



Riding the Line

PAIGE BURNS

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Paige Burns

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Dedication

Jen—this makes a total of three thank yous, but no matter how many more I write, there will never be enough. April—I couldn't have asked for a better cover! Love it! And to Jean, thanks for perfecting my first solo effort.

Prologue

“I’m not doing this,” Grant Callahan yelled at his father. “I will *not* be a pawn for your newest business venture.”

His father sat there behind the mahogany office desk with a subtle smirk on his face.

“You think this is funny?” The question ended with a squeak as Grant’s anger turned to rage. “You may have been able to dictate my life in the past. But it stops now.”

He turned and strode over to the bookcase filled with business awards and pictures of his father with politicians. He had to keep his cool. That last squeak would give his father fuel to prove he wasn’t yet a man. Another arrow the great Callahan could aim at his son to keep him under his thumb. Behind Grant, his father cleared his throat and rustled some papers on his desk. He was probably concerned that this time with Grant wasn’t bringing him any profit.

Grant let the bitterness of that thought wash his rage to a dull ache. He picked up a gilded silver frame with a picture of his family and the Taylors. Hannah Taylor and his mother, Grace, had grown up in the same circles, and when they married and had families, the friendship stuck. The summer of this picture they’d gone on vacation together to Branson, Missouri. It was one of the last times Grant remembered ever being happy.

He’d been twelve and the mystery of the Ozark Mountains had appealed to his need to belong somewhere. Those rugged mountains had called to him. He and the two Taylor sisters, ten-year-old Keira and six-year-old Lindsay, had spent the entire month hiking, swimming and getting into trouble. Their last day, he and the girls had begged their parents to take them to Silver Dollar City, an amusement park that boasted rides, an underground cavern, and captured the quaint feel of the locale. They’d taken the picture there, the girls in old-fashioned, floor-length dresses—*Little House on the Prairie*-style—the mothers in prim outfits, unadorned and completely the opposite of their “designer” lifestyle, and all of the men dressed up like gamblers—randy, slick men of the Old West.

He set the picture back down on the shelf. The Taylors were part of his problem. His father wanted to announce Grant’s engagement to Keira Taylor, along with the merger of the Callahan and Taylor empires. The only problem was that there wasn’t any engagement. Hell, he hadn’t even seen Keira since that vacation eight years ago. The ache in his gut panged in regret for what he was about to do.

“No,” Grant said softly.

“I’m sorry, Son? What was that?”

Grant turned to face the man who was forcing him to make a decision that would change life as he knew it.

“I said no. I’m leaving, Father.” He strode for the door. He opened it a fraction, then looked again at his father. Wrinkles furrowed the Great Callahan’s brow, and dark circles under his eyes gave testimony to the stress and hours he worked, away from his family. Grant would never be that kind of man. “And I’m never coming back.”

Chapter One

15 years later, Clayton, Missouri

“Hey, Grant.”

Grant Callahan stepped out from his garage to see Henry Cochran limping up the gravel drive.

“Got a package here for ya. Ol’ Tommy left it on my front porch, the dang bastard.” Henry handed Grant the box, then leaned over, hand on his knees, catching his breath.

“Thanks, Henry. You could have called, and I would’ve walked down to pick it up”

“Nah, gets me out of the house and away from *Her*.” With that Henry jerked his thumb back, gesturing towards his house at the bottom of the hill. “Her” was Henry’s sister Nancy. She was a nice woman to everyone but Henry. To Henry, she was the devil.

“Well, I’ll see ya later young man. Don’t want her comin’ up after me.”

Grant watched Henry amble away for a minute, then went back to the garage to finish working on his bike. He tossed the package onto his workbench, forgetting about it.

Two hours later, his knees sore from kneeling on the concrete floor, Grant stood and stretched. The ache in his knees was worth the time it had taken him to install a new carburetor on his bike. It was a 1961 Harley Davidson “Panhead” that he’d restored from the old rusted frame up. The new carburetor was the last part he’d needed before he could put the bike to a road test.

The manila package on the workbench caught his eye. Something, perhaps the sudden tightening in his gut, told him opening the package needed to come before the road test. He wiped his greasy hands on his jeans, then picked it up to see who it was from. The tightening in his gut grew stronger. It had been fifteen years since he’d seen the words that brought his carefully buried anger to the surface—Callahan Enterprises.

“Shit. How’d they find me?”

He ripped the package open and pulled out its contents—typed documents of some sort. He was about to toss them in the trash when a peach envelope fell out from the stack. His mother used peach stationary. For a moment he was thrown back in time, watching his mother at her desk addressing envelopes for a dinner party and letting him lick them closed. For a five-year-old, that had seemed an important job. Letting the memory fade, he bent down to pick up the envelope. In his mother’s handwriting were two simple words, *Please Read*.

* * * *

“Well, hell.”

Grant had showered, changed and grabbed a beer before sitting at the kitchen table to read his mother’s letter. The Great Callahan, Grant T. Callahan, Sr., his father, had died. Grant thought he should feel something for the man, but he didn’t. His mother’s letter had been a request for him to return. No, she’d pleaded with him to come back and let bygones be bygones. She was one of two people Grant missed from his previous life. He

felt a pang of regret at not having been there for his mother.

With his father gone, he could go and visit her for a month or two. He didn't really have anything or anyone here in Clayton that he couldn't leave for a bit. Rex manned his bike shop, *Just Ride*, and Henry could watch Chopper, his black lab.

He stood to make the necessary calls, but couldn't bring himself to call his mother just yet. He called Henry, but it was Nancy who answered.

"I'm sorry, Grant. Henry isn't supposed to have any excitement. You'll just have to find somebody else to take Chopper." Nancy hung up with an exasperated huff.

Rex was an easier phone call.

"Sure thing, boss. Maybe you'll getcha some in the city."

Grant laughed at that. He'd been so busy working on his bike it had been at least six months since he'd "gotten some." That was just a few too many judging by the stirring in his jeans at the mere thought of sex. Maybe this trip to the city would be about pleasure as much as business after all.

Two hours later, Grant and Chopper hopped in his black Chevy truck and started down the drive. He'd had no luck in finding anyone to take Chopper for that long, so he'd decided to bring him along. The company would be nice, even if it did slobber. He planned on staying in Chicago for two months, tops. That should give him enough time to help his mother get things squared away and get caught up with her. Then he could go back to his quiet life in the Ozarks. Back to his bike shop. Back to his crazy neighbors. Back to himself. Chicago had never held any appeal to him. Its hectic pace and mostly snobbish inhabitants had only made his decision to leave all that much easier. He loved his mother, but unfortunately, she fell under the snob category. Along with the Taylors, who'd been the other reason he'd left for the mountains.

Botching the forced engagement to Keira Taylor had been one of the best decisions of his life. Sure, she was a nice girl, her sister too for that matter. What was her name? Oh, yeah, Lindsay. She'd been a cute kid but a pain in the ass, too. That summer their families had spent together, Lindsay had tagged along everywhere. Even when he'd snuck off to go make-out with a girl he'd met, she'd popped up. Just as he was putting his hand up the girl's shirt, Lindsay had called out to him and ruined everything. On second thought, maybe she hadn't been that cute. He'd stick with "pain in the ass."

Chopper whined next to him and tried to do his customary three turns before settling down.

"Sorry, boy..." Grant reached over to scratch the dog behind the ears. "...We've got a long drive ahead of us so you'll just have to deal with it."

Chopper cocked his big head to the side and gave a low bark, as if to say, "Right, and I'll just drool on you, then," and proceeded to do just that. He stepped toward Grant and licked his ear.

"Get off, you big lug." Grant shoved him affectionately down on the seat, where Chopper finally settled down. Grant set the cruise. "Guess I better get comfortable, too, Chop. This will be the last time we have any peace for a while."

* * * *

The first thing Grant noticed when he pulled into the underground parking of the Callahan building was that the place was deserted except for his mother's limousine.

"Some things never change," he muttered to himself, wondering if his mother ever

left work. He got out of the truck and waited, while Chopper ran off some energy from being cooped up in the truck. Typically dogs were supposed to be leashed in the city, but in the enclosed, empty parking garage, he couldn't see what harm a dog could do. A blue Honda Accord pulled into the garage and parked over by the elevator. He was about to go find Chopper, who was taking way too long to do his business, when the car door opened and out stepped a leg. Not just any leg, mind you, but a slender, milky-white calf that slimmed down to a petite foot wrapped in a hot-pink, strappy sandal.

He'd always been a leg man, and since Chopper was taking his sweet time, he stood transfixed, wondering what would follow that enticing shoe and calf. He didn't have long to wait. As a woman stepped out of the car, his gaze followed the slender line of her legs up to a short, hot-pink and sherbet-orange skirt that swished when she stepped toward the back end of her car. He continued his perusal upward to a sweater a shade lighter than the orange on her skirt.

When she bent over to get something out of the trunk, his body lit on fire. Okay, so maybe he was an ass man. Her lush bottom peeked out from under pink and orange ruffles. The scrap of lace women called underwear nowadays did nothing to hide her pale bottom from him or anyone else that could have been looking. Speaking of anyone, Grant glanced around to see if there was anyone else enjoying the show the beauty was putting on. When he looked to his right, all he saw was a blur of black fur and lolling tongue galloping full on, straight for...

"Chopper ... no..." Grant lunged for the massive beast, but the dog slid through his hands and he landed with a painful jolt on the hard concrete. The woman spun around. Her face was etched in pure horror as she stood, frozen, watching his damn dog barrel toward her.

Chopper launched himself at her and knocked her sideways onto the garage floor. The attaché case she'd clutched flew out of her hands and landed with a resounding crash. It flew open and papers scattered everywhere. Picking himself up, Grant ran over to where Chopper was happily licking the woman's face. He had to give her credit. She wasn't screaming and kicking like most women would at having a one hundred-pound-plus canine pinning them down.

"Chopper, get off!" Grant grabbed hold of his collar and yanked the dog away. "Bad dog. Bad Chopper."

Chopper slumped down to his belly, ears laid back in a form of repentant submission. But Grant knew better. Knocking people down was one of Chopper's favorite things to do.

"Bad dog?" the woman said, still lying flat on the floor.

"Bad dog?" she repeated, this time with an edge of hysteria.

Grant reached out to help her up, and she pushed his hand away. Scooting up, once again giving Grant a peep show of her tight ass, she teetered a bit before straightening and took stock of herself. Her clothes were ruined. Big, black paw prints graced her sweater and her skirt was torn. She'd lost a shoe, too.

If Grant thought she'd been beautiful from afar, she was a knockout up-close, even disheveled and pissed off. In fact, the flash of anger he'd caught a glimpse of in her silver-blue eyes as she glared at him before straightening her clothes only served to heighten his sexual appetite. His cock lengthened and strained against the zipper of his jeans. When she finally stopped fidgeting and looked at him dead on, he saw a wave of

something he didn't understand flash across her eyes, but she masked that quickly with tantalizing anger.

"I see I have my work cut out for me," she said in a steely voice. "Not only will I have to change you..." she pointed a shaky finger at Grant. "...but your fucking beast as well."

"I'm sorry?" Grant said roughly, his mind scrambling to shift from wanting to take this woman on the hood of her car to what she'd just said. "Change me? Lady, you don't even know me or my dog, and for the record, his name's Chopper not 'fucking beast'." At the mention of his name, Chopper crawled up from where he'd been hiding behind Grant and sat next to him.

"Oh, but I do, Grant Callahan." The anger in her eyes quickly changed to mirth as her kissable lips hitched into a half smirk. "I've even seen you in your underwear."

That threw Grant off. He was pretty good about remembering the women he'd slept with. Or at least he thought he was. He stared at her for a moment, racking his brain and wondering how he could have forgotten such a magnificent woman. Forgotten or not, he was going to take advantage of the newly discovered "intimacy."

"Well, then..." Grant cocked his hip and matched her smirk. "Since we're on such intimate terms, you won't mind when I do this."

He took one step forward and grabbed hold of her arms. Pulling her flush against him, he crushed his lips to hers.

Chapter Two

Oh ... my ... God. Grant's tongue flicked out, probing Lindsay's lips, asking for entry.

I don't fucking believe this...

She acquiesced to Grant's tongue and opened her mouth, meeting him halfway in the searing kiss. The jolt of desire she'd felt when she'd looked up to see who owned the black brute that had attacked her was nothing compared to the fire spreading through her body now. The rasp of his beard on her sensitive skin drove her insane with want. Her nipples puckered, sending aching shards of desire through her breasts and straight to her core. Her panties were soaked with her juices.

How long had she dreamed of this, of Grant's kiss? She'd been in love with him since she was six years old. But her childhood infatuation had grown over the years into a longing no one but Grant would ever be able to fulfill.

She tugged her arms out of his grasp and pressed her palms against his expansive chest. She felt the heat from his body through his black T-shirt, almost as if the shirt wasn't even there. Well, she wished it wasn't there.

His hands, now free from holding her in place, were moving down her back toward her bottom.

Yes, please, grab my ass, she silently pleaded as she deepened the kiss. She snaked her hands up to caress the back of his neck and tangled into his thick hair, which was in desperate need of a trim.

Haircut? Beard?

Lindsay jerked out of Grant's arms with such force, she tripped over the shoe she'd lost when Chopper had tackled her and landed on the ground. This time on her rear, and of her own accord. Her own fault or not, the black beast took this as a sign that she was back for more playtime, and once again, crushed her to the floor. With effort, she pushed him off before Grant could get to him. She stood, ignoring Grant's attempts at helping her and the apology for his idiot dog.

"Well," she said, straightening her clothes, then bending down to retrieve her portfolio. Thankfully, her pictures were paw-print free. "I believe your mother is waiting for us."

She snapped the portfolio closed, slammed the trunk of her car shut and stormed off towards the elevator. She could feel Grant's piercing stare, but she didn't care. She needed to put some distance between them.

When Gloria Callahan had called her to ask how she was doing, Lindsay knew the old lady had something up her sleeve. Her mother and Gloria were old friends, but Lindsay hadn't seen Gloria since Keira's wedding five years ago. Even then, she'd only given Lindsay the customary, "You look amazing, dear heart," then moved on to gossip with other society biddies. So the phone call had given Lindsay pause. Finally, Gloria had gotten to the point of the conversation and asked for Lindsay's professional help with Grant, who would be moving back to Chicago to take over Callahan Enterprises. Lindsay had almost passed out from shock. Grant was moving back to Chicago?

Gloria wanted her to acclimate Grant back into the Chicago business world.

Lindsay's job as a junior consultant for *Mirror Image Consulting* was exactly what Gloria needed. Gloria told her that she'd requested her specifically. Which was the only reason Lindsay could think of that her boss had given her such a huge account. Her dream was to have her own business, and with the money she earned from this one job, that dream could become a reality.

Glancing back at the approaching Grant and Monster, she wondered how she was going to make one dream a reality, while suppressing another—Grant.

The elevator dinged. She practically ran inside the car, then pushed the “door close” button repeatedly. The doors shut right before Grant reached them, but not before she heard him let loose a string of curse words. The ride up to the penthouse office of the ten-story building, however, did nothing to take the edge off Lindsay's lust.

Grant was everything she'd imagined he'd be when he grew up, but oh-so-much better. He had to be at least six foot three, wavy black hair—she remembered he'd kept it cut short when he was younger because his father made him—that just begged to be touched. Piercing green eyes that changed from dark to light, depending on his mood. They'd been a pale hazel when she first looked at him, but after that scorching kiss had darkened to a deep green. Muscles ... well, more than enough to go around, and she wanted to feel them around her again.

Did he know who she was? She couldn't believe she'd made the underwear comment. Her mother was always telling her to keep her sarcastic tongue to herself. Lindsay could swear with the best of them, and it had taken her mother years of vigilant correcting to get Lindsay to curb her natural voice. Now, you'd never know that “fuck” was her favorite word. She smiled to herself. Grant had shattered that mother-imposed self-control over her tongue. First she'd sworn, but the beast had given her reason to, then she'd played tonsil hockey with Grant. Not the best way to meet a client, but an awesome way to break her mother's rules.

By the time she reached the top floor, Lindsay felt she'd regained her professional composure enough that the meeting with Gloria and Grant would go smoothly. She gave a firm knock on the double wooden doors to the office.

“Come in,” called a sing-song voice.

Lindsay opened the doors and was captivated by the office décor, but not in a good way. It looked like a Greek tragedy gone horribly wrong. White columns were spread about the room with either plants or busts of Henry Callahan, Grant's father, on them. There were at least three such busts and she almost shrieked when she turned to close the door and came face to face with a life-sized statue of Henry, the Great Callahan. She remembered that's what Grant used to call him and it took all her will power to stifle a laugh when she read the nameplate on the base of the stature with those exact words.

“Lindsay,” Gloria sang as she came out of the anteroom of the office. “How good of you to join us ... What in heaven's name happened to you?”

Lindsay brushed at a smear of dirt on her skirt, but only made it worse. “Nothing really, just tripped over something in the garage. I'm fine though. What was it you were saying?”

“Hmmm?” Gloria tilted her head to the side in thought. “Oh, yes, thank you for coming on such short notice.”

Cringing that she once again had to play a part that was more her mother's world than her own, Lindsay smiled sweetly and accepted the peck on the cheek from Gloria.

“I know it was a last minute call, dear...” Gloria swept away from Lindsay and gestured for her to sit on one of the plush chairs. “...but I had no idea Grant was coming until he called from St. Louis. Tea, dear?”

Lindsay nodded, even though she knew Gloria would pour her a cup no matter what her answer, “It really wasn’t a problem, Mrs. Callahan...”

“Oh, please, dear, call me Gloria. Why, I’m practically your aunt.”

Aunt being said in that snotty voice the Chicagoan elite used, so that it sounded like “Ont” verses “Ant.”

“Thank you, Gloria. As I was saying, it was no problem at all to come over...”

The ding of the elevator doors followed by a loud bark interrupted her.

Lindsay sighed and watched as Gloria flitted to the door, she wondered if she was ever going to finish a sentence while Gloria was around.

* * * *

Grant walked through the open door and straight into his mother’s embrace. She came up to his chest and felt so frail in his arms. He tilted her head back to look into her eyes and found tears running freely down her face. She gave him a smile and squeezed him one last time before backing away, wiping her eyes as she did so.

“Well, dear, you could have at least showered before you came to see me.”

He shook his head. She hadn’t changed. Always had to have a brave, detached front. But the tears and hug told Grant a different story. He felt the wall around his heart crack a little, but didn’t have time to worry about that as his mother had switched off the faucet and was pulling him toward the seating area. Toward the disheveled beauty sitting prim and proper in the oversized chair.

He held her silver-blue eyes with his and gave a satisfied grin, knowing at least part of her ruffled state was his fault.

