

This is a work of fiction. All characters, events, and places are of the author's imagination and not to be confused with fact. Any resemblance to living persons or events is merely coincidence.

## Chapter One

Emma knew she was dreaming.

She knew that when she awoke she might very well feel the heartbreak all over, but she couldn't stop the images from replaying in her mind. Even in her dreams the sights were real--the bright flashing lights of the carnival rides, teenagers crowded in lines, some groping each other earning them critical glances from parents holding tight to their excited children, and the smells of buttered popcorn, greasy fries, hotdogs and cotton candy.

Emma's stomach rumbled as she contemplated a candy apple from the closest vendor. Maybe she'd even take one home to her aunt. She hadn't planned on stopping by the fair at all, but the loud music, shrill screams and laughter had her pausing long enough at the gate to buy a ticket. She'd even splurged on a few games she hadn't stood a chance of winning, just because they looked like fun.

She only wished she wasn't here by herself. A coworker had asked her to go with him tonight, but she'd declined. Jason was polite, attractive enough, and about as exciting as an ant farm. He stopped by her desk at

exactly the same time every morning, took breaks and lunches at predictable intervals, even going with a standard menu depending on the day of the week. Although he was endlessly considerate and thoughtful, he did absolutely nothing for her increasingly sensitive libido.

If nothing else Emma had promised herself no more safe predictable men until she had at least one hot, downright wicked tryst. Not that there were many men around to indulge that particular fantasy. The odds were greater she'd be struck by lightning before she'd find a man sexy, capable and interested enough to give her exactly what she wanted: sex so incredibly hot, so mind-blowing just looking at her fantasy man would bring her to orgasm--and then some.

The sound of a little girl's tears had Emma turning around. Partially hidden by the vibrant red and white stripes of a gaming tent, a blond-haired angel sniffled and wiped her nose with the back of her hand.

Careful not to scare the child Emma ventured closer. "Are you okay?"

The little girl shook her head. "My uncle lost me," she whispered brokenly, another fat tear rolling down her cheek.

Emma's heart squeezed. "My name is Emma, what's yours?"

"Alicia."

"That's a very pretty name. Would you like me to help you find your uncle?"

Alicia glanced around uncertain. "I'm not supposed to go anywhere with strangers."

Emma crouched down to Alicia's level. "Oh. Then how about...."

"Alicia." A dark-haired man stepped between them and scooped up the little girl. "I've been looking everywhere for you."

Emma stood up, waited for Alicia's uncle to notice her standing there. When he didn't turn around right away, Emma silently waved good-bye to Alicia, who had her arms wrapped tightly around her uncle's neck, and headed back to the vendor's cart.

"Excuse me."

Emma stopped at the familiar voice, trying to place it. She turned around, nearly colliding with the broad chest mere inches from hers. Emma staggered back, kept upright only by the solid grip at her elbow.

"Sorry," the man apologized. "Wait, you're Emma right?"

Nodding, Emma glanced from the warm, firm hand on her arm and into the dark green eyes of Seth Fraser. All the air left her lungs in one traitorous exhale.

Her boss. Well not her direct supervisor, but Seth owned the company she worked for, making him her boss in an indirect way.

And he knew her name.

Both Seth and Alicia stared at her expectantly. She really should say something. Like what? 'I have seriously sinful fantasies about you,' somehow didn't seem appropriate.

"I work for you," she blurted out.

Seth grinned, a lazy smile more friendly than one shared between

employer and employee. "I know."

Her blood thickened in her veins. Lord, the man was hot. Just over six feet, Seth was built for physical endurance and was reputed to have moves smoother than a brain surgeon. Dark brown hair, short and perfectly mussed, and that lethal curving of his lips only added to his charm. Seth was the ideal candidate to deliver the naughty images from her dreams to reality. Only he didn't know she existed. Or did he?

A surge of lust shimmered through her at his lingering stare. God help her, he was standing in the middle of a carnival, innocently holding on to his niece and her mind had him naked, sweaty and poised right between her legs. It wasn't the first time she'd had such thoughts about the playboy CEO, and she doubted it would be the last. But something about indulging in those fantasies when Seth was standing so close and still holding her arm....

He was still holding her arm. Her heart thumped in her chest, but she made no move to pull away. His intense gaze had an ache building between her legs, legs that itched to be locked around Seth's waist. Heat rushed to her cheeks and she glanced away. She was going to need a very cold shower when she got home.

"Uncle Seth, I see mommy. She's over by the carousel."

"I should be going," Emma said, *before I make a complete fool of myself and start drooling, or worse*. The unexpected, but thrilling heated glances from Seth had her on the verge of orgasm.

Seth's grip slid from her elbow to her wrist, sending currents racing across her skin. "I could take you home after I pass off my niece, unless you're here with someone."

"I ... uh ... no. I'm alone." And how much of a loser did that make her?

Seth flashed a devilish smile. "Good." He grabbed Emma's hand and dragged her along to where his sister stood with a squirming toddler tucked close to her side. Emma recognized her from work as well. Seth's sister was the head of public relations.

"I think this belongs to you," Seth joked, setting Alicia at her mother's feet. "Did you have a good time, squirt?"

Alicia bobbed her head, then yanked on her mother's hand, tugging her toward the line for the carousel. Seth's sister shot them both a curious glance, her eyes fixing on their joined hands before she allowed herself to be led away. Uncertain, Emma tried to casually remove her hand from Seth's, but his grip only tightened.

"I'll call you tomorrow," Seth said before dragging Emma into the crowd. He grinned at her over his shoulder but didn't slow down. Emma tried not to read too much into the interested glances he kept sending her. From the women Seth was known for dating, Emma knew she wasn't anywhere near as striking. Although content with her shoulder length blond hair and blue-gray eyes, Emma wouldn't have considered them special enough to catch Seth Fraser's eye.

When they reached the parking lot, she stopped. “There’s no need to drive me. I’m only a short walk from here.” Emma told herself she would not be disappointed if he changed his mind.

Seth nodded thoughtfully. “I’m up for a walk.”

She couldn’t contain her smile. This was crazy. This was Seth Fraser, her boss, and he was looking at her like she was his next course. And she loved it. A flock of butterflies clipped to life in her stomach. Suddenly self-conscious, Emma glanced down at her black tank top with plunging neckline and faded hip-hugger jeans, which she knew clung to her behind in way that was barely decent. Thankfully she’d had the foresight to wear her new pushup bra. Her breasts weren’t small, but the extra cleavage the bra provided made her feel sexy, desirable.

Emma glanced up, caught Seth’s eyes appreciating the raised swell between her breasts. Under the heated scrutiny her nipples puckered against the silky material.

“Let’s go through the park,” Emma suggested. With the sun setting she’d planned to walk around to avoid any obnoxious teens partying near the lake, but the idea of walking the narrow, private trails with Seth changed her mind.

“I didn’t realize you knew my name,” Emma said, then winced at how stupid it sounded.

Piercing green eyes caught hers. “I make it a point to learn as much as possible about people that interest me.”



Pleasure ricocheted through her. She pushed aside the knowledge that Seth was never seen with the same woman twice. If he was being truthful and he was interested in her, however temporary, it would have to be enough.

Emma sneaked a sideways glance at Seth, letting her gaze scroll from head to toe, pausing however inappropriately just below his hips. Good Lord, was he as big as water cooler gossip suggested? Emma shook her head. This had to stop. He was walking her home, not inviting her into his bed. But a girl could dream.

“Over here.” Seth tugged her toward a set of swings tucked under the trees. His hand slid up her arm, to her side, resting just under her breast. Fiery threads from his touch seared her skin, made her nipples tighten until they ached to be touched. What would his mouth, no, his tongue, feel like stroking the taut peaks?

He patted the seat, dragging her from another fantasy. “Hop on.”

“I’m not sure--”

Seth lifted and whirled her around, setting her on the swing, then moved to get behind her. Emma felt the unmistakable pressure of his erection at her back. The area between her legs started to throb, and then she was airborne as he pushed her away from him. She laughed and pumped her legs, wondering if sex with Seth could possibly be as delicious as she imagined.