His grin spread wider when he saw the wave of pink creep up her face. But her gaze never wavered from his. Interesting, obviously he knew her, or at least she knew what he looked like in his underwear, but he couldn’t figure out from where. He took the chair opposite from her so he could divide his attention between his mother, who had continued to ramble while pouring him tea, and the mystery woman.

He was lost in thoughts of slowly peeling away the woman’s sweater and bra when his mother’s words cut through his sexual fog.

“...of course, now that you’ll be taking your father’s place, Lindsay here will be the one to help you with the mechanics of fitting back into Chicago society and...”

“What!” Grant’s body became rigid with rage, nothing registering but the words “taking your father’s place.” He slammed the teacup and saucer down on the table.

“What?” he said again, this time getting up to stalk away from his mother, hoping that he’d heard her wrong.

“You think I’m here to take over Callahan Enterprises?”

“Well, of course, dear. Why else would you be here?” Gloria questioned, without the faintest sign she’d been affected by his outburst. “Didn’t you read through the documents I sent you?”

“Documents?”

“Yes, they were in the package I sent you. They were papers stating that Callahan Enterprises is willed to you on the condition that you return to Chicago, which you have,

and remain here, running the business for a period of at least one year.”

Grant stood there, mouth agape. He couldn't believe what he was hearing.

“One year?” he said, not bothering to hide his incredulousness.

“Grant, darling, you must stop repeating after me. Yes, one year. That was the stipulation of your father's will.” She gestured for him to sit down again, but he didn't want to sit down and have tea with his mother, nor the blonde beauty next to her. He wanted to run out the door, get back in his truck and drive non-stop until he was home in Missouri, away from this nightmare.

Chopper, who until now had lain quietly by the door, came to stand by Grant, as if to give him some doggy moral support. Grant scratched Chopper's ears absentmindedly, then stumbled back a step, and Chopper made to jump on him.

“Down, boy, not now,” Grant set Chopper away from him and began to pace the room. Chopper, denied his favorite sport of wrestling, followed Grant back and forth.

“For goodness sake,” Gloria started, “that dog will be the first thing to go. Don't you think, dear?” She turned to look at the woman seated next to her.

At the comment of getting rid of his dog, Grant snapped.

“Who the fuck did he think he was, willing me this fucking business. I despised him and anything he did.” His pacing increased, while his mother let out squeaks of protest at his choice of words. He noticed the younger woman didn't flinch though.

“Grant, please,” Gloria pleaded in a breathy voice. “Do not use that language in front of a lady. I thought I'd raised you better than that.”

She turned to the woman beside her. “I'm sorry for his rudeness, dear...”

“Speaking of ladies,” he drew out the last word, lacing his voice with sarcasm. “Who the hell are you?”

He'd stopped pacing and pinned the woman with his stare and words. He watched her gulp, but saw the twinkle in her eyes. She obviously thought this whole incident was amusing.

She stood and walked over to him, holding out her hand.

“Lindsay Taylor, Image Consultant.” She gave him a firm handshake.

Lindsay Taylor? Keira's little sister? The little towheaded girl who used to drive him insane with her persistent tagging along? He stood there dumbfounded, still holding her hand, relishing its softness, and wondered if he could get over the mental picture of her in pigtails long enough to strip her naked and sink deep into her.

Again, his mother's voice pierced through his lust-filled thoughts.

“Lindsay is here to give you a makeover, dear.”

Chapter Three

Grant stilled at his mother's words.

"Makeover?"

He looked at Lindsay. The heat he'd felt before in no way had dissipated. In fact, it had only intensified. *But, you're supposed to be in pigtails.*

"Well, I'm a little old for pigtails..." Lindsay laughed, clearly enjoying his confusion, "...although, I believe I used to wear braids."

Fuck. Had he said that out loud? He felt like a moron. Not only was he lusting after an old family friend, but he was actually planning on getting her under him before he went back to Missouri.

His mother had started talking again, but even after years of not seeing her, his ability to tune her out was still in tiptop shape.

He continued to stare at Lindsay. His cock hardened and lengthened, straining against his jeans. Even mussed up and greasy from the parking garage floor, she was amazing. Her blue eyes full of mirth met his with no hesitation and with a hint of defiance as well. As if she were daring him to speak aloud what he had on his mind.

Once again, his mother's voice broke though, "...I think a week will be sufficient for Lindsey to do her magic. You'll have to stay in the penthouse suite. Alfred has everything arranged." His mother glided over to Lindsay and pulled her out of Grant's grasp, toward the double doors. "Did you bring your things, dear? You can have the west wing of the suite, and Grant will have the east wing."

Grant was rooted to the spot. He'd lost all thoughts but that Lindsay would be staying in the penthouse. Maybe he could stay a week. It wouldn't be such a hardship, living in luxury again, as long as his bed was warmed by a feisty little blonde. His mother called for Alfred, who, as usual, was there before she'd finished saying his name. The two of them, his mother and Lindsay, stood in the doorway chatting a moment before following Alfred toward the west wing.

Chopper whined and nudged Grant's hand with his massive head.

"What do you think, Chop? You like the skirt, don't ya? What do you say to staying for a little bit?"

Chopper cocked his head to the side and gave a low, playful growl.

"Yeah, I feel the same way."

* * * *

Lindsay stood by the window, looking out over the Chicago skyline. She'd never been in the penthouse before today, and when Grace had said she would be staying in the west wing, Lindsay thought it would be a small bedroom off to the west of the large office centered on the penthouse level. But boy, had she been mistaken.

The west wing consisted of a parlor with a magnificent wet bar and an extra-large bedroom. The parlor was decorated in bold wines and plums, complementing the wood bar and furniture. The plush décor continued on throughout the suite. The bedroom boasted a monstrous four-poster bed with rich cream and gold linens.

Lindsay slowly turned and took another look around the bedroom. When her eyes alighted on the bed, she was swamped with visions of Grant naked, tied up spread-eagle to its posts. She shook herself to clear the vision. She was going to be professional about this. Tying Grant up wasn't professional. But why couldn't she indulge in a little fantasy before she had to stick to being straight-laced, prim and proper Lindsay?

She glanced at her watch. Alfred had said dinner would be served at six o'clock. That gave her twenty minutes to herself. More than enough time to relax, have a little imaginary fun, and prepare for what was sure to be a battle with Grant at dinner. She walked over to the stereo in the corner and turned on her favorite alternative rock station. Nothing like good old rock 'n roll to get the body moving.

She let the music roll over her. The drums beat to the rhythm of her heart. This is the kind of life she really wanted, hard, fast, rhythmic. Not the stodgy life her parents had laid out for her. Not the life her mother had lived, looking the other way at her father's indiscretions. She envied Grant that, being able to walk away.

The music changed to a faster grind. She banished thoughts of her sorry life and let her body move to the pounding edge of the song. She imagined Grant standing by the bed, waiting, watching. She made her way toward the bed with sinuous movements, dancing, moving for her imaginary Grant alone.

"Get on the bed," she said aloud, her voice husky with want.

She glanced at the bedpost nearest her. It looked like an antique bed, but that was good—modern furniture wouldn't have held up to what she had in mind. She'd taken a stripper aerobics class in secret because it was something her mother would have frowned upon, and now seemed as good a time as any to put her hard work to use.

She slowed her body's movements and began to peel off her cardigan. Her breath quickened as she imagined Grant watching her with rapt attention. With a flick of her wrist, she flung the sweater on the bed, right where he would be. Next came the sweater shell. She turned slowly, until she was facing away from the bed, still moving to the music, she edged the shell up over her breasts and off her body.

The music had stopped and a DJ was talking, but she didn't care. She was in her own world, a world where Grant wanted her, and she could have him.

With the shell discarded on the floor, she snapped her head around, her long, blonde hair whipping around with the force. She gave the bed a seductive look and slowly eased a finger in her mouth. She could just imagine Grant's groan of approval. "Yes," he would whisper.

She yanked her finger out with a pop, spun around and grasped the bedpost. Sliding up and down, she ran her hands and her body over the pole as if she were making love to Grant. She thrust her hips back and forth, writhing against the hard wood.

The music began again. Lindsay switched her tempo to match. Hard. Fast. Loud. She climbed up on the bed, resting her knees on the mattress with the bedpost in-between her legs. She continued her bump and grind, holding onto the post with one hand while the other roamed her body.

"You're killing me, baby."

"I know," Lindsay moaned. With each thrust her sex rubbed against the post, her already rumpled skirt was bunched up at her waist. She pinched a nipple through her lace bra, squeezing until pain became pleasure. She could feel the pressure building; the need for release hit her fast and hard. She shoved her hand into her panties and circled her clit,

matching the rhythm of her thrusting hips.

“Do it, baby. Make yourself come. Come for me.”

“Oh ... God ... yes,” Lindsay moaned out as exquisite spasms shook her. Eyes closed, she thrust one last time against the post and arched her back so she was upside down, one hand gripping the post, her breasts pushed out and heaving, her body rigid with pleasure.

A click of a door opening and the groan of the bed propelled Lindsay out of her sexual stupor, but not before the groan turned into a crash, as the end of the bed she was on collapsed to the floor. She jumped off, but stumbled when she landed so that she was laid out on the floor, skirt still at her waist and panties askew. She'd forgotten that she'd heard the door open until she heard a thud behind her.

She turned in the direction of the sound and was struck between laughter and horror. Alfred was out cold, slumped on the floor in the doorway.

* * * *

“What the hell?” Grant rushed out of his room with Chopper fast on his heels. He'd heard a crash coming from Lindsay's room. What he saw when he got to her doorway stopped him in his tracks. Lindsay, dressed only in a skirt and lace bra and panties, was bent over an unconscious Alfred on the floor.

While the sight of Lindsay half dressed had frozen him, it had no effect on Chopper. The dog lunged past Grant, knocking him over. Grant barely had time to brace himself before he landed on both Lindsay and Alfred.

“Get off of me,” Lindsay said through gritted teeth.

“What happened?” Grant asked as he stood and helped Lindsay up as well.

She didn't answer, but went back to trying to revive Alfred. Grant scanned the room and took in the discarded clothes, the broken bed and the rock music. He couldn't imagine what the three things meant but he would be sure to get an explanation before the night was over.

A groan brought his attention back to Alfred. As much as he enjoyed seeing Lindsay in next to nothing, she needed to get dressed before Alfred fully came to. Hell, Lindsay half dressed was probably how Alfred had ended up on the floor in the first place.

“Put something on.” He'd intended to add a harshness to his voice to cool his ardor, but it came out sounding laced with lust.

“Oh,” she said and scooted back. She met his eyes and he'd expected to see a blush creeping up her face, but all he saw was searing heat. “You're right.” She stood and went to her shirt on the floor and tugged it on.

“Mr... Calla...” Alfred tried to speak, but Grant could tell he was still woozy.

“Don't talk yet, Alfred, I'll take you to your room.”

“Not ... necessary ... sir.”

Grant chuckled. Even knocked out Alfred couldn't break from the formality Grant's father had insisted Alfred use.

“No arguing,” Grant said firmly, as he lifted the slight man into his arms. He focused on Lindsey. “I'm taking Alfred to his room. When I've got him settled, we are going to talk.” He glared at Chopper. “You. Stay.”

He walked out, giving his full attention to the old man in his arms. Alfred had been more of a father to him than his own had. It had been Alfred who'd bandaged his boo-

boos when he was a little kid. Alfred who'd helped him with his schoolwork in grade school. The first time he'd snuck out to go to a party, it had been Alfred who'd known he was gone and waited up for him. He'd come in drunk and sick, and Alfred, not his own goddamned father, had held his head as he threw up in the toilet.

"Here we are, old man," Grant said as he laid Alfred on his bed. "How are you feeling?"

"Better ... thank you," Alfred said, still speaking a little slower than normal.

"What happened, Al?"

Grant didn't think he'd ever seen a man blush before, but Alfred did it with great dignity.

"I must have tripped and knocked my head, sir."

"Okay," Grant said, letting Alfred's lame explanation go. Besides, he wanted to get the explanation out of the delectable Ms. Taylor.

"I was on my way to tell Ms. Taylor that dinner was ready."

"Don't worry about that," Grant said, tugging off Alfred's vest and shoes, "I'll take care of dinner. You just rest." He tugged the covers back from under Alfred, then pulled them over him, tucking the sides under him.

"But, sir..."

"Cut the 'sir' too, Al. It's just me. You don't need to 'sir' me." He dimmed the lamp on the bedside table. "I'm not my father."

Grant headed for the door but turned back when he got there. "When's the last time you had a vacation, Alfred?"

"A vacation?"

"Yeah, you know, go somewhere for fun, away from work."

Alfred was silent.

"I thought so," Grant said, his voice held a note of sadness at what Alfred's silence meant. "Well, consider yourself on vacation. Do you have family you want to visit?"

"No," Alfred said. "There's no one."

"Well, it looks like I'm gonna be here for a week or two and it would be nice to have someone keep an eye on my house in Missouri. Do you fish, Al?"

Alfred sat up a little, and Grant saw a semblance of a smile on his face. "Yes, I do."

"Well, then, it's settled. I'll book your flight for tomorrow."

"But your mother..."

"I'll take care of her. And I'll be fine here. I know how to take care of myself, now it's time for you to do the same." Grant opened the door and stepped out. "Good night, Al."

As he walked back to Lindsay's room, Grant pushed back the guilt that had started to creep up while he was getting Alfred settled. His father's cruelty wasn't his problem. He couldn't help but feel horrible about Alfred. What had his life been like since he'd left? Probably filled with nothing but serving others who didn't appreciate him. That wasn't a life. Maybe he could do something about that in the next week.

He heard grunting when he drew closer to Lindsay's door. Now what? Lindsay had changed into lavender slacks and a matching top and was kneeling on the floor trying to lift up the broken bed.

"Leave it," Grant barked out. "That can wait 'til after dinner."

Lindsay stood up. Beads of sweat had formed on her forehead from the exertion of

lifting the antique bed and she swiped at them with the back of her hand.

“How am I going to sleep on a crooked bed?” she asked, exasperation filling her voice.

“You can use my bed.”

“There is no way in hell I’m sleeping with you, Grant,” she said, a sharp edge to her voice. He noticed, though, that her eyes opened a bit wider, and she wet her lips as if in anticipation of a kiss.

Though he knew it was the last thing he should do at this moment and with this woman, the one who planned to change both him and his dog, he grinned, let it become just a bit wicked, then, “Who said anything about sleeping?”

Chapter Four

I'm not going to sleep with you. Why the hell did I say that? Particularly when she'd spent most of her life dreaming of exactly that. She followed Grant out of the bedroom and down the hall to the dining room. The long table was set for two with delicate china and sterling silver flatware. Two large candelabras were lit up like the Chicago skyline in the middle of the table.

"Stay," Grant barked at her as he went through the swinging door towards what she assumed was the kitchen.

"Like hell." Who did he think he was ordering her around like she was his dog? Lindsay took off towards the kitchen at almost a run and pushed through the door. The moment her low heel connected with the slick tile, she knew she was in trouble. Her foot slipped out from under her, and she grabbed for the nearest counter to try and keep herself upright, but it was too far away. She let out a strangled cry as she landed on her butt.

"Do you have a balance problem that I should know about?" Grant teased from above her. His rakish grin did wonders to her racing heart.

She wanted to be mad. Hell, she'd been on her ass four times today, but she was past anger. Laughter bubbled up from inside her, and Lindsay put her hands over her face to quell the hysteria.

"Oh, baby," Grant cooed as he squatted next to her. "Don't cry." He reached out to smooth back her hair. "Are you hurt?"

The genuine concern in his voice was enough to drive Lindsay's checked hysteria overboard. She dropped her hands and let out her laughter. "Not ... hurt..." she managed between gulps of air. "It's ... just ... ridiculous..."

It took a full ten minutes for her to calm down enough to be able to look at Grant without lapsing back into giggles. The look in his eyes took her breath away. She'd expected impatience, even disgust at her unlady-like outburst, but all she saw was need. Raw need for her.

She thought back to the kiss they'd shared in the parking garage and to her imaginary strip tease in the bedroom and wanted nothing more than for those things to be real in her life. Grant in her life.

She scooted to her knees and launched herself at him, pushing him down to the floor and back against the kitchen island. Her fingers roamed through his hair as her lips met his in a searing kiss.

He hesitated for just a moment before he met her mouth and equaled her passion.

She opened her lips and licked along his bottom lip, then sucked it in and with a gentle bite released it.

He groaned and reached for her legs, pulling them forward so that she was straddling his lap.

"Yes," she gasped. Letting her body take over, she moved against his erection. She dropped kisses along his bearded chin to his ear and blew gently before taking the lobe in her mouth and sucking to match the rhythm of her body movements.

Grant's hands moved to cup her butt and squeezed her cheeks with each movement

forward, pushing her harder and higher onto his body. He kept one hand on her rear, ensuring her forward thrusts wouldn't stop, and with the other tried to unbutton her shirt.

Impatient to feel his hands on her body, she pushed his hand away and undid the buttons herself. She flung the shirt off, not caring where it landed. She grabbed for his hands and moved them to her chest.

"Touch me," she whispered.

Grant eased her bra straps off her shoulders and with his hands on her back held her still.

"Grant ... hurry, please..."

"Slow down, baby," Grant murmured. He trailed kisses down her neck and onto her shoulder.

"No."

She thrust onto his body again and bit down hard on his shoulder. He hissed but seemed to take her not so subtle hint. In one swift motion, he shoved his hand down the front of her pants and thrust a finger into her soaking core. She grabbed hold of his shoulders and leaned back, riding the wave of pleasure he was giving her.

"More," she gasped.

He added a second finger and licked her peaked nipples through the lace of her bra. He used his teeth to move the lacy material aside and clamped down on her nipple, sucking, as she'd done to him, with each thrust.

She was so close. She could feel each pull on her breast shoot straight to Grant's fingers inside her, as if they were magnetically connected. She quickened her pace as he moved to her other breast and gave it the same treatment he'd given the other.

She opened her eyes and focused on Grant. The sight of him licking, sucking and nipping at her breasts sent her over the edge. She ground against his hand, riding out wave after wave of her orgasm and cried out his name as he bit down on her nipple one last time.

Still impaled on his fingers, she leaned into him, resting her head on his shoulder to catch her breath. Had she really just begged Grant to finger fuck her? If she'd climaxed that fast from just his fingers and kisses, what would the real thing be like?

Grant eased his hand out of her pants and wrapped his arms around her. She was glad because she didn't quite know what she would say to him if he'd demanded an explanation for her behavior. Her mother would label her scandalous, her friends would say she was wanton, but all she felt was wanted.

Grant chuckled in her ear. "Remind me to knock you on your ass more often, Ms. Makeover."

Lindsay froze. The orgasm-induced haze she'd been reveling in vanished. Makeover? She'd thrown herself at her client. Her biggest client, for goodness' sake.

With an embarrassed squeak, she jumped up and stood for a moment staring at Grant.

He gave a low growl and made to get up and reach for her.

She leapt out of the way and frantically looked around for her discarded shirt, but couldn't find it. She could feel Grant's gaze following her around the kitchen, and when she finally found her shirt, on the other side of the island, she felt him come up behind her.

Just as he moved to reach for her a second time she took off for the door.

“I’m sorry,” she choked out.

“Linds...”

Lindsay stopped at the door. “This was a mistake,” she said, and fled out the door to her room.

*

Grant thought for a second that he should run after her. They’d just had some crazy but amazing sex, and she thought it was a mistake? He rubbed his face as he struggled to get his emotions in check. Crazy sex is what he’d wanted from Lindsay from the first moment he’d seen her bent over her car. Then why was he feeling like he’d broken some imaginary rule with her.

His dick was still rock hard, and his heart was beating double time. She’d gotten her satisfaction, then ran off like a scared rabbit. He should be demanding recompense. Equal time of his cock thrusting into her wet heat, or at least to have her lush lips bring him to completion. That’s what his male logic was screaming in the back of his head, but it wasn’t getting through to his heart.

The scent of rosemary and garlic pulled him from his thoughts. Alfred’s dinner was still in the warming oven. Grant wondered if he could coax Lindsay from her room to at least eat with him. He’d give her the night to dwell on what happened tonight, but tomorrow he’d find out what made prim and proper Lindsay lose control. If he had any say in the matter, it would be him.

Ten minutes later he’d dished up the chicken, roasted potatoes and asparagus and grabbed a bottle of Pinot Grigio, then headed to Lindsay’s room. First things first. He never knew a woman who could resist being waited on, so he was going to feed Lindsay, whether she like it or not.

When he reached her door, he paused to listen. Good, no crying. He gave the door a soft kick.

“Lind?” No answer. “Lindsay, I’ve got dinner here.”

Still, nothing.

“Look, you’ve got to eat, and I promise not to talk about what happened tonight. Can we just forge...”

Lindsay swung open the door. “What’s for dinner?” she said with a shy smile.

Inwardly Grant sighed in relief and smiled back at her. He didn’t want her to be embarrassed and was glad when she gestured for him to enter her room. He set the tray down on the coffee table and began to set the food out.

“Al’s specialty, Rosemary Chicken,” he said as he uncorked the wine and poured her a glass.

“Mmmm, smells wonderful.” Taking the glass, she sat down on the loveseat. “I’m famished.”

Grant dared a glance at her and saw her blush when she realized what she’d said.

“Me, too. Chopper and I haven’t eaten anything since Springfield,” he said, trying to move the conversation back onto solid ground. “Though White Castle doesn’t hold up to good ol’ Al’s cooking.”

He handed her a plate and sat in the chair opposite her in an effort to put some distance between them that he sensed she needed. But also so he could study her. He still couldn’t believe that this beauty sitting before him licking chicken juice off her fingers was little Lindsay Taylor.

“So, tell me about you. Last I heard you were being shipped off to boarding school.”

“I was,” she set down her plate and reached for the wine. “Off to school in jolly old England. I was there for eight years. It was fun but I had a hell, erm, heck of a time getting rid of my accent when I got back to the states.”

He smiled at her correction. Prim and proper as her parents had bred her. Now, how to strip away that façade? As she continued telling him what she’d been doing for the last fifteen years, he could sense a deeper being underneath all that pressed linen and manicured hands. She seemed to have an old soul, something most debutantes couldn’t even come close to having.

“And that’s how I became an image consultant.” She’d finished her meal and was reaching for the bottle of wine.

“Allow me.” Grant touched the bottle the same time her fingers wrapped around the neck. He took his other hand and gently pried off her fingers, the feel of her skin on his burning his flesh with desire. He pressed her fingers to his lips in a chaste kiss, but the sexual energy between them burst to life, and he heard her gasp softly.

Fighting his desire, he let go of her hand and poured her more wine. Never before had he been so intensely attracted to a woman. He didn’t understand the stirrings she raised in him, but he was willing to go along with them.

“Grant...”

“Well,” Grant said as he stood up and began to gather the empty dishes. “It’s been a long and interesting day. Why don’t you grab the wine and bring what you need for tonight with you, and I’ll show you my room.”

He smiled at the look she gave him, eyes wide with both hesitation and anticipation.

“There’s a small bedroom off of my father’s office. I’ll sleep there tonight, and tomorrow we can see about getting your bed fixed.”

“Okay,” she said. “If you can give me a minute to gather my things, I’ll be right with you.”

“No problem,” he started toward the door. “I’ll take this stuff to the kitchen and meet you back here in about five. Is that okay?”

“Sure. See you then.”

As he made his way back to the kitchen, Grant smiled. The sizzle between them was there, no matter how far she ran or played the proper lady. He gave a low growl of need and began to plot the demise of proper little Lindsay Taylor.

*

Lindsay waited until Grant had left the room, then ran into the bathroom. How was she going to survive this week? Within a matter of minutes of seeing him for the first time in years, she’d been kissed and groped. A few hours later she was riding his hand like she was Annie Oakley in some crazy, sexual Wild West show. Hell, she couldn’t even sit through dinner with him with out envisioning him licking his way down her body to feast on her sex.

Note to self ... don’t eat chicken with hands in Grant’s presence. Just brings on images you don’t *want to have*.

She gazed at her reflection in the mirror. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes wide with desire. She figured she’d be in a constant state of arousal all week. Her problem was not that he ignited passion in her at the slightest look or touch, it was that she welcomed that fire. There was something about Grant that had always appealed to her. Now that she

had tasted him, she was afraid she'd never be able to go back to being boring, prim Lindsay.

She had to get a grip. This was temporary. One week to transform "Grant the mountain man" into "Grant the business executive." It was a good thing most of the transformation was outward. She'd never be able to survive if she had to spend more than this week with him.

She gathered up her toiletries and her most modest pajamas, cotton pants and t-shirt. Not what her mother would have suggested for bedtime attire, but it would give her a barrier against the stirrings she felt around Grant.

She heard a thud and moved back into the main room to see what it was. Chopper sat like a sentinel just inside the door, tail wagging and mouth drooling. Not wanting to recreate the tackle scene from earlier in the day, Lindsay decided to ignore the beast. She sat down on the loveseat and sipped her wine while she waited for Grant to reappear.

Movement at the door caught her eye, and she glanced over to see Chopper inching forward toward her. She looked him full on, and he stopped, like a deer in headlights.

"I don't think so, bud," she said, wagging her finger at him. Talking to him was a bad idea. Chopper bounded over to where she was sitting and looked as if he were going to pounce on her.

"No, Chopper," Grant yelled as he materialized in the doorway. Chopper skidded to a halt and lay down, putting one paw over his nose as if to hide. Grant stalked toward the now subservient dog. "Sorry, he's normally a very well-behaved dog."

He patted Chopper on the head, then held out his hand to help her up from the loveseat.

"There must be something about you that makes him lose control," he said, standing her up and looking her straight in the eyes.

She couldn't do anything but stare back. She knew without a doubt that he was no longer talking about the dog, but about himself. The heat she'd felt before when they both had reached for the wine bottle flared up again. She stepped forward, inexplicably drawn to him.

"Woof." Chopper pushed his way through them and sat on her foot. She tugged her hand from Grant's grasp and bent down to scratch Chopper behind the ears. Silently thanking him for saving her from, yet again, throwing herself at Grant.

"Well, that's no good now, is it?" She looked up at Grant. "We'll just have to work on maintaining control, won't we Chopper?"

Only this time, she was talking about herself.

Chapter Five

Warmth caressed her body. She could feel him looming over her, his warm breath blowing softly on her face. He smelled her, as if drawing in her essence. His tongue licked from the base of her neck to her ear, leaving a wet trail in its wake. His long and slimy tongue.

“What the hell?” Lindsay opened her eyes to see Chopper not two inches from her face, tongue lolling out the side of his mouth.

“Gross. Get off.” She tried to shove him aside, but he dug in and wouldn’t budge.

“Grant! Come and get your filthy dog!”

Grant came running in and yanked Chopper off the bed.

“Sorry, I’m gonna have to kennel him if he keeps this up.”

Lindsay threw back the covers and sat up on the side of the bed.

“Grant,” she said with barely controlled anger. “You’ve got two seconds to get that beast out of here.”

“Ss...”

“And if you say ‘sorry’ again, I’ll make sure that you are.”

She heard him drag Chopper away and only looked up when she heard the door close.

“This is going to be a long week,” she said, stumbling over to the bathroom to wash off her neck.

Only when her neck was bright pink from all the scrubbing, did she leave the bathroom to go back to her room. Getting dressed was first on her agenda for the day, then coffee. Normally coffee was first, but based on yesterday’s performance she figured she’d use her business attire as armor.

She dressed in a crisp, pale yellow pantsuit with a baby-blue silk camisole that she’d bought on a shopping trip with her mother in New York. She looked in the stand mirror in the corner of the room and sighed.

“I look like a fucking Easter egg,” she said with a bitter laugh. Amazing how in one day of being with Grant, he’d devastated the carefully built façade she’d created to survive in her mother’s world. She couldn’t even stomach her own clothes.

“Okay, I’m dressed.” She gestured a checkmark in the air with her hand. “Next up, coffee.”

She gathered up her portfolio case and cell phone and made her way to the kitchen. Grant was nowhere to be seen, so she assumed he was getting ready for the day. Which would entail taking a shower. She imagined herself helping him get clean, rubbing soap all over his body in slow, sensual circles.

The shrill ring of her cell phone brought her slamming back to reality.

“Lindsay Taylor,” she answered, her professional cool automatically kicking in.

“Lindsay, darling, it’s Gloria.” Lindsay gave an inward groan. How was she ever going to face Gloria again, knowing where Grant’s mouth and hands had been on her body?

“Gloria, how are you this morning?”

“I’m fine, dear. I was just checking in to see if you slept all right and if Grant is

behaving himself.”

Lindsay choked on the coffee she'd just poured herself.

“Are you there dear?” Gloria continued without waiting for Lindsay's answer. “I know he can be a Neanderthal, what with living in the woods the last fifteen years, but I've got full confidence that you'll ship him into shape.”

“Grant is a complete gentleman, Gloria,” Lindsay replied. “I'm sure I'll have no problem acclimating him to city society.”

And in the process take away the very essence of Grant, until he was no longer the rugged mountain man, but the suave businessman. The type of man her mother obsessed over as a husband for her. She didn't want suave though, and she especially didn't want Grant suave, either. Rugged was more her liking, but that would more than likely send her mother off to the psychiatrist.

“I'd like to set up an informal dinner party tomorrow night. Just a few friends and associates. Grant, of course, being the guest of honor. Are you available?” asked Gloria.

“Yes, Gloria. I cleared my schedule for this week.” There really hadn't been much to clear either, that's how sad her life was.

“Fantastic. Come to the house, then, in the afternoon, say around four? You can get ready here.”

“Did you want me to tell Grant?”

“Tell me what?” Grant drawled from behind her.

Lindsay spun around and was greeted with the sight of Grant, garbed in black from head to toe, hair still wet from his shower. His green eyes flashing with desire before quickly masking them with feigned disinterest.

“Gloria,” Lindsay said into the phone. “Grant's here, would you like to speak to him?”

She handed Grant the phone and turned back to the island to clean up the coffee she spilled. She noticed a tray of pastries set out. She'd broken so many rules already in the last twenty-four hours, why not continue the streak? She reached for the cheese danish and took a huge bite, savoring the taste of the buttery pastry and creamy cheese.

“Mmmm,” she gave a low moan at the ecstasy of indulging.

She hadn't realized Grant was off the phone until he came up and reached around her for a bear claw, pressing into her back as he did.

“So, it takes pastries and knocking you down to get you to moan, huh?” he said in a low growl at her ear.

She stopped chewing and counted to ten, the only way to halt her body from launching itself at Grant and tearing his clothes off.

“Listen,” she said, steeling her voice with a calmness she didn't feel in the least. “We've gotten off to an interesting start here, but we've got a lot of ground to cover in one week, so let's just start over and try to get through this. Only six more days, and I'll be out of your hair.”

And out of your life. Strange how words could come out of her mouth that said the total opposite of what she was feeling. She knew, without a doubt, that her life would never be the same. In fact, it would be worse. Without Grant, she'd be miserable. No one in the past had compared to her idea of him, and now that he'd proven to be more than even that, no one ever would.

Grant moved away, and his absence from her body almost made her weep. But this is

how it was to be. He might look at her with fire in his eyes, but it was just male instinct, not real passion for her. He didn't even know her. No one really knew her.

"First things, first," she said, walking over to the trashcan and throwing away the rest of her danish. She was going to have to make a clean break of any more indulgences, food or otherwise.

"We have an appointment at Rolf's at ten-thirty this morning for a haircut." Picking up her PDA she clicked it on and accessed her calendar. "Then we've got an appointment at Masterson's to have the tailor fit you for clothes."

"You're serious aren't you?" Grant had a look of incredulousness to his face. "My mother really hired you to give me a fucking makeover."

"Well, yes," she said, silently girding herself for the battle she knew was bound to happen when he finally realized life as he knew it was over. "If you're to take over Callahan Enterprises, then you have to have a certain image, a certain look about you. That's what I'm here for, to give you that look."

She was ready for anger, violence even. Certainly some thrashing around and throwing kitchen utensils. His dead calm, however, was more palpable than if he'd torn the place apart. She felt like a scared rabbit, afraid to move in case she attracted the eye of the rabid wolf. Instinctively, she knew that pushing him into this would only serve to deepen his anger and the hurt he still carried with him from his father.

He'd broken through so many of her barriers already. She knew that the real Lindsay, the independent, outspoken Lindsay, was simmering under the surface, thanks to Grant. But maybe she still needed to be meek and subservient to ease Grant into this transition in his life.

She walked over to where he stood, leaning into the island, arms outstretched, holding onto the edges of the counter, and placed her hand gently on his.

"Grant," she said, her voice just above a whisper. "A haircut and suit aren't going to change who you are on the inside, just on the outside."

"I like the outside," he growled, anger still boiling in his voice.

"I do, too." She caught his eyes, willing him to see that what she said was true. "But this will make your mother happy, and she hasn't been happy for a long time." Lindsay didn't really know if that was true or not, but she knew she wasn't happy in this environment of social stigmata, and assumed Gloria must feel the same way, especially if she'd raised such a well-rounded son as Grant.

She felt Grant's hold on the counter relax, and he took hold of her hand and squeezed.

"You're right, Linds. It's just a haircut. I'm not Samson or anything."

The smile he flashed set her heart racing, and she had to resort to counting again. Only this time it didn't work. Grant tugged her hand and eased her toward him.

He bent down, his mouth mere centimeters from her lips so that his beard tickled her chin. "Thanks." His warm breath sent shivers down her spine.

She gulped and dared to lean into him, gently pressing her lips to his. She pulled away and took a deep breath, inhaling the masculine scent of him.

"You're welcome."

** **

In-between corralling his own libido and Chopper, Grant had come to the conclusion

that Lindsay was just like the all the other Chicago debutantes he'd known growing up. Why else would she be hot one minute and cold the next? And she hated Chopper. That right there was enough to deter Grant from pursuing her. What good would it do anyway? He would be leaving the city within the month if not sooner, and Lindsay would move on to continue living the life of a spoiled brat.

That theory lasted until he'd seen her in the kitchen, when just being in the same room as her made him rock hard. She was beautiful in an Easter sort of way that made him crave Peeps and chocolate bunnies. But he knew that was just a front, the external wrappings of a woman with enough fire in her blood to make him boil with lust—and other emotions, but he didn't want to think about those, just the lust.

On the way to the salon she'd kept up a running dialogue about the city and its newest buildings, falling empires and rising sons, of which he guessed he was the newest hopeful.

"Wait," he caught her wrist when they'd stopped in front of Rolf's. "I'll do this, Lindsay, whatever you need me to do, because I know you need this job, and I don't want to take that away from you."

He waited until she relaxed in his hold and turned to look at him.

"But," he flashed his most devastating smile. "For every change I make, you have to make one, too."

"I don't think..."

"Then don't think," he loosened his grip on her wrist and grabbed her hand, giving it a gentle squeeze. "Just do it. It will probably be fun, and when's the last time you let your hair down and had a little fun?"

Visions of her riding his hand flashed though his mind—yeah, that had been fun—but he kept them at bay. For some reason he felt a connection to Lindsay, deeper than the lust he was striving to hold in the forefront of his emotions, and until he could filter through those, he wanted to spend his time getting to know the real Lindsay Taylor.

"Okay," Lindsay said, and he couldn't help but see a little fear in her eyes.

"Don't be afraid, Linds." He brought her hand to his lips and placed a gentle kiss on each of her knuckles. "We both have to make those changes, remember? And I promise, it won't hurt."

She gave him a smile that probably meant, "I'm game" but the fear was still there, and he didn't push the issue.

"Well," he said, giving her a little shove out the door. "Let's not keep Rolf waiting."

He followed her out of the limo and into the cloudy, cool day. For a moment as the breeze hit him he was back home, among the trees and mountains—

"Get out of the way, asshole," a bike messenger sped between Grant and Lindsay, knocking her off balance. Grant grabbed her around the waist and pulled her to him.

"I gotcha," he said, and tightened his hold just a bit, inhaling the vanilla scent of her hair.

She leaned into him for a fraction of a second, then stepped away, "I can stand on my own now, Grant. Thanks."

Reluctantly, he let her go.

"First thing after my freakin' hair cut," he said. "We are getting you some real shoes, not slippers with spikes."

She spun around and stabbed him in the chest with her finger, "I may have agreed to

some changes, Mr. Callahan, but I will not get rid of my shoes.”

“Well, you seem to have issues with walking in them,” Grant replied, trying to hide the smirk that threatened to take over his face.

“I’ve never had a problem till now, thank you, and getting rid of the shoes is still a NO.”

She’d punctuated her words with more pokes to his chest and turned to stalk off toward the double glass doors of Rolf’s.

Oh, yeah, this week was definitely going to be fun.

Chapter Six

“Linzee.” Rolf floated over to her the minute she walked in the door of the salon. “How eez your mother?”

“She’s fine, Rolf,” Lindsay said as he gave her the dreaded kissy-kissy-cheek-cheek thing he did every time she came in the salon. “You know that, you saw her yesterday.”

“Ah, so I did, but it eez always nice to ask, no?”