Above them the sky opened up and rain poured down from the

heavens. Seth caught her and wrapped an arm around her waist, drawing her against his chest. His breath was warm against her ear.

“I have a bit of a confession. I’ve wanted to get you alone for some time.”

Emma had been positive Seth didn’t have a clue who she was and here he was subtly nudging his rock hard shaft against her. Warm lips nipped the sensitive flesh at her neck. Emma leaned into him, a moan slipping from her parted lips. Was this really happening? God, she hoped this wasn’t another fantasy.

His hands skimmed down her chest, just grazing her nipples before continuing down her belly to the insides of her thighs. “Do you have any idea how badly I want to touch you Emma?”

The ragged admission had moisture gathering between her legs. She closed her eyes, wanting this moment like nothing she’d craved before. Just one wild, uninhibited night, and then she could get on with her life.

She dragged in a breath. “So touch me. I want to feel your hands on me Seth.”

He cupped her breasts, his hands expertly kneading them through the damp fabric. The moan trapped in the back of her throat broke free when he closed his fingers around her nipples.

“I haven’t been able to stop myself from thinking about you. Your breasts, your mouth, your....” He cupped her wet sex through her jeans. Emma’s core pulsed, pleading for release.

“Come here,” he ordered, pulling her off the swing and into his arms. His mouth was hot, his tongue boldly stroking hers as he rubbed his arousal against her cleft.

This was really, *really* crazy, but she couldn’t make herself stop. This wasn’t at all like her, to let any man touch her so intimately when she hardly knew him. Dreams were one thing ... but there was something about Seth, something--

His fingers dipped into the waistband of her jeans, skimming the rounded flesh of her bottom. The delicate friction had her grinding against him. He growled in her ear and gripped her hips, settling her more firmly against him. Her most sensitive part clenched, aching to feel him moving inside her.

Seth’s breathing was heavy, erratic. “Jesus, Emma, what are you doing to me?”

An explosion of thunder had Emma bolting upright in her chair. She blinked and glanced around, remembering she was at her desk, at work. Not with Seth. The images were already fading, but she knew she could recall the very real memories if she wanted to. Instead, she stood up realizing it was after ten o’clock and she was the last one here. Outside her office only a handful of overhead lights were left on leading to the elevators.

Fishing her heels out from under her desk, Emma slid them on, picked up her briefcase and clicked off her lamp. On the way out she snatched her jacket from the hook on the back of her door and, draping it over her arm,

walked toward the elevators. A burst of lightning lit the dim lobby area in front of the three gleaming doors. She depressed the button and turned to look out the window at the rain.

Images of Seth, his eyes, his smile, the way he looked naked, his hardened staff jutting out from a dark thatch of curly hair, had her feeling restless and very much alone. Knowing he didn't deserve a spare thought after breaking her heart didn't stop her from remembering the soft hands sliding between her thighs, slipping between the wet folds and playing with her swollen clit until she bucked and screamed for more.

An incredible lover, Seth had released more than just passion inside her. Love at first sight was little more than a fabled intense connection better left to fairy tales, or so Emma had believed until she'd looked into Seth's eyes that night at the fair. But facing the cold truth that those stories meant nothing in real life, nothing to men like Seth, hurt almost as much as losing him.

Thunder exploded again, making her jump. She lost her grip on her briefcase, the contents spilling across the tiled floor. Cursing, Emma bent over to collect the loose papers just as the elevator doors slid open behind her.

\* \* \* \*

Seth stared out the wall of windows and into the dark. Rain pelted the

glass, nothing more than a constant reminder of a night he wanted to forget. Not because the memories were hurtful, but because they reminded him of what he couldn't have.

Emma.

He didn't dare blink for fear the visions playing in his mind would vanish for good. That night he and Emma had been soaked within minutes, yet he hadn't stopped kissing her, touching her. He had been so damn hard. And the way she ground her hips against him... It had taken everything in him not to strip her down in the rain and take her against a tree.

When she whispered, "My house is only a couple minutes from here," he wondered if he had slipped into some fantasy world. Never had he felt such an immediate attraction that he literally couldn't keep his hands to himself.

Emma laughed, running away from him. He ran after her, his own laugh barely audible in the pouring rain. She stayed just out of reach until she reached the covered porch of her house. He could have caught her at any time but enjoyed the game too much.

On the weathered steps he caught up with her and hauled her against him. He slid his hands into her wet hair before moving them lower to knead her perfect little ass. She moaned into his mouth, slid her tongue along the edge of his lips before touching it to his. He backed her against the door, pressing his straining cock against her. She shuddered, arched against him.

"If you don't open that door, I'm going to fuck you right here for

everyone to see.”

She smiled wickedly at his warning, but dug a key from her pocket and pushed it into the lock. He would have left the door open, his lower half already too focused on plunging into her to concentrate on much else, if she hadn't mumbled something about her aunt.

“Christ, that's right, you're Clara's niece. She lives with you,” he said, remembering it was the middle-aged secretary who had pointed Emma out not long after he took over the company. “She's not home is she?”

Emma shook her head, her smile widening. “Out for the evening,” she reassured before dragging her shirt over her head. Seth sucked in a breath and followed her down the hallway, each step making him more painfully aware of how his balls ached and tightened. She fingered her bra strap, drawing it slowly down her shoulder. Her nipples were little more than peaked crests straining at him through the clingy material. He wanted to taste them, roll them under his tongue, nip them, suck them.

He growled, snagging her wrist before she could dance away again. She went into his arms willingly, pulling him down on the bed. Her hands were inside his pants, stroking him, teasing him until he was certain he would come in her hands if she didn't stop. But first he needed to get inside her, deep inside like he'd been thinking about for too long. He peeled her jeans down, slipped his fingers under the lacy edge of her damp panties and into her hot, slick flesh.

“Oh God,” she groaned, her nails grating down his back. With his

thumb he flicked her swollen nub and slid his fingers deep inside her. Her muscles clenched around him, urging him deeper. He pumped them in and out, slowly at first, then faster.

“Don’t you fucking stop,” she cried against his neck, writhing under his hand. “Yes, yes, right there.”

Seth knew the second she came, her juices dripping from his fingers, her eyes wide with passion as she yelled her release.

“Damn it,” he cursed when she relaxed against the mattress. “I wasn’t ... I mean I didn’t plan ... I don’t have anything with me,” he finished. Wasn’t there some unwritten rule men had to carry condoms in their wallet, just in case?

Grinning, Emma rolled over and withdrew a foil packet from her nightstand. He wanted to slow down, enjoy the smell of her, the taste, the feel, but first he had to have her. He had to feel her tight, moist center surround his cock, and he needed to feel it now. Without taking his eyes off her, Seth stripped off his pants, rolled on the condom, wrapped her legs around his waist and plunged into her.

He wanted to yell at the bliss of it. She was so hot and tight. He felt his control slipping away with the increasingly frantic rhythm as he pumped into her. He wanted to ease back, concerned that the primal need to possess consuming him would frighten her. But she clung to him when he would have lessened the fevered pace, digging her hands into his ass cheeks. Harder and harder he drove into her, until she was whimpering, pleading

with him for more. Her hips rocked up to meet his. Each thrust met with a purposeful quivering that sucked him deeper, reluctant to let him withdraw. Seth's body quaked, the most exquisite tension shattering inside him. On a groan he buried his face against the side of her neck, fighting to regain some semblance of the control that had slowly diminished from the second he stared into Emma's eyes at the fair.

Her fingers tunneled lazily through his hair. He raised his head long enough to smile at her before covering her mouth with his. Never in his life had sex been so good, so satisfying, and they were just getting started. At the same time some part of him instantly recognized that it wasn't just Emma's body that rocked him so completely.