Rolf held her away from him, looking over her critically. Lindsay felt her cheeks flush. She’d known Rolf her whole life. From the moment Lindsay’s mother discovered Rolf, she’d spend a full day at his salon every Monday, and when Lindsay was little, her mother would bring her. In a weird way, Lindsay considered Rolf her uncle. Over the years, as she realized her mother would never be happy with the person she really wanted to be, she’d confided in him the things that girls would normally tell their mothers.

Rolf and Lindsay knew things about each other very few others did. He knew she was really a jeans and T-shirt kind of girl who craved freedom. She knew he wasn’t the gay Frenchmen who owned one of Chicago’s most exclusive salons. He was really Ralph from New Jersey, had learned French from a cassette tape course and was very heterosexual. But in the society they lived in, appearances were everything.

Rolf knew her better than anyone, and she knew he would see through her feeble attempt at keeping Grant at a distance.

“Rolf,” she stepped aside and grabbed Grant’s arm, pulling him from his hiding place behind her. “This is Grant Callahan, your next appointment.”

“*Merde*, you have brought me a wolf man!”

Grant growled, making Lindsay jump.

“Behave, Grant. Now, Rolf,” she said, turning to look at Grant. “He’s not that bad.”

Not that bad? The man was a vision of heat, danger and sex all mixed into one fantastic package. Rolf had begun muttering in French and walked in circles around Grant, who stood there with a menacing frown on his face. She felt a little sorry for him that he was being looked at like a grizzly bear at the zoo, but not so much that she didn’t take advantage of Rolf’s perusal to memorize him.

This would be the last time she saw him with his long, wavy hair and full beard. She reached up and touched her lips, remembering the softness of his beard against her face when he’d kissed her. What would it feel like kissing him without the beard? Whoa. She was supposed to be *not* wanting to kiss Grant.

“Well, Rolf?”

“Yes, Rolf,” Grant snapped. “Are you finished making comments about my butt?”

“What?” Lindsay smacked her forehead with her hand. “Rolf?”

Rolf had the gall to look innocent for a moment, then shrugged.

“What can I say? *Il est un loup seduisant*. He eez a sexy wolf, no?” Rolf turned and gave Lindsay a look that made her realize he knew about the sexual tension between her and Grant. Rolf hooked her arm in his and started walking toward his private studio.

“Fallow uz, wolf man,” Rolf called over his shoulder.

Lindsay glanced back at Grant, and the heat combined with anger in his eyes sent shivers to her sex. That look was like a siren song, and all she wanted to do was break

free of Rolf so she could run and devour, or be devoured by, Grant.

“Okay, Lin,” Rolf whispered in her ear, breaking the hypnotic pull of Grant’s eyes. “Larry Flynt could make millions off the sex oozing between you two. What gives?”

Lindsay smiled despite Rolf’s seriousness. Very rarely did Rolf let his French accent drop. It usually only happened when he was caught way off guard or drunk.

“He’s my client,” Lindsay replied, keeping her voice in the conspiratorial whisper Rolf had started in.

“Client my ass, Lin. I’m sweatin’ here with the heat you two are putting off.”

Lindsay gave an exasperated sigh. “Fine, there’s heat okay, but it’s not something I can talk about now. So just go along with me here, and I’ll tell you everything later.”

She looked over her shoulder to make sure Grant was still following them and caught him staring at her ass. Yeah, ignoring him was going to be so easy—riiight.

“Okay, my love,” Rolf said, giving her arm a little squeeze. “But you must tell me all.”

Rolf twirled around with a flourish. “Okay, loup, let uz see what mahzhic I can make, no?”

* * * *

“Voila”

Rolf finally spun Grant around so he could see the mirror. Rolf had had him facing away from the mirror while he worked his “mahzhic,” but Grand didn’t mind. It had given him the opportunity to watch Lindsay’s face as Rolf transformed him. Her looks had gone from worry to undeniable desire in the two hours it had taken Rolf to get to his “Voila.” Grant bet Rolf had been waiting to say that the entire time.

Grant took a good look at himself in the mirror. The hair that had once hit his collar was now cropped tight to his head. Rolf had left the top longer than the sides and an errant wave kept falling to his forehead. Grant reached up to feel the smooth expanse of his cheeks. If it hadn’t been fall, he would have a huge tan line. Rolf had been ready to shave his entire beard, but Lindsay had lobbied hard for a goatee. She won and he was glad. He didn’t think he could have handled his entire face clean shaven.

He stroked the goatee and looked up, catching Lindsay’s eyes in the mirror. His mouth hitched in a sensual grin, causing Lindsay’s eyes to widen. He held back a groan when her tongue peeked out to lick her lips. He wanted those lips on him, her tongue driving him over the edge.

“Ahemm,” Rolf coughed. “Eet eez perfection, no?”

“He looks fantastic, Rolf,” Lindsay came around to stand next to Rolf, giving Grant a phony critical once over. Her smile and passion-filled eyes gave her away. Grant gave a small bow, then held out his hand to Rolf.

“Thanks, you did a great job. Are you available for the next hour or so?”

“Well, yez,” Rolf replied, confusion evident on his face.

“Great, then its Lindsay’s turn.”

“W ... what?” Rolf sputtered.

Lindsay didn’t say a word, but anger replaced the passion in her eyes.

Grant almost enjoyed the anger as much as he lusted after the passion.

“This is not what I had in mind, Grant.” Lindsay seethed.

“You agreed, sort of an eye for an eye thing, remember?” He took a step toward her,

not menacing, but to show that he meant business. “Remember?”

She stood her ground, he’d give her that. Even full-grown men backed down from Grant when he gave them that look.

“Yes.” It was more of a breath than an actual spoken word, making Grant wonder if she was just saying yes to his question. He hoped it was more.

Rolf, who’d been standing there with a shocked look in his face, finally came back to the living.

“Oooh, what fun! I geet to transform Lindzee, too?” He pushed Grant aside and shoved Lindsay into his chair. “We have talked about theez, no? Somzing new?” He moved to the door, flinging it open and hollered down the hall.

“Elise! Come quickly.” Rolf stepped out into the hall and barely missed getting run over by Elise.

Grant knelt in front of Lindsay while Rolf and Elise stood in the hall muttering to each other.

“You okay?”

She didn’t reply, just looked deep into his eyes.

What he saw there gave him pause. Hope. He saw hope in her eyes, for what he didn’t know, but he was glad he put it there. Grant held his breath as she reached out and caressed his cheek.

Her hand trailed his jaw line toward his chin, where she stopped to stroke his goatee, her fingers lightly moved across his lips.

Whatever she was doing, he didn’t want to scare her off, so he closed his eyes and gave into the feeling of her hands. He sensed her leaning forward and his eyes flew open when he felt her breath on his lips.

“Thank you,” she whispered.

Rolf and Elise came in the room then, not giving Grant the chance to respond.

Rolf grabbed his arm and with great effort hauled him up. “You may have suggested theez, but you do not get to watch.”

“But...” Grant started.

“No. Out.” Rolf thrust him out the door and shut it in his face.

“Well, shit,” Grant spat out, making his way back to the lobby. He would just have to be patient. He was never very good at being patient, and with Lindsay his patience was wearing very thin.

* * * *

“I don’t think I’ve seen you look better, Lin,” Rolf gave her a quick hug.

“My mother is going to kill me.”

Lindsay stared at her reflection. The long, pale blond hair was gone, replaced with sensual low lights and a shoulder-length layered cut that moved with her. For the first time in her life, Lindsay liked her reflection.

“Rolf. It’s beautiful,” she began.

“No, *ma petit*, you are beautiful.” Rolf grasped her chin and turned her face to look at him. “Believe it, Lin, you are beautiful, inside and out, and I think a certain someone has figured that out as well.” He raised a neatly waxed eyebrow. “Elise is gone now, I’ve got ten minutes to my next appointment, will you tell me now what’s going on with you and Wolfman Grant?”

Lindsay shook her head, she didn't know herself what was going on between her and Grant.

"Okay, here's the scoop. I've known him since I was four years old. I fell in love with him when I was six. He left Chicago because his father was trying to force him to marry Kiera. Remember who he is now?"

"Oh, *oui*," Rolf gasped, enlightenment dawning in his eyes.

"So he's back now to run his father's business. I have one week to transform him into a suave businessman, and I can't seem to keep my hands off him." The last had come out as more of a sob. "I don't know what to do. He's so much more than I imagined and I'm afraid."

"Afraid of what, Lin." All trace of accent gone, Rolf was dead serious. "Love?"

Lindsay laughed at that. She laughed until tears streamed down her face.

"Love? How can I love anyone if I can't even love myself?"

"Lindsay, no matter what your hair looks like, what clothes you wear, or who your mother is," Rolf tipped her chin up, looking into her eyes. Honesty and love were in his eyes and his words. "The real you, the real Lindsay Taylor is there, you just need to let her out."

Lindsay wrapped her arms around him, hugging him tight while she regained her composure.

"I love you, Rolf."

He chuckled in her hair.

"And I love you, Lin. Now can the tears and let's go slay the wolf."

She gave him a playful shove. "Isn't that 'slay the dragon'?"

"Dragon, wolf. Honestly, I think he's a bit of both."

"Rolf," Lindsay replied in her best French accent. "You are right about zat one."

* * * *

Grant was tired of waiting. He'd never been ogled more in his life than in the last hour and a half. By both men and women. A collective gasp brought his attention to the hallway at the back of the salon. Rolf was walking toward him with a woman who looked faintly like Lindsay, but this Lindsay had a glow about her, a warmth that seemed to come from the inside.

He had thought she was beautiful before, but he was dumbstruck now. What was once pampered perfection was now, soft, luscious, *real*. The sort of real beauty the movies were always trying to capture, but never quite hit the mark. If this was a movie, there would be angels singing and a filtered spot light centered on Lindsay as she sashayed toward him.

There weren't angels singing or lights flashing, but there was definite sashaying. Before the night was over, Grant vowed to have Lindsay naked, under him, panting his name.

Lindsay stopped just short of arms' reach from him, but wouldn't look him in the eye.

Strange, before she'd always met him head on, but now she seemed not so sure of herself, or maybe not so sure of his reaction.

"Incredible." He let his passion be felt in that one word.

Lindsay took a sharp intake of breath, and the slight blush that crept up her neck only

spurred his desire.

“Are we done here?” His voice husky with want.

“But, of course,” Rolf interjected, taking an arm of each and guiding them toward the door. “My work eez done today. *Au revoir, ma petits. Croyez à l'amour.*”

Grant shook hands with Rolf and ushered Lindsay into the waiting limo. He wondered if Lindsay spoke French and knew what Rolf had said as they left. *Croyez à l'amour*. Believe in love.

Chapter Seven

Thank God, Masterson's wasn't very far from Rolf's. Lindsay didn't think she could control herself much longer. Grant's searing gaze penetrated through all her layers and left her naked, open, raw. The sexual tension choked the air so that the backseat of the limo felt like being crammed in a Mini-Cooper.

"Um, thanks." She looked out the window at the buildings speeding by.

"For what?"

"Well, for pushing me to do this, I really like it."

"I didn't push you into anything." He leaned forward and grabbed her hand, rubbing sensual circles on her palm with his thumb. "I really like it, too."

As much as she should pull her hand away, she didn't. She let the desire build with each rotation of his thumb. She looked at Grant just as the limo pulled up in front of Masterson's. If she thought her desire had hit its peak, she was wrong. The passion in his eyes exploded her want and left her exposed.

"Grant," she whispered.

"Looks like we're here, Lin." Releasing her hand, he opened the door, gesturing for her to get out first.

She hesitated a moment. She wanted to pursue what had just happened, but followed Grant's example and let it go. For now. She got out of the limo and walked into Masterson's, not waiting to see if Grant was following her. She knew he was, she felt his stare.

"Hi, Joey," she said to the well-tailored old man who was shuffling towards her.

"Lindsay," Joey said, sounding like Sylvester Stallone in Rocky. The Masterson clan originated from New York, and even though this was the third generation of Masterson's to run the shop, their accent seemed innate.

"Hey, Joey, I'd like you to meet a friend of mine, Grant Callahan."

Joey reached for Grant's outstretched hand. "Mr. Callahan, very nice to meet you. I believe I did business with your father." Joey gestured for them to follow him. "It's an honor to continue the tradition."

"Nice to meet you too." *An honor, huh?* Joey Masterson was a practiced liar if he thought working with his father had been an honor.

"Okay," Lindsay said. "I've got some work to do, so I'm going to the Starbucks down the street. Joey, Grant needs at least three suits and a tux. Grant..." She turned to him and took his hand. "—remember what I said in the kitchen?"

Grant tugged her close and leaned in. "You mean when you were moaning over the danish?"

Lindsay felt the blush creep up her face. "No, about being the same on the inside even if you change the outside."

"Oh, that, yeah. Remember our agreement?"

"How can I forget?"

"Off you go, then." Grant spun her around and swatted her butt. "Joey and I will be fine, *mom*."

Joey and Grant were still laughing as she pushed the glass door and stepped out onto

the sidewalk. She really didn't have any work to do, but she thought the distance would do her some good. She needed to get some perspective. She wished there was someone she could call and talk to about what she was feeling. Rolf was the only person she confided in, and he had practically told her to jump Grant as soon and as often as she could.

This was a testament to her lonely, fake life. The grass is always greener, they say. Well, for Lindsay, the grass on her side had been dead for a long time.

The Starbucks wasn't busy, thank God. She ordered her latte and sat in a faux suede cushy chair near the window so she could see Grant when he came to get her. They had a bit more shopping to do before the day was out—for both of them, if Grant had anything to say about it.

They had a reservation at Club International at The Drake Hotel at seven tonight. She wanted to discuss the schedule for the week as well as acclimate Grant to the types of places he'd be required to conduct business in or find potential wives. After all, he would be required to carry on the Callahan name. Grace had told her it was part of the inheritance and that she should try and teach him how to treat "a proper young woman."

Lindsay wasn't feeling proper at all and was in no mood to teach him how to behave around silly debutantes. She wanted Grant, primal, animalistic, baring her soul to him as he pounded into her. Every instinct in her wanted to grab Grant and run. Run back to his secluded mountains and hide from herself, from the person she hated, but didn't know how to get rid of.

A cold sip from her latte made her realize time had flown by, and she wondered where Grant was. She got up from the table and went to order a second drink. She hadn't gotten much sleep last night and probably wouldn't tonight—although not for reasons she wanted—so another coffee would do her good.

"Back again?" The twenty-something guy behind the counter asked.

"Yeah, I guess I was daydreaming and my latte got cold, can I just get an ice tea?"

"Make that two," Grant said over her shoulder.

She jumped, startled, and landed against him, melting into his embrace.

He leaned down and nuzzled into her hair, inhaling deeply, then planted a gentle kiss on the curve of her neck. "Mmmm, you smell good." He handed the barista his credit card to pay for their drinks, then tightened his embrace as they moved to wait for them.

She should pull away. She shouldn't want to feel the warmth of his chest pressed against her back. She shouldn't want him with such desperation that she imagined Grant stealing her away to the Starbucks bathroom and taking her against the wall.

But she did, and she didn't know what she was going to do about it.

"Did you and Joey get everything squared away?"

"Yep, three very proper business suits and one snazzy tux will be delivered to the office tomorrow."

She turned to look into his eyes, but he didn't let her step away. She put her hands on his muscular chest and pushed back so she could see his face. "I hope it wasn't too painful?"

He thrust his jean-covered erection against her, a gleam of mischief in his eyes. "Honey, it's been painful since I saw you bending over to get into your trunk."

She slapped him on his shoulder and pushed away, but the feel of his hard length against her still lingered. He knew that wasn't what she was asking him, but she wanted

to fix that particular problem. She picked up their drinks and handed Grant his, then walked toward the door.

“If you’re a good boy and behave the rest of the day, I promise I’ll kiss your boo-boo.”

Grant reached her before she got to the door and pushed her through and into the back of the limo before she could think of the consequences of her tease. In one smooth motion he had their drinks in the holders and her pressed down on the leather seat.

Her breath caught at the intensity of his gaze. Smoldering heat seared her to her core.

“Don’t make promises you won’t keep.”

She met his gaze with a passion and intensity all her own.

“I don’t.”

She reached up to cradle Grant’s neck in her hand and felt the limo lurch forward. She knew the driver had their schedule and would know where to go next, so she concentrated on the step she was about to take.

She pulled Grant’s lips to a hair’s breadth away from hers, a flutter of a kiss. “I always keep my promises,” she said against his mouth.

Grant crushed his lips against hers with a growl, his tongue forging entrance to her eager mouth.

She met him with equal force. Her tongue dueled with his for dominance, but he was too potent, and she gave into his power over her, letting him take the lead.

He placed his hand on her hip and shifted her shirt up as his hand raked molten fire up her side, the gathering heat converging to her breast where the journey of his hand ended, with a squeeze.

She arched up into his callused palm, wishing they weren’t in the limo. Wishing there weren’t layers of clothes between them. Wishing against hope that this was something that would last forever.

Releasing her lips, he trailed kisses down her neck and shoulder until he reached her bared breast where his thumb chaffed against her peaked nipple. He pinched her hard, pushing up her nipple to his open mouth. He licked in one long stroke over his thumb to flick her hard bud.

She arched up further into his hot mouth and moaned. “Grant,” she whispered. “We ca...”

He licked her taut bud again, this time nipping her instead of flicking.

“Yes, we can. Your body is saying yes, Lindsay, why do you keep saying no?”

He removed his hand from her breast and shifted aside, moving his hand to cup her sex through her pants.

“I feel your heat, Lin. I want nothing more than to taste that heat. To feel you shudder against my tongue as you climax from my mouth alone.”

“God, Grant.” She covered her face with her hands. With words alone he had her close to orgasm. “We’re supposed to be working together. This wasn’t part of the deal. This isn’t supposed to happen.”

He pushed off her, pulling her bra down over her breast, then straightened her shirt. With a heavy sigh he sat on the leather bench opposite her. The limo stopped, and he raked his fingers through his newly short hair.

“Look at me, Lin.”

She moved her hands to her lap and sat up, sinking back into the seat, wishing it

would swallow her up.

“Look. At. Me.”

She hesitated a moment, knowing her confusion had hurt him. They were both in need of release, yet she didn't know how to say yes, to give over to the inner-Lindsay and have hot, sweaty, ruthless sex with the man of her dreams.

He growled low.

She flicked her gaze to his, seeing raw need, hurt and questions she didn't have the answer for.

“We will finish this.”

She gasped, the utter truth of his statement grating her heart raw. “I know,” she consented. Knowing that once she did her heart would break in two. There was no way she could be with Grant and not jump over the edge of the cliff into unrequited love. Hell, she was already halfway there.