The phone rang, jarring Seth from the memory. He pulled his attention from the rain-splattered windows and glanced at the cell phone on his desk. He didn't feel like talking to anyone just now. If it was that important, they'd leave a voice mail message and he'd call them later. Feeling entirely too sorry for himself, Seth stood up and left his office. The elevator was there waiting to take him home to his empty apartment where he knew he would pour himself a drink and curse his own stupidity. It was no one's fault but his own that Emma had turned from him. He stepped inside and hit the button for the lobby. How he wished he'd been able to make her understand what she'd walked in on.

Seth stared at the numbers over the door and frowned when they paused on the fifteenth floor. The doors scrolled open, giving him the



sweetest view of a woman's bottom and a pink garter that looked suspiciously familiar.

“Emma?”

## Chapter Two

The woman's body went rigid and Seth immediately knew he was right. It was Emma. His heart thrummed in his chest, his throat tightening as he wondered if she would run. Every time they'd crossed paths, she always managed to slip away.

"Emma," he repeated. Maybe it wasn't her, just a product of his imagination. Hell, maybe he needed to start seeing a shrink.

The woman straightened and turned around. God, she was beautiful, Seth thought. Both his mind and body rejoiced at seeing Emma, his cock twitching anxiously in his boxers. As if it stood any chance of getting within a foot of her.

"Hello Seth." The cool indifference in her voice sliced through him.

She stooped to collect her briefcase, offering Seth another tantalizing view of creamy thighs and that sexy garter. He imagined removing it with his teeth as he'd done before. As if sensing his thoughts, Emma snapped upright and glared at him over her shoulder. He grinned at her, damn well grateful he hadn't instituted a dress code requiring women's skirts to be at least knee length.

“Go ahead. I forgot something,” she said, walking away from him.

“I can wait,” Seth offered.

“Don’t bother.”

“It’s no trouble.”

Emma whipped around. “Don’t,” she warned. Seth heard the tiniest squeak in her voice. That small show of emotion sent hope swirling through him. Maybe it wasn’t too late after all.

Seth leaned in the doorway, preventing the doors from closing. “I didn’t realize you were afraid to be alone with me.”

Her blue-gray eyes flared. “Always the egotist.”

Shrugging, he stepped back into the elevator. “Coward.”

Like Seth hoped, Emma took the bait and slid in beside him a second before the doors shut. He made the mistake of looking down at her breasts, remembering how the dusky nipples tasted. The memory of the hard peaks sliding between his lips as he suckled them, his hands kneading the surrounding creamy flesh while Emma moaned, had Seth wanting to tear her blouse off right then.

The elevator began its descent. He knew he had precious little time to say something to Emma to make her want to ... to what? Talk to him? Have dinner with him? Spend sweaty, tangled hours in bed? All of the above were exactly what he wanted, but he doubted Emma would be receptive to any of his suggestions just yet.

“What?” Emma asked, one delicate brow arched.

“Nothing,” Seth mumbled, inwardly kicking himself. Yeah, he was going to make a lot of headway now. What he needed was time, time to convince Emma--

The elevator jolted to a stop and they plunged into darkness. Emma gripped his arm and he instinctively wrapped his arms around her, drawing her close. Overhead the emergency lights clicked on, but they provided little more illumination than a pair of candles.

Emma immediately moved out of his arms but no more than a foot away. She glanced uneasily at the darkened display panel. “What happened?”

Seth shrugged, not at all minding the change of events. It was almost as if fate was working with him to win Emma over, giving him exactly what he needed. Time. “Power outage maybe, from the storm.”

Ignoring him, Emma opened the console under the display and retrieved the phone. She waited, tapping her fingers on her leg. Seth couldn’t help but remember how soft and persistent her tapered fingers felt sliding up and down his shaft. After two minutes, during which she didn’t so much as look at him, Emma tucked the phone away, her shoulders sagging. “No one is answering.”

Seth bit back a smile. She was clearly not happy about the situation. He on the other hand couldn’t have been more pleased. “George is probably trying to fix the problem. I’m sure he’ll be back at his desk before long.”

Something in his tone must have alerted her to his increasing

pleasure. She poked a finger at his chest. “You’re enjoying this aren’t you?”

Seth sensed it was a rhetorical question, but couldn’t help responding. “It’s not every day a man gets trapped in a confined space with a beautiful woman. I’d be a fool not to appreciate it.”

“You mean take advantage of it, don’t you?” she asked innocently, her eyes unreadable.

“Well there is a saying about not looking a gift horse in the mouth.”

Her eyes flashed. “Cut the crap. You’re talking to me remember. I know what you’re like, what your type is after.”

He knew what she was hinting at. And it was as much his fault that he let rumors get spread around as anyone else’s. A man didn’t date a stripper, even if it was just once, without opening himself to a certain amount of speculation. “And what is it you think I’m after?”

Emma turned away from him. “Just forget it. How about we don’t talk, okay?”

“And if we’re here all night?”

She tensed. “Then we’ll spend it in silence.”

“Have it your way,” Seth said and sat down on the floor.

It took less than two minutes for her to give up staring at the closed doors before she sank down beside him, careful not to touch him. “So how’s work?” he ventured.

Emma countered with, “How’s Celia?”

Seth didn’t know whether to be annoyed at her belief that something

had happened between him and Celia or pleased that she obviously still cared enough to be jealous. “I wouldn’t know.”

Emma snorted.

“I told you before, nothing happened.”

“Didn’t look that way to me,” she snapped, edging farther away.

Even though he’d done so before, Seth felt compelled to defend himself. “*She* kissed me.” But his response only earned him a you-expect-me-to-believe-that? glare. Not for the first time Seth considered how it must have looked to Emma. If it had been him walking in and seeing another man’s mouth on Emma, he’d have knocked the man out. Still, he didn’t know what he could say or do to make her believe him.

Yeah, Celia had kissed him, and he hadn’t stopped her either. Not because he wanted it, but because he wanted to be sure that his attraction to Emma had more to do with Emma herself than how hot she made him. As far as office sexpots went, Celia was prime. But when she had kissed him she’d aroused nothing more than fleeting male interest. His blood didn’t simmer, his cock didn’t ache to be buried inside her, and his heart didn’t pound furiously just tasting her lips. With Emma it did all that and much more.

How could he make her see that?

\* \* \* \*

*Where the hell is George?* Emma wondered, as she replaced the phone for the third time. She had to get out of here. Now. She could feel Seth's eyes on her, silently begging her to look at him. How could she? Meeting those dark green eyes made her relive the crushing disappointment he caused her, not to mention the hours they'd spent together in bed until exhaustion forced them to cease their love play. How many times had he made her come? Too many to count--and not at all worth recalling now or ever again. She'd known what she was getting herself into, yet she'd foolishly convinced herself it was different between them, more than just sex. But Seth Fraser was a player and she'd been just another one of his conquests.

But why was it so hard to make herself believe that?

"Emma?"

And why couldn't he let her get on with her life? Their brief affair ended almost a month ago, yet he continued to seek her out, corner her, making it perfectly clear with every heated gaze that he remembered what she looked like naked, how she whispered, begged and screamed for him.

Her breasts tightened and a soft throb built between her legs. How could she still want him when she knew he had cast her aside without a thought? Seth felt nothing for her but lust, and as appealing as sex with him was, she wasn't willing to sacrifice her heart.

"You were right," Seth said quietly.

Emma stood up to put as much distance between them as she could,

the small space making her increasingly aware of Seth. “About what?” she asked, forgetting her decision not to talk to him.

“Celia. I didn’t initiate the kiss, but I didn’t stop it either.”

Emma looked over at him. His eyes were solemn, regretful. What game was he playing now?

“But what you walked in on was all that ever happened between her and me.”

Emma wished she could believe him. “I think you have me confused with someone who cares where you’re shoving your dick.”

Seth flinched and Emma regretted her cruelty, but maybe it was needed to get through to him, to make him understand she wasn’t interested in being just a play toy for him.

She reached for the phone again, only to be jerked around. Seth’s face was rigid, his eyes glittering. “Shit Emma, what do I have to say to make you believe me? I haven’t touched another woman since you. Do you want to hear that I regret kissing Celia? I don’t--”

Anger seethed inside Emma. “You bastard--”

“I don’t regret it because it made me realize how crazy I am about you.”

Emma reeled from his declaration, ordering herself not to believe him. “Liar,” she whispered, her throat squeezing so tight she could barely breathe. Tears burned behind her lids. Why was he doing this?

“I’m not lying,” Seth insisted. He dragged a hand through his hair.



“Fuck. You deserve better than me, I know. You deserve flowers and candles and a thousand long nights of endless pleasure, and I haven’t given you that. But I want to.”

Was he telling the truth? Emma squeezed her eyes shut wishing she could be sure. Slowly, she opened her eyes, found him watching her. Fierce, emerald pools implored her to believe.

Her heart stuttered. “Seth--”

“Don’t,” he ordered, hauling her against him. “Don’t talk. Feel.” He bent his head, his mouth devouring hers, licking, nibbling. She managed not to respond for half a second before her desire spiraled out of control. Unable to hold back, Emma kissed him back, her tongue plundering his mouth with equal demand. Her mind warned her to be cautious, guard her heart.

To hell with caution. What she needed was Seth. She needed to feel his hands touching her everywhere, to remind her how good they were together. Her breath hissed out as he slid his hand under her blouse, splaying it across her back. That simple touch had her clit throbbing.

“Oh God, Emma.” Seth murmured against her throat. His tongue was like liquid velvet. She wanted to feel it slide between her damp folds, suck the sensitive nub already wet for him. Reason argued that she should stop, but she couldn’t, not now. Every nerve ending hummed, straining toward an earth-shattering release she knew only Seth could give her.

“I’m sorry,” he added.

*For what?* she wondered, right before he ripped open her blouse. Her

breasts swelled and ached; her nipples puckered anxious to be free. His hands closed around them, fingering the tight peaks through the black lace, tugging them until she thought that quaking pleasure alone would make her come.

“Seth,” she moaned. “Don’t ... don’t stop touching me.” Her knees jelled, but she held tight to his shoulders, holding herself so tight she thought she’d snap in two. He groaned, unclipping her bra and sucking hard on her nipple. Emma arched against him and buried her fingers in his hair, drawing him closer.

“Emma, if I don’t feel your hand on my cock, I’m going to die.” Grinning, she slid her hand down and cupped his engorged length through his pants. The quivering tightness between her legs clutched, already imagining Seth driving inside her.

Seth captured her mouth, kissing her fast, hard and deep. Even in her dreams she hadn’t imagined a reunion so heated, so hungry. In between breaths, she worked to remove his belt and slide his zipper down. She shoved her hand into his silk boxers. He trembled in her hand, and she felt Seth suck in a breath before growling and dropping his head to lick her breasts and tug her nipples between his teeth. Shuddering, Emma worked her grip up and down his shaft, teasing the head to the same pulsing rhythm pitching through her center.

“I need to taste you,” Seth murmured, dropping to his knees. He yanked her skirt down, followed by her panties. “Step out,” he ordered and

Emma readily obeyed. She felt her own warm juices slid down the inside of her thighs. Then his mouth was on her skin, skating a hot trail up her leg. She spread her legs wider, as much to give him more room as to stabilize herself. Every limb trembled, quaking to feel his mouth on her. Seth caressed her thighs, moving higher, hovering, but not touching.

“Seth, please,” she begged.

“What? Tell me what you want, Emma.” He parted her folds and blew a warm breath across the sensitive flesh. She would have grabbed him and buried his face against her, if she didn’t need to maintain the iron grip on the side rail to keep herself upright.

“Tell me, Emma,” he coaxed, his lips skimming her blistering core. The tip of his tongue flicked across her clit, and she tensed with the shivering pleasure at the intimate contact.

“I want...” He traced her wet slit with one feather-light finger. “I want...” She couldn’t think, couldn’t concentrate on anything but the delicious wave close to swallowing her.

“You want what? My lips, my tongue, my teeth?”

“Yes. All of it, now. Please now.” She wouldn’t, couldn’t last much longer. She cried out when his mouth finally sealed her damp center, bucked against his ravaging tongue. He licked and then suckled at her clit, devouring her with feverish lips. Emma squeezed her eyes shut, the mounting pleasure almost too much to stand. Seth slid first one and then another finger into her, moving them to the same frenzied tempo at which

she rocked against him.

A searing tide of pleasure jetted through her, and her muscles quivered before everything fell away. Seth must have sensed the moment she could no longer hold herself up, for he swept her into his arms, cradling her to his chest. Her breath was coming fast and she fought to regain control of her still spiraling senses.

“Seth,” she began.

He kissed her cheek. “I missed you, Emma.”

She swallowed past the tightness in her throat. “I missed you, too.” She wrapped her arms around him, bringing his mouth to hers. His tongue stroked hers and she felt herself coil tight once more. He groaned and shifted, rubbing his still hard cock against her. Despite the flood of sensations channeling through her from her orgasm, she wanted more. Only this time she wanted to feel him inside her when she came.

Once more Emma slid her hand into his pants, grinning when she felt him shudder at the contact.

“Easy, baby,” she teased. “We’re not through yet.”

Beneath their feet, the elevator jerked to life, resuming its descent.

### Chapter Three

“Shit,” Emma cursed, turning away from him. Seth didn’t move, only stared at her, a goofy grin curving his lips. Yanking on her skirt, she searched for the panties Seth had tossed aside. “Don’t just stand there.”

Still grinning, Seth zipped his pants, then leaned back and crossed his arms. She frowned at him over her shoulder as she jerked her arms into her blouse. Why was it with Seth she always found herself doing something so reckless, so unlike her? Like having sex, or almost anyway, in an elevator. Emma crammed her bra into her briefcase and pulled on her jacket, tying the sash to conceal the fact that most of the buttons to her blouse lay scattered on the elevator floor. And damn it, she didn’t have time to pick them up. Where the hell was her underwear?

Seconds before the doors rolled open, Seth hauled her into his arms and kissed her. Her muscles quivered under the liquefying pleasure of his warm lips sliding over hers. She was more than tempted to hit the emergency stop button. The need to have him, to feel him moving inside her, smoldered under her skin like an oxygen-starved flame.

“Need these?” Seth asked, tucking her underwear into her coat

pocket. She opened her mouth to reply when the doors opened.

George was waiting for them. “Mr. Fraser? I didn’t realize you were still here. Were you two trapped in there?” The poor man’s hands were shaking even though he kept them close to his sides. “I’m real sorry. I didn’t know. I would have--”

“Don’t worry about it,” Seth interrupted with a smile. “We’re just fine. Better than fine actually.” Seth smiled, a lazy and completely sexy curving of the lips. Emma thought her cheeks might burst from the wide grin she returned. She’d had no idea when she crawled out of bed this morning her day would end like this.

“All set?” Seth asked.

Emma nodded. “Goodnight, George.”

“Goodnight, Ms. Myles. Mr. Fraser.”

Seth took her hand and led her through the outside doors into the pouring rain. They were both soaked within seconds, but neither seemed inclined to move beyond the front of the building. Would they go their separate ways now? Part of her was terrified to leave him. What if this had been some unbelievable dream and she would wake up in her bed alone the second he walked away?

“Seth,” she began, but no words came to mind. There would be more than just tonight, wouldn’t there? A lump lodged in her throat. What if Seth had no intentions of reestablishing a relationship? No. Seth had feelings for her, Emma reminded herself. He said he was crazy about her and she

believed him.

Raindrops streamed down her face and she blinked through wet lashes. Her heart tapped in her chest when he drew his thumb along her jaw. “Come home with me.” His voice was deep, needy.

“My aunt--”

“Will be fine without you,” Seth finished.

Emma nibbled her bottom lip. What if she agreed and after tomorrow he didn’t want her any longer? “But I don’t have anything with me.”