He bent over, opened the door and got out of the limo.

She sat, letting wave after wave of confusion wash over her. This was her punishment. For all the times she had wished she wasn't a part of Chicago society. For every time she stuck her tongue out at her mother's back when she scolded her for wanting to read a romance novel over literary fiction. For the stripper classes, the secret tattoo no one, not even Rolf, knew about, for kissing her pillow every night before she went to sleep since she was six, imagining it was Grant.

All the hidden wants and desires she'd locked away in a secret place in her heart had suddenly sprung free after Grant had jimmed the lock.

“I know you've got us on a tight schedule, Lin. Are you getting out of the limo?”

She steeled her rampaging emotions, wanting to get through the rest of the day with at least her dignity intact. She'd go searching for her wayward secrets later, away from Grant. Hopefully he hadn't broken the lock to her heart. She was gonna need it.

* * * *

Grant rested his head against the smooth, cool shower tiles, a direct contrast to the searing water washing over him. He willed his tense muscles to relax. For a man who lived a life of solitude in the quiet mountains, the last two days had been a whirlwind of activity, emotion, and pain.

He grunted as his aching shaft flexed, in search of release. It would be so easy to relieve his pain. It would only take a few deft strokes, and he'd be shooting his cum on the shower wall. But as much as that would make him feel better, he didn't want it. He wanted Lindsay, to feel her moist heat expand as she accepted his length, then contract as she screamed his name in ecstasy.

“Fuck.” He banged his head a few times on the tile, the pain clearing his head and taking his focus away from a pain lower in his body. He prided himself on his cool reserve. On his stoic exterior matching the self-controlled interior. Two days with Lindsay and cool, stoic and self-controlled all went out the window. His fuckin' dog was even out of control.

He turned off the shower and reached for the towel hanging over the stall door.

Chopper, who'd been sulking in the corner after a very harsh tongue-lashing from Grant about why he wasn't supposed to eat the down pillows, grunted and lifted his head off the floor as Grant stepped out of the shower.

“I’m still not happy with you.”

Chopper laid his head back down and averted his eyes.

“I still don’t understand how you only ate Lindsay’s pillows and not mine.”

Chopper whined and slunk further into the corner.

“She wasn’t happy with you in the first place, and now she’s pissed at me because I can’t control myself.”

He wrapped the towel around his waist and swiped the mirror with his hand. The man looking back at him didn’t look like him, short hair and goatee. But Lindsay was right, other than his lack of self-control, it was still him, still Grant looking back at him. As he dressed in new black slacks and long-sleeved, collared shirt, it was still his skin underneath, his heart beating in his chest.

He put the finishing touches to his outfit on, silver cufflinks he’d gotten at a local Harley shop he’s insisted they stop at. He smiled. She’d been like a kid in a candy store. He was hoping to see her in the outfit she bought soon.

Lindsay was unsure of him, unsure of herself. He was going to prove to her that he could keep his body in check, while at the same time, slowly lure her true nature out.

He stepped through the bedroom door into the hallway, and the sight of Lindsay, in a short black dress, bent over fixing the strap on one of her hot-pink patent leather stilettos pinned him in place. Desire swamped over him, his body responding to the sight of her long legs and a quick flash of rounded ass.

He would be in control ... even if it killed him.

Chapter Eight

The evening went by without Grant losing control. Well, almost. Every time she opened her mouth to take a bite of her halibut his cock jumped. When she unconsciously tucked her hair behind her ear his heart thundered. When she excused herself to the restroom, the sight of those pink stilettos almost killed him. Until he saw that every other man in the restaurant was watching her walk away from the table and having the same thoughts about her as he was, then his desire turned to jealousy and rage quicker than lightning.

But on the outside he was the epitome of calm, cool and collected. He dutifully listened to her “society” instructions. His mother must have thought living in the mountains had turned him into a Neanderthal, but instead of interrupting Lindsay, he concentrated on the sound of her voice. Her body movements as she talked. Her pink lips, just a shade lighter than her “fuck me” shoes.

When she suggested a drive through the city to show him the new hot spots for the elite of the city, he wanted a gun so he could end it quickly. Sitting that close to her and not being able to touch her was seriously eating away at his resolve. Her spicy perfume was a smell he was never going to forget.

“So?”

“Huh?”

“Grant, are you even listening to me?”

“Of course.” Lie. He hadn’t really heard a word she’d said all evening, but he wasn’t going to let her know that.

“So, are we going to stop at any of these places?” He focused on her and watched as she visibly gulped.

“Um, if you want.” She didn’t look like she wanted to at all. He didn’t want her to be uncomfortable, he just didn’t want the night to end. “You’ve been a good sport today, you got your hair cut, went shopping for shoes you won’t fall in and ended up buying those bad girls,” he said pointing to her stilettos. “I even got you to eat a hot dog from a vendor.”

“Oh, that hot dog was so good. Whoever thought of putting tomatoes and pickles on a hot dog was a genius. It was my first, you know.” She looked sheepish and a little angry.

“Your first hot dog ever?”

“Yeah, mother never let me have them, said they weren’t good for me.”

I’m not good for you either, but you can take a bite out of me. He almost said it, but held himself back at the last minute. She looked vulnerable and he didn’t want to scare her back into her hole.

“What else, Lin? What else weren’t you supposed to have?”

“Too much,” she said in a whisper.

He reached across and took her hand. “Well, let this be your free pass for the rest of the week.” He leaned over and kissed her softly on the lips. His body screamed for more, but he tamped down his desire and sat back in his seat.

Her eyes were closed and a flush crept up her face, but she hadn’t pushed him away.

She inhaled deeply and let it out with a soft woosh. Her eyes popped open and glittered with anticipation.

“Free pass?”

“Yep.”

“To do *whatever* I want for the rest of the week?”

He grinned and wondered if there was a notary public available at midnight. She looked like she was going to ask for something in writing. “Yep.”

“With no consequences?”

“Well, unless you want to do something illegal, then I don’t see why not. No consequences.”

A sly, sexy smile slowly grew on her face.

“It’s a deal,” she said, then jumped across the open space between the bench seats of the limo and into his arms.

*

Lindsay crushed her lips to Grant’s. She wrapped her arms around his neck and straddled his lap.

He sat still, unresponsive.

Probably shocked at her behavior, but she didn’t care. She’d had a long talk with herself this afternoon as they’d shopped and as she’d gotten ready for the evening. It didn’t matter if she wasn’t going to see Grant ever again after this week. She wanted him and she wasn’t going to deny herself. She would have this week and hold on to the memory of it for the rest of her life.

She rocked against his erection, pulling away from his lips to his ear. She nipped his ear lobe and sucked it into her mouth, releasing it with a pop.

“Lindsay,” Grant growled and crushed her to him, both of his arms wrapping around her.

But she didn’t want to be held close, she wanted to be wild, to be wanton. She pushed back and slid down his lap until she was on her knees. She looked up at him as she undid his belt.

“Come up here,” he said tugging at her.

“No, I want this. I want to taste you.”

He growled his surrender and opened his legs, giving her room and freedom to have her way with him.

Lindsay unzipped his slacks with a slowness that belied her eagerness to feel his cock in her mouth. She opened the flap, revealing his bulge encased in his black boxer briefs. She leaned down and ran her nose up the length of him, inhaling his scent. When she reached the tip she took a deep breath, surrounded the tip with her lips and let out her breath, slow and warm.

“I’m gonna die, Lin.”

“No, you’re not. Lift up,” she said, tugging his pants and boxers off his hips. She slid them down to his ankles, then spread his legs wide, her hands resting on his knees.

His cock bobbed under her gaze, long and hard, the engorged tip already seeping pre-cum.

“Magnificent,” she whispered, then slid her hands up his thighs, brushing her thumbs against his balls.

He jumped and sucked in his breath.

With one hand she cradled his sac and with the other grasped the base of his cock, holding it steady. She leaned up and flicked her tongue around the flared head, then sucked off the pre-cum glistening on the tip. She was rewarded with another sharp intake of breath from Grant.

He began caressing up and down her arms that were resting on his thighs, sending chills through her body.

She responded by taking his cockhead in her mouth, swirling her tongue around the tip, then pulling almost all the way off. She slowly bobbed her head up and down, giving attention to only the tip, building up anticipation in both of them.

Grant shifted his hands to her hair and massaged her scalp and neck.

She opened her mouth and throat fully and took him in, the head of his cock hitting the back of her throat.

“God,” he moaned.

She sucked up his length, then tightened her lips and eased back down. She massaged his balls, gently rolling them with each up and down motion of her head.

Grant growled and thrust into her mouth.

She opened her throat wider so she was taking his full length in with each thrust of Grant’s hips. She moved her hands to grip his hips to steady herself as she accepted the give and take of Grant’s rigid cock.

Her breasts tingled and sweat beaded on her back, trailing down to the crease of her butt. Her sex clenched with each lunge, her juices soaked her thong and ran down her leg. The only thing that would make this perfect was if Grant was pumping into her sex, driving her to climax with his thick shaft, his body weight, his heady scent.

Grant’s pace increased and he grunted with each stroke into her mouth.

Lindsay answered with her own moans as a sensual haze stole over her, and all that mattered was the two of them and their pleasure.

He clenched her hair, pulling it to the point of pain and with a yell, thrust one last time, then stilled as his seed pumped into Lindsay’s welcome mouth.

She swallowed every drop, savoring the tangy taste and the sounds of his labored breathing. She sat back, resting against the leather bench seat and stretched her neck. Her cheek muscles ached, but it was a satisfying pain.

Grant sat, eyes closed, sprawled on the seat, his relaxed cock resting on his leg, still glistening with the combination of her saliva and his seed.

The limo stopped, and he moved to pull up his pants, then reached across and grabbed Lindsay by the shoulders.

“That was amazing,” he whispered, touching his forehead to hers. “I want to return the pleasure, Lin, but after two days of wanting you I don’t know if I have the energy to even walk to the elevator.”

She looked up into his eyes and gave a satisfied smile. “I’ve got all week for the free pass, remember?”

He pulled her in for a kiss, then helped her out of the limo. He held her hand the entire ride up the elevator to the penthouse, and when they stepped into the foyer, she pulled away to move to her room, but he pulled her to him.

“Stay with me, Lin.” He looked tired, yet there was still a gleam of desire in his eyes, in his body a sense of possession. “Please.”

She glanced down the hallway toward her room—her bed was probably still broken.

She'd taken his free pass and run with it, giving him a blowjob to rival any porn movie. So why was she hesitating?

"Okay." She squeezed his hand and let him lead her to his room. He'd said he was too tired to do anything more tonight, implying that he just wanted to sleep next to her. Why, then did she feel like she was being led into the lion's den?

* * * *

Lindsay woke slowly. Her dreams had been filled with visions of Grant and her in various states of undress and multiple positions. How she hadn't attacked him in the night she didn't know. As the haze of sleep drifted off, she became aware of Grant's warmth pressed against her back, his arm flung over her and his feet twined with hers.

She expected to feel some embarrassment, or even remorse, for her behavior last night, but she felt neither. Only a deep contentment and peace in her heart, and a constant tingling sensation in her belly. She snuggled closer into Grant's hold, shifting so his limp hand covered her breast. It was sneaky, but after her dreams, she was desperate for his touch.

She wiggled her bottom into his crotch and started to stroke his calf with her toes.

Grant closed his hand over her breast and pressed his newly aroused shaft against her butt.

"Good morning, Lin." His gravely voice heightened her desire.

She grasped hold of the new Lindsay emerging from the old and rolled over in his arms. "Morning." She planted a wet kiss on his mouth and trailed her lips along the edge of his jaw line to the hollow of his neck. She licked back up, following the line she'd just made with her lips.

This new Lindsay had no inhibitions, no hesitation.

Grant reached around and gripped her butt, crushing her to him, grinding his erection into her soft belly.

Lindsay moaned. She was going to like this new Lindsay.

Grant rolled over, pushing her into the mattress, resting on his elbows above her. He fit perfectly to her.

She looked up into his bedroom eyes, his sleep-tousled hair, his five o'clock shadow, and sumptuous lips and felt her heart drop. She'd dreamt of him looking at her like this, and somehow, even through her defenses, he'd made his way into her heart.

"I need to make love with you," he whispered.

Lindsay felt his words to her core, as if he'd said them over a loud speaker.

"Me, too," she whispered back, meeting his lips in a searing kiss.

Grant pulled back, mischief in his eyes. "You need to make love to yourself? Can I watch?"

Lindsay laughed, the sound full and whole bodied. "Shut up, you dolt," she said, smacking him on the shoulder.

"Resorting to physical violence?" Grant shifted and grasped her hands, moving them above her head and holding them there with one hand, the other hand poised for attack at her exposed armpit.

Lindsay squirmed under his hold, but it was firm, and she really didn't want to go anywhere.

"Hold still and take your punishment."

“My pun—aaaahhhhh!” She screamed as he started to tickle her. Grant held fast as she tried to yank her hands out of his, but she was helpless to fight him.

“Stop,” she gasped between laughing and trying to catch her breath.

“Are you gonna hit me again?”

She shook her head no.

“Promise?” He relaxed his hold on her and stopped tickling.

She pulled out of his grasp and smacked him again on the shoulder. “Don’t tickle me—ah!”

He attacked her armpit again.

She wiggled, trying to get out from under him. With a burst of energy she bucked him off and rolled off of the bed. She spun to face him, panting to catch her breath.

He was sprawled out on the bed in the mass of covers, an evil grin spreading over his face.

“I said, don’t tickle me.”

He eased his feet off the opposite side of the bed and stood facing her, the grin now reaching his eyes.

“I mean it, Grant.”

He took a step toward the corner of the bed.

She parried a step in the opposite direction on her side of the bed.

He lunged and bolted around the bed toward her.

She squeaked and jumped on the bed, attempting to reach the side he’d just deserted, but fell on her belly with a grunt as she felt his grip on her ankle.

In one quick motion, he grabbed her other ankle and flipped her over.

“You’ve done it now, Lin.”

She sat up on her elbows, anticipation of his next move making her nipples bead, the sound of her thudding heart filling her ears.

He put first one knee, then the other on the bed and crawled up to her. His hungry gaze devoured her. When he reached her lace panties he yanked them off with a loud rip and brought the wisp of black lace to his nose and inhaled, his eyes locked with hers.

Her mouth opened with a gasp at his erotic gesture. Her pussy pulsed with desire.

He seized her t-shirt and drew it over her head and tossed it to the floor.

He pushed her legs wide, opening her to his covetous gaze.

She couldn’t deny her need. Couldn’t deny the fierce craving Grant stirred in her. The evidence of her desire seeped from her pussy down to the crevice of her butt.

Grant licked his lips and caught her look. He quirked an eyebrow and gave her a slanted smile that increased the fire already blazing in her before he leaned down to draw in the scent of her arousal. He let out a guttural growl, then with his hands forced her legs up and wider, bringing her closer to his mouth, and plunged his tongue into her waiting pussy.

Lindsay arched up into his mouth, savoring Grant’s ravenous assault on her.

Oh, yeah. Lion’s den for sure.

Chapter Nine

Grant was almost overwhelmed with his desire. He licked Lindsay's pussy, plunged his tongue in, then back out to lick again. With each swipe over her clit, he elicited a stimulating gasp from her. He tongued into her again, mimicking the thrusting motion his dick was craving. He wanted her writhing under him, begging him for release, begging for him to be inside her.

She arched up again, pushing against the onslaught of this tongue.

He pulled back, flicking her clit with the tip of his tongue, holding her in place with his hands as she bucked toward him.

"Please, Grant," she moaned.

He answered her by gliding his hands from her knees down her thighs. He palmed her ass and opened her sex wide with his thumbs.

"Oh, God," she gasped.

He bent to her pussy and feasted on her, relishing her addictive taste.

Her breathing quickened and her body trembled. She reached up and grasped his head, pushing him further into her sex.

He pressed his thumbs into her and moved to suck on her clit, desperate to bring her to completion.

"Yes ... Grant," she yelled as her pussy pulsed around his thumbs. Her fingers dug into his scalp as she came into his mouth.

He continued to suck and nibble until he felt her body go slack in his hands. He lowered her butt to the bed, then crawled off. "Stay there," he instructed as he went into the bathroom to retrieve a condom.

Lindsay gave a feeble laugh. "Like I can move."

He returned, removing his boxers and climbed back onto the bed.

"Oh," he replied, ripping the foil package open and easing the condom down his aching cock. "You'll be moving all right."

He knelt between her legs and prodded her wet opening with the head of his cock. He eased the tip in, clenching his teeth at her exquisite tightness.

"God, Lin." He stilled, willing his overeager body to calm, or he was going to finish before he even started.

"Grant? You need to move."

"You make me crazy, Lin. Give me a sec." He eased in another inch.

Her pussy clenched once around his shaft, and she lifted her hips, forcing him further in.

"You need to move now, Grant." She reached up to palm her breasts and tweaked her nipples. "I need you inside me."

He thrust into her, pulled almost completely out, then plunged again.

She moaned softly with each advance, her hands moving freely over her lush breasts.

Grant reached over and grabbed a pillow, slowing his onslaught only to tuck it under her butt. He took her ankles in his hands and lifted her legs to rest her calves on his shoulders. He leaned forward and replaced her hands with his on her breasts.

Lindsay's chest heaved, her eyes closed, ecstasy written on her face. She flung her

arms out, bracing herself.

Grant watched Lindsay's pleasure build up again. His momentum never faltered, but his resolve did. It took everything he had to concentrate on bringing her to orgasm again before he let his control go.

He bent over more and sucked a peaked nipple into his mouth. At this angle he was pressed so deep in her, with each thrust his sac tapped gently against her ass.

"Fuck," she yelled, her eyes flew open, catching Grant's sidelong gaze.

He released her nipple with a pop and sat up, taking her legs off his shoulder and holding them out, increasing his tempo.

Sweat trickled down his back and his breath became labored. He felt his sac tighten and spread Lindsay's legs wider. He pounded into her with force, the sounds of his onslaught and her seductive moans filling the room.

She reached up and gripped his forearms, her nails digging into his skin, then arched her back as wave after wave of orgasm hit her.

Grant let loose his control and surged into her with a ferocity he didn't know was possible.

He felt her coming down from her orgasm and shifted so that with each thrust he hit her clit, sending her over the edge again. This time he followed her, his own release hitting him like a Mack truck.

He released her legs and collapsed on Lindsay. It was only then that he realized she was hanging off the bed. He chuckled and hugged her to him, scooting around so they lay fully on the bed. "Sorry."

She snuggled closer into him, burrowing her fingers in his chest hair. "Don't be sorry. That was ... indescribable."

"Amazing."