“So we’ll stop by your place. You can pick up whatever you want and let your aunt know where you’ll be. Please,” he added, his green eyes tender and eager. “I’ll beg if you want me to.”

“On your knees?”

Seth nodded seriously. “If that’s what it takes.”

An image of Seth begging for much more than that had Emma smiling. “That won’t be necessary. But I do reserve the right to make you beg later.”

“Fine by me. Very, very fine.”

“Okay.” The weight on her chest lifted and Emma reached up and pressed her lips to his. Seth deepened the kiss, sweeping his tongue into her mouth, grinding his erection against her sensitive mound.

She broke away on a moan. “We need to go. Before...” she trailed off as he kissed his way down her neck.

“Uh-huh,” he mumbled and then brushed a kiss across her forehead.

“But I do hope you aren’t planning on getting much sleep tonight.”

Laughing, Emma followed him to his car and slid into the passenger seat of his navy BMW.

Seth backed out of his reserved space. “Why were you working so late tonight anyway?”

“My CEO is a real slave driver,” she teased.

“Someone should talk to him.”

Emma smiled. “Volunteering?”

“Possibly, though I do think the conversation would be a little one sided.”

“Of course,” Emma added, “that could work to your benefit. And I happen to know he is very approachable.”

His gaze slid from the road to her face. “And what else do you know about your CEO?”

Feeling bold and entirely too wanton, Emma shifted in her seat, drawing up one leg to purposely give Seth an eyeful of the inside of her thigh. His glanced down as she adjusted her skirt to add to the tantalizing view, hoping it drove him crazy. He whipped his attention back to the road. Emma noticed his knuckles were white and gripped the wheel like it was some kind of lifeline. Pleased with herself, she untied the sash of her coat and opened it just enough to reveal the tops of her breasts.

She fanned her face. “Is it getting hot in here?”

Seth stared straight ahead. “I’ll turn on the AC.”



“Oh, I can get it,” Emma said and leaned forward, letting her jacket fall open. She felt rather than saw his gaze dip to the peaks that hardened under the frigid blast of air. Instead of settling her hands back in her lap, she rested her palm on the inside of his leg, just above his knee. His muscles bunched, encouraging her to move higher. Seth’s attention was still firmly fixed on driving. She traced a path to the top of his thigh, skimming her thumb over his groin. His jaw clenched and she heard his rapid intake of breath.

Seth gripped her hand. “Emma if you don’t stop, I’m going to embarrass myself.”

Laughing, she drew back. “I’ll give you a reprieve. For now.” But later, she promised herself, she would make him pay.

\* \* \* \*

Only by a thread did Seth manage to keep control of his libido. More than once, he contemplated pulling over and taking her in the car, only to stop himself at the last second. After what they had been through, he wanted her to have more than that, feel like she meant more to him than just a quickie in a parked car. Not that the idea didn’t have merit. His cock twitched in his pants at the thought. But there would always be tomorrow or the next day. Or the next.

Seth turned down her street and parked behind Clara’s lime-green

sedan. Outside the door, Emma turned around. “I can’t go in there. She is going to take one look at me and know what we were doing.”

Seth held back his laughter at the concern in her voice. One would think she was a sixteen-year-old about to sneak back into the house, instead of a twenty-eight-year-old woman with her own life. “Maybe she’ll be asleep already.”

“You think so?” she asked hopefully.

Averting his face to hide his smile, Seth reached past her and turned the knob. “It’s fine.” He squeezed her hand. “Just relax. You’re a big girl now.”

Emma rolled her eyes before opening the door. Clara was sitting on the sofa facing the front door, knitting needles poised in self-defense.

“Gracious, you scared the crap out of me, Emma.” She caught sight of Seth behind Emma, and her eyes widened before she concealed her surprise or was it disappointment? “Evening, Seth.”

He nodded, suddenly nervous about facing Emma’s aunt away from the office. “Hi.”

“I’m just gonna grab a few things,” Emma said to Seth, then turned to her aunt. “I’m staying at Seth’s tonight.”

Relief flooded Seth. For a second he’d been afraid Emma would disappear, leaving him to tell Clara. He watched Emma hurry down the hall to her bedroom, admiring the sway of her behind. He wanted to follow her, memories of the things they had done in her bed stirring his blood.

Clara cleared her throat. Seth rocked back on his heels, a guilty warmth creeping up his neck.

“So, you two are back together again?”

“I think so. You okay with that?”

For endless seconds, Clara continued knitting without looking at him. If she didn’t approve, he wondered how Emma would deal with that. Her aunt was the only family she had. Her mother died when she was just a child and her father had left without a word two years before that. A twisting nausea stewed his insides at the thought of Emma being forced to choose between him and her aunt’s approval.

“You know I’ve always been you’re biggest fan, Seth.”

Why did he sense a very big ‘but’ coming on?

“But if you hurt her again, I’ll use your ass for dart practice and your pecker as a bungee cord. Do we understand each other?”

Seth swallowed, his aforementioned body parts cringing at the way she stabbed her knitting needle in his direction. “Perfectly,” his voice squeaked out.

“Good. I want you to know I’m not harboring any hard feelings toward you. Sometimes these things work out for the best.”

Seth got the impression she wasn’t talking about Emma, but before he could figure it out, Emma was by his side. She’d changed into a pair of faded gray sweat pants and pink T-shirt. Neither showed off the curves he knew to be hidden beneath, but his body responded as though she were

naked, his hands burning to run over every inch of her creamy skin.

“We should go,” Emma suggested.

“Goodnight, Clara,” Seth ventured, again perplexed by the regretful expression on her face. Something niggled in the back of his mind. Emma grabbed his hand and tugged him toward the door.

“I’ll call you tomorrow,” Emma called to her aunt as they stepped out onto the porch and into the rain.

Seth’s mind shifted from Clara’s odd behavior to the fact that Emma hadn’t bothered with another bra. Her nipples strained against the pink cotton and a burst of lust shot through him. Grinning at his good fortune for winding up trapped in the elevator with Emma, he swung her over his shoulder and carried her to the car. He slapped her ass before setting her beside the passenger door.

As Seth unlocked the door, then rounded the hood to climb in himself, he couldn’t shake the feeling he was forgetting something very important, something that might crush his and Emma’s fragile bond.

\* \* \* \*

It was well past midnight by the time they picked up a pizza and reached his apartment. If she hadn’t been carrying her overnight bag and him the pizza, Emma doubted they would have been able to keep their hands off each other in the elevator. Just as she knew she would never be able to

ride in another one, alone or with Seth, without recalling the feel of his hot tongue sliding between her legs and the explosion of pleasure it brought. A delicious shudder coursed through her at the memory.

Seth opened the door and crossed to his answering machine, leaving her to follow. He pushed play on the machine before depositing the pizza on the kitchen counter. Emma left her bag at the door as she listened to Seth's sister's voice come over the speaker asking him to call her as soon as he could, something about work.

Seth grabbed plates from the cupboard. "There's wine or beer in the fridge."

Emma crossed to the fridge and withdrew a bottle of white wine. "Shouldn't you call your sister?"

"I'm sure it can wait until morning, seeing as it's after midnight already." He handed her glasses, and she filled them and then followed him to the table with the remainder of the bottle tucked under her arm. The first sip zinged pleasantly down her throat. She followed it with another before snagging a piece of pizza from the box. Seth had already devoured a full slice by the time she took her first bite.

"You're cute when you're shoving food into your mouth." Emma pushed a trailing string of cheese into her mouth.

"I told you I was starving."

Seth took another piece and refilled their glasses. Had she already drank a full glass? An answering warmth radiated from her stomach.

Smiling at him over her glass, Emma took another long drink before polishing off the last of her pizza and reaching for a second slice.

“We should save some of this for later,” she said, licking pizza sauce from her fingers. She caught Seth staring at her and sucked suggestively at the tips.

Shifting in his chair, he cleared his throat. “You have plans for working up our appetites again, do you?”

“Well,” Emma pushed her plate aside and drained her wine without breaking eye contact. “I might have a few ideas.” The wine flowing through her veins loosened her muscles, making her both sleepy and adventurous. Seth filled her glass again.

“You’re not trying to get me drunk, are you?”

“Darlin’, I don’t have to. You’re doing fine all on your own.” He stood up and held out a hand. Bone-deep longing pitched through her. She licked her lips and allowed him to lead her into the living room. He stopped in front of the stereo long enough to hit play. She didn’t recognize the hypnotic melody, but she felt the slow, sexy rhythm as it seeped into her skin. Emma shivered.

Taking her glass, Seth sank onto the couch. “Take off your shirt,” he instructed.

“Is this the part where I say, ‘Yes, Master’?”

He leaned forward, his gaze intense as he stared at her chest. Under the lust-filled scrutiny, her nipples peaked, chaffing against the cotton.

“Would that be so bad, Emma?” His voice was low, sensual. He toyed with the hem of her shirt, pushing it up just high enough to expose her navel.

Gripping her waist, Seth drew her close enough to press his lips to her abdomen, tracing an invisible pattern with his tongue. Emma shuddered, flashbulbs of electricity shooting through her at the contact.

“God, you make me so horny,” Seth whispered. The words were hot on her skin.

“I’m not through yet,” she promised, pushing him back against the couch. Whether it was just being with Seth or the wine she’d consumed, Emma felt strong, energized and in control. She certainly wasn’t dressed for a strip tease, but that was exactly what she intended to do. For courage, she gulped down the rest of her wine, keeping her back to him.

The bass of the music increased just enough and she felt her body sway to the beat. She looked at Seth over her shoulder, pleased to find him sitting straight, an edginess to his otherwise unruffled personality.

Spurred by his interest and the alcohol thickening her blood, Emma ran her fingers through her hair and slid them down her sides as she turned to face him. She raised them to her breasts, palming them through her T-shirt. When she rolled her taut nipples between her fingers, Seth groaned and reached for her. Emma backed away him. “No touching.”

“That’s not fair.”

She dropped her hands. “I can stop.”

“Don’t. Don’t stop. I’ll...” He visibly swallowed. “Just don’t stop.”

Like Seth had done earlier, Emma fingered the hem of her shirt, each time tugging it higher only to let it fall. Certain Seth would rip it off if she teased him with it much longer, Emma finally pulled it over her head. Instead of feeling exposed and uncertain, as she'd expected, she felt incredibly sexy and wanted. She didn't take as long to remove her pants, turning to show him her behind, only a thin strip of blue lace from her thong divided the cheeks. Seth hissed out a breath, making her glad she'd chosen them.

Facing him once more, Emma alternated between playing with her nipples and sliding her hand between her legs, cupping her sex. Seth's hand tightened on his leg, but he made no move to touch her. On her knees she straddled him, grinding against him. His arousal strained against the designer suit, pulsing against her moist cleft.

Trembling with a fiery need, Emma loosened Seth's tie, keeping her breasts near, but not quite touching Seth's mouth. She wanted to push the aching buds into his mouth, demand him to suck, and she would. Very soon.

"Emma, I can't do this any longer. I have to taste you."

"No. We're playing this my way."

"Please, baby. I want to touch you."

Shaking her head, she gripped the top of his shirt and ripped it open, sliding her palms across his chest. Beneath her fingers his nipples hardened. She lowered her mouth and teased her tongue around the raised points as she continued to rub herself against his groin.



He grabbed her waist, ceasing her movements. “Emma,” he warned. His eyes were dark, dangerous. She leaned forward and nipped his bottom lip. “You’ll get your turn.”

Sensing she wouldn’t be able to stop him for much longer, she slid her hands to his waist and unbuttoned his pants. His cock throbbed through his boxers, and Seth groaned when she pushed the material aside and freed him.

“Damn it. I want to fuck you hard, fast and deep. Don’t you want to feel me pumping into you Emma?”

Fire pooled between her legs. Oh yes. But she wasn’t done yet. “Soon,” she answered, her breath heavy and uneven.

Emma tunneled her fingers into his hair. “Take my nipples in your mouth, Seth.”

His body tensed. “Do you want me to suck them?”

She nodded. “Hard.”

Seth complied, drawing first one sensitive peak into his mouth and then the other. His tongue laved and his teeth nibbled before he sucked them into his hot, greedy mouth.

“Touch my ass,” she commanded, her entire body on fire and eager for more. Keeping his mouth trained on her breasts, his hands cupped her bottom, kneading as she continued to slide herself along his rock-hard length with only the scrap of lace separating them.

“I’m gonna drive it in you Emma, and you’re gonna scream for

more.”

Torn between the building sensations and the need to feel him between her legs, Emma clung to her determination. Kneeling in front of him, Emma wrapped her palm around his hard shaft and he jerked against the tender grip. Smiling at his response, her fingers circled the sensitive head before she lowered her head and stroked the smooth length with her tongue.

“Ah, damn. That feels fucking good,” Seth murmured, fisting his hands in her hair. Emma continued to lick and tease the velvety head, swirling her tongue around the throbbing tip.

Her own body started to thrum and a warm ache built between her legs. Already she could feel how wet she was and imagined him sinking his fingers deep inside her. She closed her mouth over him, loving the feel of the smooth shaft. She suckled him, drawing him into her mouth only to pull back when she knew he would have thrust deeper.

“Jesus, Emma,” Seth cursed, rocking his hips against her mouth. Emma knew he was very close to orgasm and she pushed ruthlessly on, licking and sucking. As she tugged and stroked him with her tongue, her own need for release coiled tighter and tighter. All at once she swallowed him, sucking him hard and fast. Nearing delirium from the pleasure of it, Emma groaned when Seth slid his hand between her legs, ripped her underwear off and shoved his fingers into her hot, quivering folds. She moaned loud and deep against his cock, the rhythm of her mouth sliding

down him matching the pace of his fingers plunging into her.

“Yes, baby, yes,” he hissed, sliding his thumb along her slick center, finding her pulsing clit. She bucked against his hand, writhing toward the edge as she licked and swallowed, faster and faster. Her body tensed and she came in an almost violent wave, crying out his name. But he didn’t stop driving his fingers into her or grinding his pelvis against his mouth.

On a savage cry, Seth jolted up, and she tightened her grip around his length. His breath ragged, Seth relaxed against the seat. Watching him, Emma sat up with a satisfied smile curling her lips. He smiled back at her before drawing her into his lap and kissing her until she couldn’t form another coherent thought.

\* \* \* \*

Seth wrapped his arms around her, his blood still tearing through his system. “That was incredible,” he said when his breathing was once more under control. Emma raised her head long enough to give him a smug smile. He kissed it away and stroked her damp hair back from her face. The woman unleashed in him an all-consuming need to possess her and be possessed. After their first time together, he’d been shaken by that overwhelming desire. Now he embraced it, craved it the same way he craved air. He loved her eyes, her laughter, her body, the whimpering sound she made right before an orgasm rocked her. He frowned at the deep

wanting echoing in his chest. He wanted Emma like no woman before or possibly again, but that didn't mean he was ready for anything that serious, did it?

He felt Emma's stomach rumble against his belly. "Hungry already?"

Moving to the floor but not out of his reach, Emma tugged on her T-shirt. "I guess I burned off those first two slices. You want some?"

"How about you bring it into the bedroom?"

"Still haven't had enough?" she teased.

"Never."

She stood up and dropped a hard kiss on his mouth before retrieving the pizza. She glanced at him, noticing he still hadn't moved. And how could he? His entire body felt too relaxed.

Emma winked at him. "I can't promise there'll be any left for you if you don't drag your ass to bed."

"Yes, Master," he quipped, recognizing the glint in her eye. It was going to be a long night. He couldn't wait. His cock already back at attention, he followed her into the bedroom.