"Fantastic."

"Earth-stopping."

She pulled his chest hair and smacked his chest. "That's a little far-fetched. Now you're just being conceited."

"Really?" He said, rubbing where she'd smacked him. "I could have sworn I felt time slow down, if not stop completely."

She sat up laughing. Her eyes twinkled with newfound ease.

Grant reached up and traced her smile with his thumb. "I love your laugh." He pressed his thumb to her lips in a kiss. "You need to do it more often."

Her smile faltered and she looked solemn for a moment, but then smiled even brighter, an edge of determination to her gaze. "Maybe now I will." She settled back down into his arms.

Grant lay there, wondering at the amazing woman in his arms. She inflamed him, drove him to do things he swore he would never do, just to see her content and happy. He wondered if she would fit in his world, then sighed in regret. Lindsay was money, society galas, and charity balls. He was backwoods, motorcycles, and the closest thing he'd been to a party was tailgating.

He had five more days to drink in his fill of Lindsay before he had to let her go. He felt sleep creeping over him and pulled the covers around them.

He was going to make every moment count.

* * * *

Lindsay's backside was ice cold. She rolled over to throttle Grant for stealing the covers only to realize he wasn't in the bed anymore. She glanced at the clock, eleven o'clock. "Crap!" She'd slept most of the morning away and she still had a ton of information to go over with Grant before his mother's dinner tonight.

She scrambled out of bed, but didn't find her clothes. She picked up Grant's black t-shirts from the floor. His scent still clung to it, surrounding her with flashbacks of being in his arms all night. She couldn't stand here all day daydreaming, so she scooted to her room as fast as she could. The Callahan offices were closed this week, but she didn't want to run into the cleaning crew. She found the clothes she'd bought yesterday hanging in the closet, and with Alfred gone, the only one who would have done that was Grant.

She gave a girly sigh at his thoughtfulness and felt her heart lurch. But just as quickly shook herself out of la-la land. Who was she kidding? She'd given them a week of free play. One week that was already half over, then he'd be engrossed in his new life, and she'd go back to her fake one. She had four days left to play, and she was going to take every moment and savor it, lock it away for safekeeping, and only bring out the memories on sad, rainy, windy days. Which in Chicago were plenty, but she'd get over him.

Lindsay dressed quickly, but just as she was stepping out of her room in search of Grant she caught her reflection in the full length mirror. The woman looking back at her had a glow of confidence about her, something Lindsay never felt she'd had. The black leather pants fit her like second skin and showed off her long legs. She turned in her Kenneth Cole heeled boots to look at her backside, surprised to find she had one. She reached around and gripped her ass, giving it a squeeze.

"Holy shit! I have a hot ass." She laughed and spun around, once again giving a critical eye to the rest of her. The black halter top hugged her breasts, showing off her ample cleavage and revealing her toned arms. Her new shaggy hair was the definition of tousled. *Note to self, sex in the morning makes for sexy hair.* She winked at her reflection and blew a Marilyn Monroe kiss. She'd lined her eyes with dark charcoal like the register girl at Hot Topic where she'd bought her first black t-shirt, it had a happy bunny on it and said, "It's cute how stupid you are."

A last once over in the mirror and she turned to search for Grant. She looked in the kitchen, but he wasn't there. She went back to his room, but he wasn't there, either. She stood in the hallway for a minute, wondering where he could have gone and why he'd gone without her when she heard a faint whining. Lindsay knew of only one thing that could make that noise, Chopper. She followed the sound of the whine to the office and heard Grant's muffled voice behind the closed double doors.

She took a deep breath, letting the fact that she looked good on the outside boost her confidence at seeing Grant after their morning romp. She turned the doorknob and swung the door open, barely missing Chopper. Her hand on the doorknob was her only saving grace from falling on her ass again. She burst out laughing, but stopped abruptly when Grant waved his arm at her and scowled. It was only then that she realized he was using the headset to talk to someone on the phone.

"Oops," she whispered, feigning repentance. She tiptoed her way over to the big desk where Grant sat, the computer lit up and papers strewn over the desk. He looked like he was actually working, but she knew better. She leaned over the desk, pushing out her already visible cleavage, and attempted to give Grant the good morning kiss she'd wanted

to when she woke up. But as she had been this morning when he wasn't in bed, she was denied again.

"Yes, sir," Grant said, holding up his hand to deflect her kiss. "Absolutely."

Lindsay pushed away from the desk, pouting over Grant's reaction. Damn him. Three days and he was already starting to break her heart. She made her way over to the bookcases lining one wall and looked over the books and pictures there.

She found the picture of their families from the summer vacation they'd taken together in the Ozarks. That had been the start of this whole mess. That was the summer she'd fallen in love with Grant. She was so absorbed in her memories she didn't notice Grant had finished his call until he snaked his arm around her waist.

"Eek." She smacked his arm and tried to pry his hand away. "You scared me, jerk."

He pressed into her, bending to her neck and took a deep breath. "Jerk?" He kissed her bare shoulder and licked up her neck to her ear. "Jerk?"

She wanted to be miffed by his rejection, but his kisses were turning her inside out. Maybe she'd interrupted a call to his shop back home, not a real business call. She quit resisting his embrace and melted into his chest, leaning her head back onto his shoulder.

He kissed her forehead and with a gentle squeeze released her. "So," he said, turning back to the desk. "What's on the agenda for today, boss? I thought we'd go over who will be at tonight's soiree at mother's."

That sweeping wave of hurt hit her again as she felt the loss of him and as his words sunk in. She'd actually been thinking about ditching work today and going to the Brookfield Zoo or one of the museums. Something fun, something not work-related, for once in her life.

"Okay, um," she stalled, willing the hurt away from her eyes before she turned to look at him. She wasn't going to give him the satisfaction that he'd touched her heart, negative or positive. She took a steadying breath and turned and walked to the door on anything but steady legs. "I seem to have forgotten my briefcase in my room. I'll just go run and get it, then we can get to work."

"Alright," he called after her. "I'll wait ri..."

She shut the door with a little more force than she'd meant to, cutting off the rest of his reply. She didn't know what Grant was up to with his uber-cool demeanor, all businessman one minute and sultry lover the next, but two could play at that game. If he was going to play it cool, she was just going to have to play it cooler.

* * * *

Lindsay shut her bedroom door and knocked her forehead against it. She was exhausted and the day wasn't over yet. They had spent the entire day working. He hadn't even tried to make a pass at her. She was furious and confused.

"Fuck." She banged her hand against the door and turned to make her way to the bathroom. She had two hours to get ready for the dinner tonight, and she wanted to soak away the knots in her shoulders in the huge tub.

She had been mistaken about Grant. He had a great head for business. It wasn't surprising, seeing he'd come from the Great Callahan. She didn't know how she could have been mistaken or even fooled by his rough appearance. The long hair, beard and black clothes were just trappings of the savvy businessman underneath.

Trappings. She shed her clothes and stepped into the steaming tub water. She'd

never really felt comfortable with the person she'd built up for herself. Maybe that was why she chose her profession. She needed an outlet for helping people change, something she couldn't even do for herself. How was that for positive advertising?

She sank into the tub, the hot water sloshing over the sides as she held her breath and went under. She came up with a sigh and smoothed her hair away from her face. Her emotions were everywhere, and she didn't even know where to begin. The old Lindsay wouldn't have felt the need to dissect how she felt. Now, emotions bombarded her at every corner, yet she knew, no matter what happened after this week, she could never go back to being cold, distant, rigid, conforming Lindsay.

She had Grant to thank for that. For taking a sledgehammer to her "trappings" and smashing them to bits. The image of Grant swinging a sledgehammer at her was one for a bad Hollywood horror flick and made her smile. At least he was a sexy bad guy.

Chapter Ten

Something about the way Lindsay was glaring at him from across his mother's sitting room made him feel like a bad guy. She leaned casually against the fireplace mantle, but he could see the tension riding her body. He didn't want to be the bad guy, but he hadn't been able to get Lindsay to tell him what was bothering her. He had so much to think about that he didn't know where to start, Lindsay, Callahan Enterprises, his father ... His head was dizzy with the realization that his father had not just built a thriving company, but an entire corporate empire. He glanced around the room, filled with Chicago's rich and powerful and wondered anew at what type of man his father really had been.

Everyone he'd met tonight had nothing but condolences and good things to say about his father. He'd helped Harry Langdon by buying his floundering company, but had kept Harry in charge until Harry had enough money to buy it back. Celeste Michaels told him of the property donations his father had given her charity, Inner-city Hugs, a chain of community centers in the lower income parts of the city, enabling her to help kids in need without having to worry about monthly rent from her non-profit organization.

The list went on. From the paperwork he'd gone over this morning, it looked as if with each act of selflessness on his father's part, sometimes putting his own company at risk, Callahan Enterprises managed to maintain and even increase in size and profit.

He'd pulled his mother aside just after they'd arrived to ask her about his father. She'd simply said, "He was a good man, Grant," then moved on to greet more of her guests.

Movement caught his eye, and he watched as Lindsay, decked out in a red dress that clung to her curves and showed off her new hairstyle, glided into another man's arms. The man was dressed in a dark blue tailored suit and built like a linebacker. His short, blond hair had a military look to it and Lindsay was almost lost in his embrace. Joy flickered across her face, but when she caught Grant's gaze it faltered, then turned to determination.

The man pushed her a little away from him, then spun her around in a circle.

Grant noted how the man's eyes lingered on her uncovered legs and the bounce of her breasts as she settled back into a "tah-dah" stance in front of the man. "Excuse me, gentlemen," he said to the group of men who'd been talking to him, and made his way toward Lindsay and the man he was going to kill.

Lindsay's eye flew wide in panic as she saw him striding toward them, yet she leaned into the man, touched his arm, her hand trailing down his sleeve and laughed at what he was saying. She was playing with fire. He might have given her a free pass for the week, but that pass was good for him only.

Rage, pure and simple jealous rage surged in Grant's blood. He saw red and it took all his control to not deck the guy on his ass.

"Grant," Lindsay called as he reached them. She hooked her arm in the man's, turning him toward Grant.

Leaving him just the right angle for a good solid left hook. The guy was big, but Grant had plenty of fight experience.

“We were just about to find you,” she said, smiling up at the man like a love sick puppy.

That look hit him in the gut. He almost wanted to look around to find the truck that had run him over. He wanted her to look at him like that. Most of the time she had the wary look of a deer caught in headlights, or overconfidence shadowing her insecurities.

“Hi”, the man said, holding out his hand for Grant to shake. “I’m Zach Michaels, Lindsay’s sister’s husband.”

Instantly the rage retreated, and Grant felt like a fool. He extended his hand and shook Zach’s hand a little more firmly than he had intended, but he was still a little shocked at the intensity of his emotions when it came to Lindsay.

“Grant Callahan. Nice to meet you.” So this was the man who’d had to take his place and married Keira.

“Keira and Zach just came back from vacation in the Fiji Islands with some great news.” Lindsay looked like she was going to burst, and her face glowed with such happiness and joy that Grant’s heart melted a little more.

“Hell,” Zach muttered and launched himself at Grant, giving him a big bear hug and pounding him soundly on the back. “I should be thanking you, brother.”

Grant extracted himself from the big man’s arms, glanced at Lindsay in confusion, then back at Zach who almost had tears in his eyes.

“Thank me?”

“Well, if you hadn’t left fifteen years ago, I never would have found my little rabbit, Keira.” Zach blinked away the tears in his eyes, and his smile was bright enough to warrant sunglasses. “And now we’re going to have our very own little bunny, isn’t that right, honey?” He reached out to a woman who was approaching them.

If Lindsay hadn’t changed her hair and clothes, Grant would have sworn the woman was Lindsay, only a few years older.

“Hi, Grant.” Keira leaned up and kissed him on the cheek, then settled into her husband’s arms. “Long time no see.”

Grant was relieved to see to no malice in her gaze. When he’d left, he’d written her a note explaining his reasons for not following through with the “merger,” but he’d never known how much his actions had affected her. From the looks of things, everything had turned out for the best.

“Keira, you’re looking great. I hear congratulations are in order?”

Keira whirled around on her husband and smacked his chest. “I told you to wait for me, Bear.”

Zach looked down at his wife, then winked at Grant. “I couldn’t help it, Rabbit, I’m just so happy.”

Grant felt uncomfortable as he watched Keira reach up and stroke Zach’s cheek with affection and love. He glanced at Lindsay, and she was watching the interaction with a longing that tore at his heart. As much as he’d like to think he was good enough for Lindsay, good enough to bring her happiness, he had too many demons. They were too different. She was delicate porcelain, and he was the bull in the china shop.

Suddenly Grant realized his five days left were quickly turning into four and that he hadn’t so much as touched Lindsay all day. His body burned for her. He wanted to hike up her dress and plunge in as she screamed out his name. Better yet, he wanted her naked except for those black stilettos of hers and riding him. Driving her body down onto his

until they both exploded from the intensity.

“Dinner will be served in the conservatory momentarily,” one of the waiters said, jolting Grant out of his visions of Lindsay naked.

Dinner would have to wait. “Save us some seats would ya,” he said to Zach and Keira, taking Lindsay by the hand and leading her toward the double doors that led outside into his mother’s rose garden. “I need to talk to Lindsay a moment.”

*

Lindsay let out a squeak of protest as Grant shut the doors behind them and dragged her further into the garden. “Where are we going? Didn’t you hear the guy? Dinner is ready.”

He didn’t answer, only tugged her hand and led her to a small arbor with a stone archway.

“Grant,” she huffed in frustration. The touch of his hand encircling her wrist was sending shivers of lust through her body, and she was determined to stay mad at him for ignoring her all day.

He spun her around and pressed her up against the wall of the archway.

His body against hers flushed any anger away. Her body responded, equaling his intensity. Her nipples hardened, her pussy clenched and became wet with her desire.

“I’m not hungry for *food*, Lindsay,” he rasped, his voice husky with want.

“We can’t, Grant ... not here,” she pleaded. His mother would fire her for sure if he missed the dinner.

“Yes,” he said through gritted teeth, his hand smoothed down her side and hitched up her dress, exposing her to the cool breeze. “We can.” He bent and kissed her, exploring her mouth while at the same time his hand moved her thong aside, and he plunged two fingers into her pussy.

She arched against his hand, thrilling that he could want her so much, so badly.

“Fuck, Lindsay, you’re so wet.” He leaned down and bit into her shoulder, anchoring him to her. “So hot.” Slowly he pumped his fingers into her sex as he trailed kisses from her shoulder down the vee of her dress to the juncture of her breasts.

Her insides had turned into molten lava, and the only one who could release the tension building in her was Grant. He built up such a fire in her. His nearness alone fueled the embers he’d started in her from the first kiss.

He pulled away from her, and she almost cried at the loss of his fingers, the loss of the warmth of his body against hers.

She heard the zip of a zipper, and he was back, hard, long and hot against her.

“I promise not to break these, baby,” he said and tugged the thong aside again, exposing her wet sex to him. He surged into her, filling her completely.

The uneven stones of the archway dug into her back, but she didn’t care. She was thankful it was solid and able to withstand Grant’s fervor. She wrapped her legs around him, pulling him deeper into her as she felt the first wave of ecstasy wash over her.

Grant thrust with a wildness that spread to her, and soon she was using the stone arch as leverage to bear down with forward motion of his hips.

The friction of their bodies, the threat of exposure, Grant’s frenzy, all of it, built up in Lindsay until she erupted with a sharp cry.

Grant cut her off, swallowing her shout with a kiss as he followed, plunging into her over and over again with possessive fierceness. He thrust one last time and groaned as he

paused, deep, pushed to the full length of his cock inside her.

Slowly Lindsay lowered her legs and whimpered as she felt his spent cock ease from her sex.

Grant swayed, then fell back on his bare ass onto the grass. “Shit,” he said, trying to catch his breath as he attempted to get up.

Lindsay laughed until tears rolled down her face.

“Don’t laugh,” Grant scolded as he tucked himself back into his boxers and righted his pants. “That was your fault.”

“My fault,” Lindsay sputtered, reaching to straighten his tie and smooth his shirt before she adjusted her thong. “That...” She pointed to the ground, indicating where he’d fallen. “—in no way was my fault.”

He inhaled deeply and let it out slowly, running his hand through his hair and looked at her in wonder. “Fuck, Lindsay, I almost passed out that was so...”

“Amazing?”

He laughed. “Earth-shattering.”

She flushed, she’d felt the same and was glad it was too dark for him to see just how much the last ten minutes had affected her. “That must be the reason you fell on your ass.”

He turned her around and brushed at the back of her dress, each caress breathing life to those ever present embers again. “You must be rubbing off on me.” He turned her back around to face him and pulled her into his embrace.

Rubbing off on him, huh? She wanted to leave her mark so he’d never forget her, just like she would never forget him. Maybe it was working.

“Grant?” a voice called from the shadows.

“Shit,” they both said together, pulling apart and making last minute adjustments to each other’s clothing. They stepped apart just as Grace Callahan stepped into the arbor.

Lindsay was thankful it was dark and that the smell of the roses overpowered the scent of their lovemaking. She trembled to think what would have happened if Grace had come looking for them a few minutes earlier.

“Oh, there you two are,” she said, barely giving them a glance before turning back around toward the house. “We’ve been waiting for you, Grant.”

“I wanted to show Lindsay your beautiful garden, Mother.” He grabbed Lindsay’s hand and followed his mother back to the house.

Lindsay tugged her hand out of Grant’s just as Grace looked back exasperated. “Lindsay’s seen the gardens, Grant. You have guests, obligations that need to be taken care of. Lindsay doesn’t need you to entertain her, and it’s her job to make sure you’re mingling tonight.” Grace spared Lindsay a look of disappointment before she spun around and continued up the path.

“Mother,” Grant said, a hint of warning and anger in his voice.

“Shh,” Lindsay whispered. “She’s right, Grant. You go ahead, I need to freshen up.”

Grant looked up the path at his disappearing mother, then back at Lindsay, indecision marring his handsome face.

“It’s okay,” she reassured him. “I’ll be there in a minute.”

“Okay, but we’re talking about this later.”

“I’m sure we will.” She gave him the bravest smile she could conjure up—a smile that slowly dissolved as she watched him enter the house through the double doors of the

sitting room.

Lindsay let the tears and the hurt that had been threatening to burst through at Grace's cutting statement. How could she have forgotten? She let her body betray her. Grant was temporary. Someone she never should have gotten involved with in the first place. A client, for goodness' sake.

Grace just reaffirmed what Lindsay had been feeling since this morning. She would let herself have this week, the next four days, of giving herself to Grant. She knew she should be strong and cut it off now, but she wasn't that strong. She didn't go back on promises, and she'd promised herself this. Then she'd walk away, leaving Grant to his new life, and she would make a new one for herself. Because she was new inside. A little raw and still in need of some transformation, but new all the same.