\* \* \* \*

Awaking with Emma nestled close to his side sent a swirling warmth straight to Seth's heart. This was exactly how it was meant to be.

The shrill sound of his cell phone made Emma stir. "Morning

already,” she mumbled.

“Stay in bed. I’ll be right back.”

She slid her hand across his chest, resting it over his heart. “You better be.”

Seth kissed her forehead before stepping into a pair of shorts and snapping his phone off his dresser. He should have turned the damn thing off. “Yeah,” he snapped, not caring if he sounded annoyed.

“Good morning to you too,” his sister’s sing-song voice chirped.

“This better be good.”

“Oh and what could I possibly be keeping you from? Soggy cereal and a sports update?”

“As a matter of fact--”

“You’re with a woman? That’s good, I guess. Didn’t know you were seeing anyone since--”

“It’s Emma.”

“Oh. Ooooh. Tell her I said hi.”

Seth glanced down the hall toward the bedroom. “I will just as soon as you tell me why you had to call early on Saturday morning. The kids get you up?”

“No. Daniel has them this weekend. I was going over some files last night and had a couple of questions about the severance packages.”

“And these need to be addressed right now because?”

“How about you just e-mail me the files so you can get back Emma.”

“I can handle that. But no more business calls until Monday. Consider me on vacation.”

His sister agreed and Seth hung up, heading toward his home office. He logged onto his computer and e-mailed her the requested information before leaning back in his chair.

Something clicked in his brain.

Aw shit. Seth pounded the keys, pulling up the appropriate file containing a list of people who’d been offered the severance package. His brain paused midway down the list.

Damn. Damn. Damn.

Clara Myles.

Emma was not going to be very happy with him.

## Chapter Four

How could he have forgotten? Clara would have been notified yesterday, which explained her odd behavior. What was it she'd said to him? She didn't have any hard feelings? She might not, but Emma damn well would. Her aunt was her only family, and Seth doubted she would be anything but supremely pissed off.

Seth took a few minutes to look over Clara's file, noting the slight changes that had been recorded about her performance--most revolved around being assigned tasks and forgetting details about the projects. The decline had been overlooked because of the years she'd been working for the company. Her superior had recommended her for the severance package after an error last month almost cost the company a client.

Sighing, Seth turned off his computer and pushed away from his desk. After last night, the thought of saying anything to ruin things between him and Emma made him ill. Clara obviously hadn't mentioned anything, but it was only a matter of time. He should go out and tell her now, get it over with. They could talk about this. Emma would understand. She was a reasonable, levelheaded businesswoman.

He rested his forehead against the closed door, dreading opening it. Christ. She was going to rip him to pieces. Maybe she was still in bed and he could just slip in beside her and deal with this later. Much, much later. Like after he told her he loved her. She couldn't hate him for this if she knew how much he cared for her, could she?

Seth paused. He loved Emma? His lungs exhaled air, but drew no more in. Love? Jesus, was it possible that in their short time together, he'd fallen in love with her? It made sense and explained why he hadn't been able to move on or forget about the way she stirred his mind, heart and blood.

He was in love with Emma Myles. Why the hell hadn't he figured it out sooner? Seth found himself grinning. He wanted her, all of it on a permanent basis. The whole package, complete with a ridiculous white picket fence, mixed breed mutt and kids.

Seth sucked in a breath waiting for panic at the idea of being tied down like that to sneak up on him. Nothing. Just the erratic pounding of his heart as he came to terms with a truth he suspected part of him had known for a while now. He yanked open the door, euphoria over the realization oozing through his veins like a drug. Then reality intruded and he remembered Emma was about to get very angry with him.

Maybe he was overreacting. Maybe she would take the news better than he imagined. Yeah, and maybe pigs really could fly.

The smell of coffee reached his nostrils when he finally stepped out



of his office. Emma wasn't in the kitchen or the bedroom. The sound of running water told him she was in the shower. He'd just pop in and tell her they needed to talk when she was finished. Nothing serious, just a little heart to heart, maybe start with asking her to move in with him. And after she told him how much she loved him too, he'd tell her about Clara.

Sure, she'd be upset, but she'd get over it because they had a future together. Satisfied to have it all worked out in his head, Seth opened the bathroom door. Steam warmed his skin as his eyes sought her out. Through the frosted glass, he watched Emma run the bar of soap between her breasts and down to her belly. Lust stirred in his groin and his cock instantly hardened. He looked away. Now was not the time. They needed to talk first, clear the air and then--

Emma bent over giving him a clear view of her ass and the delicate folds hiding her clit. His balls quivered at the thought of slapping against her firm, little bottom while he pumped into her from behind. Forgetting his resolve, Seth stripped off his shorts and slid the door open. She didn't realize he was there until he grabbed her hips and brought her back to his chest. The tip of his erection probed her slippery ass, sliding down the wet slit between her legs.

Emma sucked in a breath and nudged herself against him. Her hands closed over his, guiding them up to her breasts. Seth tugged the taut peaks, rolling them until she squirmed.

"More," she whispered, and his cock demanded to be buried deep

inside her.

He walked her to end of the stall and pressed her against the tile. She started to turn around, but he forced her flat against the wall. “No. I’m going to shove it so deep in you, you’re gonna beg me to stop.”

“So stop talking already.”

Seth grinned and bit the side of her neck. She arched against him. In one fluid motion, he thrust inside her, growling at the tight fit. Sheathed by her moist center, her muscles contracted around him and he knew he wouldn’t last long. Hands on her hips, he drove into her, rocking her back to meet each thrust. “Yes, yes,” she murmured. “Harder.”

Complying, he slammed inside her as deep as he could. “Touch yourself, Emma. I want to feel you come.”

She nodded then shook her head. He pounded into her again. “Do it,” he ordered.

Moaning, she slipped her hand between her legs and rubbed her clit. Her fingers intentionally teased the head of his penis as she stroked herself. Emma’s cries became more fevered, her whimpering driving him closer to orgasm. He pumped faster, streaks of light blurring behind his closed lids. Seth shivered as he thrust into her over and over again. She was so tight, so hot he could die right now, just from the blissful pleasure of fucking her. Emma arched against him, shouting her release, but he didn’t stop. His insides coiled tight and with one last thrust he came inside her.

Breathing heavy, his heart pounding much too quickly, Seth rested his

head on her shoulder.

“How much longer do you think we can keep this up?” she asked, her voice low and throaty.

“I don’t know. A couple of lifetimes maybe.”

Laughing, she turned in his arms, slid her mouth over his. The tip of her tongue mated with his and he held tight to her. Even just kissing Emma drove him wild. How had he managed to spend the last month without her in his bed or his life?

“You finish showering. I’m going to start breakfast.”

Seth shook his head. “You don’t have to. We could go out.”

Her smile made his chest catch. “I want to.”

Seth nodded, stepping under the hot spray while she toweled off.

When the door closed and he was once again alone, Seth cursed. He had to be the biggest asshole in the world. He had come in with the intention of getting everything out in the open and instead he’d caved to baser demands and took her against the Goddamn shower wall. He might as well string himself up now and save Emma the trouble.

Unless, unless he called Clara, told her there was some horrible mistake, that she wasn’t being let go. Emma would never have to know. Even as the plan started to form, he pushed it aside. No, letting Clara go had been a business decision, not his, but he had to support his managers. If he started challenging their decisions just because they affected his personal life, it would go against everything he’d built within the company.

By the time he finished his shower and pulled on a T-shirt and jeans, his stomach was tight and his chest ached. Emma was on the phone when he walked into the kitchen. Her face was angled away from him, but he heard her say, “We’ll talk more as soon as I get home.”

Seth noticed her knuckles were white when she replaced the cordless phone on its base. Not good. “Everything, okay?” he asked, inwardly bracing himself.

Emma stormed past him. “What do you think?”

Seth caught her arm. “Can’t we talk about this?”

Her normally serene eyes shot daggers at him. “You fired my aunt. What else is there to say?”

“That has nothing to do with us.”

Her sharp laugh cut through him. “There *is* no us.” She jerked her arm free and strode down the hall to his bedroom. He went after her, hovering in the doorway while she hurriedly gathered her stuff.

“Emma, please. It was just business.” He regretted the callous words even before she whirled on him, staring at him like he was a stranger.

Her voice was too quiet. “There is nothing left to say.” She brushed past him.

Following on her heels, he shot out, “Decisions like this are made for a reason.”

Emma stopped, turned slowly to face him. “You’re saying my aunt deserved to be fired?”

“Yes. No. Damn it, she wasn’t fired. She was given a good severance package.” Why couldn’t she see this wasn’t his fault?

Her hand closed around the knob. “I hope that helps you sleep at night.” The door slammed behind her.

Christ. Shit. Double damn it all to fucking hell. Seth ran to the door and darted into the hallway. Emma stood in front of the elevator.

“Emma. Please come back inside. Let me explain.”

Her eyes were shining when she looked at him. “Will you give my aunt her job back?”

Seth closed his eyes, tried swallowing past the rock lodged in his throat. “That’s not my call.”

The chime sounded just before the doors opened. Emma slipped inside. “At least one of us is capable of making a decision.”

A vise tightened on his chest. “Don’t do this. I...” Love you.

The doors closed before he could finish. He punched the metal doors before turning back to his apartment. He’d fix this. He’d be damned if he let fate give her back to him only to tear her away again. Somehow he’d fix this.

\* \* \* \*

“What do you mean you’re leaving?” Emma stared at her aunt. It had been less than two weeks since Clara had been let go and, although her aunt

didn't appear disappointed or depressed by the change, Emma knew she had to be putting on a positive face for her benefit.

"I'm taking a vacation. My first in nearly ten years."

"But--"

Clara sat down on the edge of the bed beside Emma. "Stop worrying about me. I told you I'm fine."

"You can't be fine. After what he did--"

Clara tsked. "Seth is not responsible for what happened."

"The hell he's not." The anger that still burned inside her at his betrayal was the only thing keeping Emma from falling to pieces. She knew it was just a matter of time before her heart finally gave up on the foolish fantasy of them working this out. It had been two weeks and he hadn't called or tried to see her, even at work. He'd obviously moved on, not caring that he had ruined her aunt's life and broken her heart all over again.

"Which swimsuit should I take? The red or the blue? I should take both, shouldn't I?"

Emma glanced from the open suitcase in the middle of the bed to her aunt. "Running away won't help. You'll still have to deal with this when you get back."

Frowning, Clara took Emma's hand. "Is that what you think I'm doing?"

She shrugged. "You won't talk about this, about what happened. What else am I to think?"

Clara sat beside her. “I was going to wait until I got back, after I had more time to think about it myself, before I told you.”

Something in her aunt’s voice had Emma’s pulse picking up speed. “Tell me what?”

“Seth’s people made the right decision letting me go. I saw the signs, but foolishly ignored them, denying the truth right in front of my face. I should have quit before they had no choice but to let me go, but I didn’t want to believe it was happening.”

Emma’s stomach swirled nervously. “What are you talking about?” She told herself she didn’t want to know, didn’t want to deal with whatever her aunt was facing.

“The doctors think I’m in the very early stages of Alzheimer’s.” At Emma’s stricken expression she pressed on. “Nothing conclusive. They’ll run more specific tests when I get back. I just wanted time to process it all first.”

Tears burned behind Emma’s eyes and her throat squeezed painfully.

“So you see none of this is Seth’s fault.”

Shaking her head, Emma stood up. Her aunt was sick and yet she was planning a vacation and trying to fix things between her and Seth. The woman truly did have some screws loose.

“I’m going with you,” Emma decided. “We’ll spend some time on the beach, do the whole tourist thing. It’ll be fun.”

Clara shook her head. “How the hell am I going to be able to hook up

with someone if you are hanging around?”

For the second time in less than five minutes her aunt had managed to shock her.

“Besides,” Clara continued, “you’re too uptight to be comfortable on a nude beach anyway.”

Emma’s jaw dropped open. “A nude beach?”

“Damn straight. Always wanted to check one out, see all those masculine packages on full display.”

The flurry of emotions channeling through Emma shifted and she was torn between tears and laughter.

“Now, let me finish packing. My flight leaves very early tomorrow morning so I’m going to stay at the hotel tonight. And,” she quickly added when Emma started to object, “you can meet me for dinner tonight at the hotel. Let’s say later, around seven okay?”

Emma struggled to take everything in, so much information to process. The world around her blurred at the edges. She couldn’t deal with any of this.

“It’s going to be all right, sweetheart.” Clara folded her arms around her.

“Promise?” What a stupid request. It was her aunt’s life that was changing so radically, not hers. It should have been Emma doing the hugging, the reassuring.

“Cross my heart,” her aunt whispered.



\* \* \* \*

Emma stopped by the front desk long enough to pick up the key her aunt had left for her. She was running more than half an hour behind, but there had been so much to think about. After her aunt had shooed her from the room, Emma decided to run the few errands. Even those menial tasks hadn't helped take her mind off the chaotic emotions churning inside her.

And then she'd made the mistake of walking through the park to clear her head. She'd taken one look at the swings Seth had pushed her on and the dam holding back the tears finally collapsed. No one had been around to witness the breakdown, something she was immensely thankful for the second she shook off the personal pity-party and forced herself to get a grip. Her aunt had worse to face than she did and she would damn well be there for her.

Before showering and changing for dinner with aunt, she'd picked up the phone but couldn't make herself dial Seth's number. What would she say? What if he didn't want to talk to her? In the end she lost her courage.

Squaring her shoulders, determined to be as strong as she could for her aunt, Emma stepped into the elevator. She acknowledged the other occupant, a man dressed casually with a ball cap tugged low over his face, with a nod and fixed her attention on the closed doors. Her life was as normal as it was likely to get anytime soon and the faster she accepted that,

the better off she'd be--with or without Seth.

Beside her, the man pushed the emergency stop button and the elevator jerked to a stop.

Catching her balance by clutching the side rail, she glared at the man. "What are you doing?"

He removed his hat and smiled at her.

Emma's heart fluttered. Seth. "Are you crazy?"

He grinned at her. "Certifiable."

"What are you doing here?"

Shrugging, he reached for her. "Seems the only way to get your attention is to box you in."

Emma allowed him to touch her but didn't go into his arms. She had experienced just about as many surprises today as she could stand. The last thing she needed to do was throw herself at Seth for the sake of comfort, especially when she didn't know where they stood.

"Do you love me?" she blurted out. As naïve and insecure as it sounded, not to mention shocking even to her own ears, she had to know. If he didn't feel what she did, then she was better off alone instead of pining for something that could never be.

He didn't hesitate. "Yes."

That was it? Yes? Just, yes? He couldn't elaborate even a smidge? Ah, hell, who cares? Emma threw herself into Seth's arms, curling her hands around her neck. She jerked his mouth down to his, her lips melting against

the most amazing, steal-your-breath mouth she'd ever kissed.

And he loved her.

She broke away when she felt his lips curve into a smile. "What?"

"I didn't expect you to be putty in my hands by simply answering 'yes'."

Emma smiled back. "I guess I'm easy."

"And here I had this whole speech worked out."

"Oh? What were you going to say?"

"I was going to start by telling you I fell in love with you the night of the fair." He kissed her slow and long. "And I was going to finish with dragging you up to the room, which is empty thanks to your aunt's help, and not let you out until you told me you loved me too."

She moved away from him just long enough to depress the button to resume the elevator's climb. Her heart paraded through her chest. Slowly she raised her face, staring into sparkling green eyes. "I love you so much it terrifies me."

His mouth sealed hers in a fiery wave. "I'd say we're even then."

The elevator doors opened.

Emma stared up at him. "So can we still do the part where you drag me to the room?"

Laughing, he scooped her over his shoulder and smacked her behind. "Just try and stop me."

The End