She took a deep breath and made her way up the path to find the bathroom. She let a wicked smile spread on her face as she thought of a way to keep Grant on his toes. He wanted to talk about tonight, about the intensity of their lovemaking in the garden and probably about his mother's comment, but Lindsay didn't have time for talking.

All she had time for was action.

Chapter Eleven

Of all the things Grant wanted to do, dining with the elite of Chicago wasn't one of them. The earth had shaken with Lindsay out in the garden, or maybe that had been his foundation. Lindsay had gotten under his skin, and he didn't think there was a way to purge her. He didn't think he wanted to purge her.

His life was taking a turn he hadn't expected, and he prided himself on being able to think on his toes, but the new revelations about his father and the way Lindsay had worked her way into his heart, he was feeling a little unsettled.

His stomach flipped as Lindsay waltzed into the dining room, nothing out of place to show she'd been thoroughly fucked just ten minutes ago.

Her breasts bounced enticingly with each step, sending his already eager lust into overdrive. She captured his gaze and slowly, deliberately made her way to the empty seat to his left. As she rounded the table he noticed her right hand clenched into a fist.

For a moment he thought she might be making her way over to him to punch him. He flinched a little when she stopped next to him, her scent enveloping him, and he looked up just as she bent forward.

The vee of her dress dropped showing her ample cleavage, and she took his hand, pressing her clenched fist into his open palm. "I think you forgot something." She sat down daintily into the empty chair and turned to the man on her left and started talking.

Grant looked down at his hand, and his cock lengthened with a painful ache. Lindsay had pressed her damp, black lace thong into his hand. He uttered a low moan at the thought of her naked under her dress and repressed the urge to bring the thong to his nose to inhale her sweet scent.

She turned back to him, a sly smile gracing her face, and her eyes glittered with unspoken promise.

The waiter came by and placed a plate of food in front of him, but it was all going to taste like dirt next to the way he remembered Lindsay tasted, hot and musky on his tongue. He didn't care how the rest of his mother's "re-coming out" party went, all he wanted was Lindsay under him, over him, anywhere, as long as it involved her naked and with him.

The rest of dinner went by in a blur, and he thought he was going to bend the silver fork he was holding when his mother announced drinks out on the veranda, just as the waiters cleared away the last of the dishes on the table. Once there, though, he decided it was good. He needed time to get a grip on his libido. Otherwise the night was going to be over before he'd really gotten started.

He excused himself from the cluster of men talking business and set off to look for Lindsay. He'd just about given up when he heard her voice from behind the wall of bushes on the edge of the veranda.

"It's my choice, Keira."

"I know Linds, I just don't want to see you get hurt."

Grant, feeling only a smidgen of guilt, edged toward the bush, trying to look nonchalant standing alone by the bushes.

"I'd have to actually feel for him to get hurt, K. It's just a fling. A mutual fling."

Consenting adults sort of thing. I'll be fine."

"Just a fling? I don't believe you for one second, Lindsay Samantha. I see the way you look at him. God, he looks like he wants to eat you up when he looks at you. That's more than a fling. You wouldn't be defending it left and right if it was 'just a fling'."

Silence permeated Grant's little eavesdropping corner. The tinkle of glasses and murmurs of the guests filled the empty space, but not his empty heart. She thought it was just a fling? Was it? Before today he'd have said yes, but now he wasn't so sure. Maybe it had started out that way, a little harmless flirting, some action, but she'd gotten to him.

A soft sob broke through his thoughts.

"It *has* to be. There will be no room for me in his new life. I can't be mother. I can't live the lie anymore, K. You found the right man. Grant just isn't that guy for me. He belongs here. Did you see? How else would he have been able to transition so quickly? He didn't even need me to help him. This life..."

The hurt and frustration in her voice cut at Grant like a deadly knife.

"This life isn't mine anymore."

"Oh, Linds."

There was a soft rustling of cloth and then Lindsay's muffled sobs. Kiera must be holding her.

He wanted to hold her, to assure her that ... what? He didn't know himself. But he knew her tears were breaking his heart, and he was going to spend the next few days, digging, dissecting this thing growing between them until he knew. Until he could make her pain go away.

"Grant, darling," Gloria called from across the veranda.

He waved, letting his mother know he was coming. Coming to say good bye. He was taking Lindsay home to prove to her that what they had was more than a fling.

* * * *

The ride home seemed to take forever. If Lindsay had had a knife she could have cut through the tension. She didn't know what had happened to change Grant's mood. She'd purposely baited him with her panties so any thought of serious talk was the last thing on his mind. But he hadn't said more than two words to her since they left his mother's house.

A small part of her was glad for the silence, though. Her confrontation with her sister had left her drained and no closer to solving her dilemma with Grant. She didn't know where she was going to go, but she knew without a doubt, she couldn't live in Chicago anymore. The Lindsay who only shopped at Neiman Marcus didn't exist anymore. Lindsay, who woke promptly at six in the morning in order to attend a boring seven a.m. breakfast with her parents, now wanted to sleep until noon and have cold pizza for breakfast.

She glanced at Grant, who still looked tense as he drove the car into the parking garage of the Callahan building. New Lindsay was going to smooth that tension away and fuck him until the sun rose.

Grant eased the car into a parking slot and put the car in park, but didn't make any moves to get out.

This was it. He was going to get serious and talk about why they shouldn't be together, why his place was now here and with his mother. Lindsay almost chickened out.

Almost.

She unbuckled her seatbelt with a quick click, bent down to retrieve her handbag and was out of the car before Grant could protest. She turned back and bent over, knowing her cleavage would draw Grant's gaze. "It's been a long night. I'm going up to take a hot bath and call it a night."

He turned to look at her and sure enough, his gaze lingered on her breasts before he looked at her eyes.

"We need to talk."

"Okay," she sighed, feigning a yawn that heaved her breasts out further. "Can't we talk in the morning?"

He nodded and turned back to look straight ahead at nothing.

"I'll see you later, then, Grant." She lowered her voice when she said his name, hoping it would incite him while he worked through whatever was going on in the car and she scrambled to finish her trap. She'd baited him, now was the time for the latch to fall.

The butterflies that had taken residence in her stomach since Grant stepped back in her life were fluttering as if their lives depended on it as she waited for the elevator to reach the top floor. Maybe they did, she'd never had butterflies. None of the men she'd dated or even slept with over the last few years had even made a dent in her heart. It was as if her body had put itself on the reserve shelf. Reserved for Grant alone.

The elevator dinged, and she quickly clipped to Grant's room. He would think she was sequestered in hers for the night, and he wouldn't stay in the car forever, so she had to hurry. When she reached Grant's room she shed her clothes, but she put them in the closet instead of leaving him a trail. In order for this to work, she had to leave no trace of where she was until he found her.

She padded naked into the bathroom and started the water in the tub, pouring in a sandalwood-scented bubble bath she found on the bathtub edge. The first time she'd seen the huge bathtub she'd had visions of her and Grant, sloshing water over the side in their hurry to have each other. She hoped tonight the vision would be fulfilled and more.

"Woof."

"Great," she huffed, turning to see Chopper looking at her curiously. "Shoo."

Chopper stood resolutely watching her prepare the bath.

"Come on, Chopper." Lindsay grabbed his collar and dragged him away from the bathroom door. Grant was going to come through the elevator doors at any minute, and Chopper was going to ruin everything if she didn't get him locked in the kitchen or something.

Chopper dug his paws into the bedroom carpet, using his full weight against Lindsay's pull.

"Ugh. Stupid dog!" She reached around his legs, gripping him around his chest and half-scooted, half-walked, him away from the bathroom door. Twice she almost fell as he continued to resist her, but she'd finally made it into the hallway when she heard the elevator door ding.

"Shit!" Before she could release Chopper and salvage any of her plans, the dog took off like a bullet, dragging Lindsay with him down the hall toward Grant. She released Chopper just before he lunged to jump up on Grant, leaving her skidding along the floor on her knees. When she stopped, she knelt there, looking at the floor, naked, heaving with

the exertion and embarrassment and wondering why she seemed unable to function like a normal human being anytime Grant was around.

“Linds?”

Lindsay felt the flush of embarrassment creep up her neck and the first tickle of unshed tears as she shook her head. There was no fixing this. She might as well leave Chicago now.

“Chopper! Go lie down!” Grant slowly knelt in front of her, reaching for her and folding her into his embrace. “Lindsay, baby? Dare I ask what happened?”

“I ... you ... I...” Her throat constricted and the tears that had threatened, burst through. “God, I can’t do anything right.”

“Shhh,” Grant soothed, running his hands down her bare back, his fingers lingering on the curve of her butt. “It doesn’t matter.”

She pushed away, anger cursing through her veins. “It does matter. Everything I do I screw up. Why do you think my mother has scheduled my life until I die?” She got up and paced the width of the hallway, mindless of her nudity. “I messed up at school, so they sent me away to boarding school. While I was there, I accidentally set the ballroom on fire the night before the Yule Dance.”

Grant stood, but stayed away, letting her continue her tirade.

“I came back to Chicago thinking everything was going to be fine, but it wasn’t. I was still *‘Embarrassing Lindsay.’* Still the bane of my mother’s existence. On the way to my interview at Mirror Image, my scarf got caught in the door of the “L,” and I almost lost my head, literally. I tripped and snagged my dress and brought down an archway trying not to fall flat on my face at Keira’s wedding, and I hadn’t even been drinking!” She stopped for emphasis and glared at Grant. “It made the front pages, for goodness’ sake!”

She harrumphed and continued her pacing. “The first time I see you in years, I throw myself at you.” Her body warmed now, her anger shifting into need, remembering that first kiss. Her pace slowed and her nipples beaded. Just a thought and her body was ready for Grant. *Shit.*

The knowledge that she was ranting, naked in the hallway of Grant’s building hit her and she wanted to crawl into a hole. Once again, she’d acted before thinking. With as much dignity she could muster, she turned and headed for her room. There wasn’t going to be any tryst in the bath tub. No night of endlessly making love. She was packing and getting the hell out of Dodge before she did anymore damage.

Chapter Twelve

Grant stood immobilized by the sight of Lindsay's tight ass jiggling seductively and the small red-orange tribal flame that kissed her lower back just at the crevice of her butt, as she retreated to her bedroom. It didn't matter. Nothing that happened in the past mattered, and he was sure as hell glad that she *had* thrown herself at him. Hell. Before he even knew who she was he'd wanted to bury his cock deep inside her. And that's exactly what he was going to do now. Fuck her until she forgot about her past and only thought of her future. A future of nights with him.

In two strides he'd caught up to her and grabbed her around her waist. He hefted her over his shoulder, her naked ass high in the air, and turned toward his bedroom.

"Put me down this instant you cretin!"

Her breasts pressed against his back as she kicked and screamed. She pounded him with her fists, but instead of making him want to put her down, it sent desire rushing through his body and straight to his cock. "If you don't quit moving Lindsay, we're not going to make it to the bedroom." He smacked her ass to get her to quit struggling.

She stilled, a high-pitched yip escaping from her mouth.

He smoothed the sting with his hand, trailing down her crevice with a finger before gripping her legs firmly again.

"Tell me about the fire."

"What? You're crazy, what fire, put me down!"

"The fire on your ass, Linds. The one that's making *me* burn."

His bedroom door was ajar, and he kicked it fully open. The anticipation of tossing Lindsay on his bed and filling her with his cock while he stroked that small flame kissing her butt almost made him oblivious to the sopping wet carpet as he stepped into the room. "What the hell?" He set Lindsay down with a splash and walked into the bathroom. The scent of sandalwood assaulted him as he walked through the door.

Steam billowed out from the tub where the faucet was still running full blast. Bubbles overflowed onto the floor and shifted with the waves his footsteps caused.

"Oh, my God," Lindsay gasped from the bedroom.

Grant rushed to turn off the water and found himself flat on his ass.

Lindsay hurried in and promptly tripped over him, falling head first into the teeming tub.

Grant lunged forward, pulling a sputtering and soaked, but sexy as hell Lindsay out of the tub, landing on his back with her sprawled on top of him.

The sound of the water rushing dimmed, his soaked suit forgotten. The damage the water was going to cause swept aside, leaving nothing for him to think about except her.

She lay still, like a deer in headlights, almost sensing the change in him and waiting for him to make the move. Only fear didn't show in her eyes, but heat, passion and threads of love.

His heart jumped, answering those precious tendrils of new love. The words were on the tip of his tongue, palpable, filling his mouth with the need to voice them.

Lindsay shifted up, her naked body slid over his clothed erection, and licked his lips in a playful kiss.

He swallowed the words.

He plunged his hands into her soaked hair and forcefully brought her lips to his in a searing kiss that left them both breathless.

She rocked against him, spreading her legs wide, her sex ready for him.

“Bed.” He pushed her off him and shoved her gently toward the bedroom. “Now.”

Lindsay scrambled to her feet and out the bathroom door.

He turned off the water and shed his drenched clothes as he turned and made his way to the bedroom.

Lindsay lay draped like a harem concubine on the bed. Her legs open. Her pussy glistened from her juices. Her rosy nipples were peaked and screaming for his touch. She reached to him, beckoning him to her.

Like a sailor to a siren, he crawled onto the bed and into her willing arms, into the cushion of her breasts. He nuzzled her neck, trailing kisses to the soft spot behind her ear where he sucked gently before nibbling around her ear lobe.

“Grant,” she whispered, arching up into him, her hard nipples poking into his chest. She wrapped her arms and legs around him. Her heels dug into his butt, pressing his cock onto her wet core.

He pushed up onto his hands and surged up, his cock spreading her labia wide. Each thrust forward he bumped her clit with his cockhead, then slowly soothed his way down until his tip rested between her slick pussy lips. He thrust, then retreated, over and over, until she was writhing under him.

She gasped and moaned with each tap of his cock on her clit. “Please,” she moaned, meeting his surge with the tilt of her hips. Her body urging him inside.

Not yet. He wanted her broken from her negativity. Unwilling to let thoughts of her past filter their way into this night, or any night after.

Up. Down. Up. Down.

The slick friction of his cock on her clit was sweet torture, but he wanted her to come undone over and over, until she knew nothing but the feel of his cock in her, the scent of him, the love he showed her with his body.

“Let go,” he urged, bending down to suck a rosy nipple into his mouth.

She groaned and lifted her breast to him, urging him to take more of her into his mouth.

He tugged and pulled, suckling her deep with each surge of his cock until she cried out. He backed off of her nipple, but kept up his relentless motion.

“Lindsay.” Grant bowed to her other breast and gently bit her taut nipple. “Let go,” he said, his teeth still lightly clamped on her breast.

Sweat beaded down his back as he leaned forward, increasing the pressure of his shaft on her clit and increasing his pace.

She clung to him, her hips tilting upward, matching his thrusts. Her nails dug into his back and she let go. Her scream filled the room, her body rocking into him as her orgasm ripped through her.

“Again, Lindsay.” He bit down hard on her breast and pushed his aching cock inside her sex.

“Oh ... God ... Grant!” She bucked up against him, raking her nails down his back.

He pushed into her, surging deep and hard.

Her sex pulsed, gripping him, pushing him closer to that edge.

Again and again, he pushed full hilt, her moans and the sounds of his body slapping hers filling the air.

His balls lifted to his body, his cock throbbed, aching for release, but he wanted Lindsay with him. He needed Lindsay to go with him, to jump over that edge into the unknown, and drown in sensation.

“Look at me, Linds.”

She opened her eyes, but they were unfocused.

“Me, Lindsay.” He stroked into her so that she lifted a little, shifting to rest in a half-sitting position.

He slid back so just the tip of his shaft rested inside her.

“Watch my cock.”

In.

“Look at our bodies join.”

Out.

“This is meant to be.”

In. His paced increased, forcing her to focus on their joined bodies.

“We are meant to be.”

Lindsay reached down with her hand toward where they fit like perfect puzzle pieces. Her look of utter amazement and rapture pushed at his control. With her middle three fingers she touched his cock tentatively as he continued his momentum.

“That’s right. Don’t you feel it? How right it is?” He advanced, watching as her fingers thread around him and squeezed, just as her pussy clenched and squeezed, urging them both to delirious completion.

She released him and flung her arms around him, pulling her to him as he continued to pump into her. Her tight channel milked him repeatedly, even as he rammed into her one last time.

She held him tightly, her tiny gasps tickling his ear. Slowly she relaxed, and soon her breathing became soft and shallow.

Grant lifted off her, rolling her over to her side and tucked her into him. He cradled her back to his front, her butt resting against his shaft, slick with their mixed juices.

“I love you,” he whispered.

Her soft snores were her only response.

* * * *

The next few days for Grant were filled with more meetings with board members, business dinners and hours poring over the Callahan books. But they were never lonely hours. Lindsay was by his side through everything, filling him in on who was who, explaining a nuance here and there. She kept him sane, from running screaming away from responsibility back to his carefree life.

His nights, however, were filled with Lindsay. Laughing. Seducing. Rocking his world so that he didn’t know where she began and he ended.

He’d finally convinced his mother to meet with him to speak about his father. He had questions about the man behind the business. The man he’d obviously been sorely mistaken about. And somehow, accepting his father’s limitations and forgiving him strengthened his resolve to follow through with whatever was going on with Lindsay.

Yet, even as his love for her grew with each new fact he discovered about her, he

saw a sadness in her eyes. She tried to cover it up with excuses of someone keeping her up all night, or something in her eye, but he felt it, too. A deep sense of loss radiating from her.

He didn't understand. He'd professed his love. He'd shown her his love. Opened up like he'd never done before, not even to his mother. True, she hadn't responded, she'd fallen asleep to be exact, but he knew better than to push. She knew. That's all that mattered. They would work out whatever was bothering her together.

Grant glanced at the clock on the office wall and turned off the computer. He pushed back the desk chair and stood, stretching out the kinks in his back. He wasn't used to sitting all day in front of a computer. If he was going to take over Callahan Industries, he needed to find a good assistant so he didn't have to spend so much time in an office.

He opened the middle desk drawer and pulled out a little black box. His gut clenched, but he willed it to relax. This felt right. Tonight was the last night of Lindsay's job, and once she no longer "worked" for his mother, he was going to ask her to marry him. She fit in this world and would be a wonderful asset while he established himself in Chicago. He only hoped that once he had everything in hand, she'd be willing to move with him back home to Missouri.

He sat back down in the chair, picked up the phone and dialed his mother.

"Hello?"

"Mother, it's Grant."

"Well, of course, it is, I don't have any other children, do I?" The humor laced in her voice warmed his heart. He knew she'd taken his father's death hard, and it was good to know that she was beginning to heal.

"I need to tell you something."

They were both beginning to heal. His time spent learning the company showed him a different man than he had thought his father was. He regretted that he was a day late and a dollar short with his apology, but he knew how to make up for it.

"Grant? Is everything okay? I thought you were picking up the business end of Callahan well." Her voice held an edge of panic.

"No, Mother, everything's fine," he rushed to assure her. "In fact that's one of the things I wanted to talk to you about. I've decided to stay the year."

Her shrieks pierced his ear, and he held the phone away until she finished.

"Why, Grant, that's wonderful!"

"I think so, too, we'll get everything straightened out, and I think I can find a good candidate to run the business for me so that I can oversee the operation from Missouri."

"Oh," his mother sighed.

"Now don't get your panties in a bunch."

"Grant, don't talk to your mother that way."

He chuckled, loving that he could tease her. He'd missed that for fifteen years.

"We'll still make it to Chicago at least once a month if not more. After all, Lindsay's family is here." He heard nothing but silence on the other end of the phone.

"Mother?"

"What about Lindsay? Why are you including her in your 'we'?"

"I love her, Mother."

She shrieked again, only this time it wasn't in joy. "You love her? You've known her for a week!"

“I’ve known her all my life, Mother.”

“Having a little girl in pigtails follow you around one summer isn’t knowing her.” Her sigh of frustration was tangible through the phone. “Oh, I knew I shouldn’t have hired her. She’s been nothing but trouble for her mother and now look what she’s done. She’s got her claws in you.”

“Now see here, Mother. Nobody’s got their claws in anyone. And why do you say she’s trouble?”

“She’s a disgrace. Oh, I knew it, just knew it. Everything she touches falls apart.”

“Mother,” his tone bordered on anger. He thought his mother would be thrilled with the match. After all, a Taylor bride was what had started this whole mess in the first place. She’d seemed pleased with the job Lindsay had done on him, he didn’t understand the animosity she was seething through the phone now.

“I will not have it, Grant. Sow your wild oats, do what you need to do with her, but after tonight she’s gone, out of your life.”

Grant sat back stunned. Sow his wild oats? Lindsay was no fling. She was forever, and no one, his mother included was going to stand in the way of him having her.

Chapter Thirteen

“Of all the vile things to say, Mother,” Grant’s voice reverberated in the hallway.

Lindsay froze in the hallway. She hadn’t heard Grant pissed before, but the menace and hurt in his voice stole her breath away.

“Sow my wild oats?”

Lindsay crept closer to the office door which was cracked open. She held her breath as if it would help keep her from being discovered eavesdropping.

“No, you listen to me.” A crash resounded from the room and then the sound of Grant pacing filled the silence. “Lindsay is not someone to sow oats with. She’s a forever kind of girl. She’s *my* forever.”

Lindsay’s eyes widened in shock, and she gripped the door handle to keep from falling to the floor. Her knees shook and her head reeled. She was his forever? Her heart lurched and tears threatened. In her dreams she hadn’t imagined him saying such a thing.

“In fact...” Grant paused his pacing. “—I’m going to ask her to marry me.”

Lindsay’s already shaky knees gave way, and she slumped to the floor, careful not to disturb the door. She didn’t want to be found out, not yet.

“Yes, Mother, I am.” The determination in Grant’s voice held a softer note than before. “She’s perfect for me. Plus, she knows Chicago and is well versed in society here. She’s exactly what I need.”

Pain lanced through Lindsay’s jubilant heart. He wanted her for her connections? Because she knew the right people, the right crowd? Her mother’s lectures about decorum, connections and marriage not always being about love swamped her with remorse. She thought Grant was different, but he’d turned out to be just another notch on her disaster counter.

Her eyes burned with unshed tears, and the lump in her throat refused to go away. She’d come looking for Grant to tell him she loved him. It hadn’t mattered that he hadn’t said it first, she thought she’d felt it from him last night for sure, if not growing into love from the last few days.

Her love for him had hit her this morning as she packed her belongings in her room. She’d thought about the last week. About his willingness to change for his mother, and the good of the company. About his gradual understanding and forgiveness of his father. About how he’d crashed through all her barriers and helped her discover who she really was.

She’d been bowled over then. She’d sat on the floor of her room and reveled in the feeling of love for Grant as it washed over her, cleansing her of her mother’s biased taint of men and society dictations. She’d marched down the hallway finally ready to commit herself to the man she loved. She’d been determined to stay and fight for Grant, no matter what her mother said—or Grace Callahan for matter.

But Grant mattered. What Grant wanted mattered. And according to what she just heard, Grant wanted a society wife. Someone to look good on his arm at company functions. Someone to breed heirs. Someone who will look the other way while he dallied with the nanny or his secretary. *God, he was going to ask her to live the miserable life her mother had for the last thirty years.*

She pushed up from the floor. She was not going to be her mother. This was not the life she wanted. Her heart cracked, and she felt the lake of tears pushing to break through, but she held fast. The life Grant wanted for her was not worth shedding tears about. She'd been mistaken—nothing new in her life, she'd been here many times. She would just pick up the pieces and move on, like she had every other time.

Lindsay turned and made her way back to her bedroom. She gathered up the rest of her things and shoved them in her suitcase. She took one last look around her room, then headed out the door.

Chopper met her in the hallway. He sat, statuesque, in front of the elevator doors.

"Hey, buddy," she whispered. She could still hear Grant dimly through the office door and didn't want to add to her pain by confronting him. She bent to scratch behind Chopper's ears. "I'm gonna miss you, ya big oaf."

Chopper huffed and growled low, nudging her hand with his massive head.

"I know, I love you, too." She planted a kiss on top of his head, then stood and pushed the down button for the elevator car.

The doors opened, the ding reverberating through the marble hallway. She rushed into the elevator and punched the door close button over and over, willing Grant to not have heard the call bell.

The doors shut with a finality that pushed her over the edge, and her tears broke through.

* * * *

"Woof."

"Thank you, sir." Grant glared at the door as he heard Chopper bark again. "Yes, sir. Eight o'clock tonight. Perfect."

"Woof."

"Can you have a bottle of Dom chilled and ready?"

"Woof. Woof."

"Thank you. I'll see you tonight, then."

"Woof. Woof. Auuuuuuu."

"Oh, for Christ's sake," Grant muttered, hanging up the phone. All the pieces were in place for tonight. He didn't know how he was going to make it through the day and not reveal his plans to Lindsay.

"Auuuuuuu."

"Chopper!" Grant got up from the office chair. The damn dog sounded like he was dying. Grant pushed through the office doors and found Chopper facing the elevator doors, barking and howling his head off. "Shut up, you stupid mutt! If you haven't wakened Lindsay by now, your awful howling will do the trick."

He left Chopper to bark and howl at the elevators and made his way to Lindsay's room. He hoped she was still sleeping. He wanted to wake her up with kisses. He wanted to slide into her while she was still mused with sleep. His cock reared with a ferocity he'd only felt with Lindsay.

The door to her bedroom was open, but he didn't hear a sound coming from the room. Damn. She must be in the bathroom. His stupid dog had woken her up. He walked into the room and stilled. Yesterday her things had been strewn all over the floor and bed and pretty much everywhere. Panic ripped through him as he moved to the bathroom.

Empty. Chopper's howl filled the silence and brought his panic to a new level. "Fuck." He raced to the elevator, cursing the number of floors between him and the parking garage. Just as he was going to take the emergency exit to the stairs, the elevator doors slid open. He jumped in with Chopper close on his heels.

The ride down took an eternity. Why would she leave? He loved her. He'd told her so last night. He'd showed her with his body, over and over. True, she hadn't said she loved him back, but he thought she'd just needed time. He would have given her time.

The doors opened, and he raced into the garage. Empty, except for his truck. Chopper clipped him as he ran to where Lindsay's car had been parked. Fear welled up inside as he watched Chopper sniff and huff, scenting a phantom Lindsay. She was gone. Chopper knew it. He knew it.

"Fuck," he yelled into the garage.

Chopper stopped searching and howled, his sorrow boomeranging off the concrete and knifing Grant in the heart.

* * * *

One month later.

"Keira?"

"Grant? Is that you?" Keira's voice through the phone, so similar to Lindsay's, made Grant's heart beat a little faster.

Grant, sitting at his father's desk, dropped his head into his hand. He ran his fingers through his hair, then let out a depressing sigh. "Yes, I can't find her."

"Grant, you sound horrible. Can't find who?"

"Lindsay. She's gone. She left." He scooted his chair back and thumped his forehead onto the desk edge, staring at the dark brown carpet, willing his broken heart to heal.

"She's gone? Why didn't anyone tell me?" The panic in Keira's voice brought Grant out of his sullen stupor for a moment.

"I didn't think she was *gone* gone. I thought she was hiding in the city, at her apartment or with your family. But she's left, I can't find her anywhere." He let his anguish flow through his words. "Tell me where she is. I need to find her. I love her, I can't be without her."

"You love her?" Keira sounded astonished, yet hesitant.

Grant latched onto her hesitation. "Yes, with my soul. Have you heard from her? Please tell me where she is, I need to find her."

"I ... I don't know where she is, Grant." Keira's sadness oozed through the phone and added to Grant's. "I don't understand. I know she had growing feelings for you. She told me she was confused, but that you made her feel special."

"She is special," Grant groaned into the phone. "Why would she leave, then? That's what I don't understand. We clicked. We meshed. She's my other half. I want to marry her—."

"Whoa," Keira interrupted. "Did you ask her to marry you?"

"Well, no, I never got the chance. I had everything set up. I was going to take her to the Signature Room at the 95th. They have the perfect view of the city at night. The perfect place to get engaged." Grant's voice broke. "That's what the maitre d' said."

Keira's soft breathing filled the silence.

Grant didn't know what else to say. What else was there? The first week after she'd gone, he hadn't even looked for her. He thought she needed some space, that she would be back. When she hadn't, he started looking for her, but he soon found that she didn't have many places she used as a safe haven. Rolf hadn't heard from her, the doorman of her building hadn't seen her. She had just simply disappeared.

"Um, Grant," Keira interrupted his thoughts. "Did she know you were going to ask her?"

"I don't think so. The only person I'd told was my mother, but I was on the phone with her when Lindsay left, so there's no way she could have said something to Linds."

"Could she have overheard you?"

"I guess, I don't know. Why are you asking me these things?"

He heard Keira take a deep breath, almost fortifying.

"She didn't want to get married, Grant. Since her fifteenth birthday, she's vowed to never marry."

"What? Why?"

"Well, to make a very long story short, she found our father and his assistant having sex in his office on her birthday, during her party to be exact."

"Oh, my God."

"Yeah, she confronted my mother about it, and all she said was that sometimes it was better to look the other way in a marriage than live on the street. That's when Lindsay started causing trouble and eventually she was sent to boarding school. Well, you know the rest."

"I think I know enough now." His sadness turned to heartache for the fifteen-year-old Lindsay, touched by lies at such a young age. "I'm not like that, Keira. I will never be like that."

"I know, Grant. I know."

"If she calls you, tell her ... I love her, and I'm waiting for her. Can you explain it to her, Keira?"

"Yes, Grant. I'll tell her."

"Thank you, Keira." He hung up. He knew Lindsay loved him, now all he had to do was to find her and convince her he wasn't her father. That he would never be her father.

Grant picked up the phone again. His buddy Adam Shields worked for the FBI; if anyone could find her it would be him.

* * * *

Three months later.

The shrill of his cell phone startled Grant. "Callahan here."

"Hey, Grant."

"Adam, tell me you have good news." Grant pulled his truck into the parking garage of the Callahan building and got out. He'd just returned from New York. He'd followed a lead that Lindsay might be there, but it had turned out to be a false trail. Who knew that his Lindsay knew how to hide?

"I'm sorry, man. She hasn't used any credit cards. You know all her money was withdrawn the day she left so she must be living off of that, and if she found a job, she's using a different name."

“Thanks.” He pushed the call button for the elevator and stepped in, feeling more lost than Lindsay was. “I appreciate all your help.”

“Anytime, Grant, I’ve got a big case in Vegas now that I need to deal with, but when I’m done I’ll help you again if she hasn’t turned up by then.”

“Talk to ya later, Adam.”

“Bye.”

Grant hung up just as the doors opened to his floor. Noise filtered in from the kitchen and hope flared in his heart. He ran full force down the hall and slammed the door to the kitchen open.

“Lindsay?”

His mother spun around, her hand to her chest. “Are you trying to give an old woman a heart attack?”

“Oh, sorry, Mother, I thought you were...”

“Lindsay, yes, I heard. I think the accounting office on the second floor heard you as well.” She moved around the island from where she’d been making sandwiches. “You look like hell, Grant.” She hugged him, then stepped back, looking him over with a critical eye.

“You’ve lost weight, your hair is a mess. The dark circles under your eyes could rival the biggest black hole.” She huffed and turned to place the sandwiches on plates and began to slice an apple and a pear sitting on the counter. “All this for a silly woman.”

Grant’s anger, always so close to the surface since Lindsay’s disappearance, flared. “Don’t you get it, Mother?” He slammed his fists on to the counter, causing her to jump. “I *am* in a black hole. And Lindsay’s not a silly woman!”

He turned and slumped against the refrigerator. “Why is it so hard for you to accept? I love her. I love her.” The last was a mere whisper as he slid to the floor, head in his hands. His turbulent emotions overwhelmed him and he wept.

Grace knelt by him and held him in her arms, soothing him like she had when he was small. “Shhh, please don’t cry, Grant. I’m sorry for being insensitive.” She sniffed and squeezed him tighter.

“Haven’t you ever lost something you truly loved, Mother? Do you know how it feels?”

“Yes,” she said, her voice tight with unshed tears. She tilted his head up so he looked into her eyes. “You. I lost you for fifteen years, and it broke my heart. You’ve just come back, and I don’t want to lose you again.”

Grant hugged her back and helped her stand up. He cradled her in his arms, giving her comfort just as she had him. “You won’t lose me, Mother, I’m not going anywhere.”

“I’m sorry, Grant. I’ve been so selfish. I’ll help you find her. We’ll find her.”

Grant looked to the heavens and sent up a prayer.

“Yes, we’ll find her.”

* * * *

Lindsay stood in front of Grant’s motorcycle shop in Clayton, Missouri, not at all sure she was ready to be here. She’d done a lot of soul searching the last few months, yet no matter what route she took in her excuses for running, she always came back to the same conclusion. She loved Grant, and she was tired of running.

She’d run from who she really was, from the strong independent woman underneath

the designer façade. She'd run from the only man she'd every really truly loved. Her passport had gotten a lot of use over the last few months, Paris, Beijing, London. None of those places could compete with the place Grant called home, the Ozark Mountains.

"Miss Lindsay?"

She turned toward the voice. "Alfred? What are you doing here?"

He walked down the sidewalk toward her, a kick in his step that hadn't been there the first time she'd seen him. He was wearing grey coveralls, black biker boots and a black baseball cap with the "Just Ride" logo emblazoned across the front.

"This." She gestured to his attire. "Is a bit of a change for you, isn't it?"

He gave her a knowing smile. "I'd say the same to you." He pointed to her outfit—black leather pants that rode low on her waist, a cropped white T-shirt, and three-inch black ankle boots.

She laughed. "I guess you're right."

"Why are you here, Lindsay? Does Grant know you're here?"

"No." She shuffled her boots against the grey concrete. "I'm not sure—shit—honestly, I couldn't stay away."

Alfred gave her a knowing nod and ushered her through the busy shop to a back office. He pointed for her to sit down on a beige loveseat against the far wall of the manly office. "Tell me."

Simple as that. He wanted her to tell him; she'd barely just told herself.

Thirty minutes later, Alfred sat back in the office chair behind the desk. He'd kept silent and attentive throughout her story of the last few months.

"Well?" She'd just poured her heart out to a man she hardly knew, yet instinctively she knew he would know what to do.

He leaned forward again and reached for the desk phone. "I know just who to call."

Chapter Fourteen

“Are you going to wallow in yourself some more or are you going to find her?” Grace Callahan strode through Grant’s bedroom door. “Get up, you lazy oaf.” She yanked the covers off him and smacked his butt.

“Oww.” Grant rolled over and pulled the blanket back up to cover his nakedness. “What the hell are you doing here?”

“Your misery is making my life hell.” She moved over to the window and jerked the blinds up.

The harsh glare of the afternoon sun burned his eyes. “My misery?”

“Yes, it’s time you saved us all from living your hell.” She tossed him some jeans and a T-shirt from his dresser. “Now get up and meet me in the office.”

Grant raked his fingers through his hair. Without Lindsay, his life was hell. He had searched for Lindsay—for almost five months he’d scoured the city, begged and pleaded with her parents to give him information, until they’d barred him from their house. They claimed they didn’t know where she was. Even Keira didn’t know where Lindsay had gone.

He’d used all his resources to find her and had come up with nothing. Even his buddy Adam at the FBI hadn’t turned up anything. It was as if she’d disappeared off the face of the Earth.

“Grant!”

“I’m coming,” he yelled back and tossed the blanket aside. He stood and pulled the jeans and T-shirt on, along with socks and tennis shoes. He padded to the bathroom and splashed water on his face. His hair fell into his eyes and he brushed it back.

“You’re a mess,” he said to the reflection in the mirror. He’d let his hair and beard grow out, his face was pale, and there were dark circles under his eyes from lack of sleep and worry. He’d searched tirelessly, but either she hadn’t told anyone where she was, or everyone was lying to him. Neither boded well for her. When he found her, and he would, she was in big trouble.

With a heavy heart, he made his way to the office. He didn’t know what the hell his mother wanted, but if he didn’t appease her, she would just add to his ‘misery.’

“Finally,” she huffed as he walked through the office doors. “Here’s your itinerary. The flight leaves in two hours, so you don’t have much time.”

“Itinerary? Time?”

“Do you realize that almost every time we talk, you just sit there and repeat what I say?”

She grabbed his hand and placed a piece of paper in his hand and spun him around, pushing him toward the door. “The limo is waiting and the corporate jet will take you.”

“Wait.” Grant dug his heels in the floor. “Where am I going? And how can I go without clothes?”

His mother sighed, then pushed hard, catching him off guard.

He fell forward, just catching himself on the office door frame.

“Alfred called from Missouri, seems there’s something going on at the shop that needs your immediate attention.” She shoved again, this time getting him to stumble to

the elevator door. "Then I need you to go to Maui. The financial division of Callahan Enterprises over there is having some problems you need to address." She pushed the call button for the elevator and stepped back, a smile on her face.

Grant thought she looked more like the cat who had swallowed the canary, but he couldn't argue with her urgency. He'd given Alfred a year's sabbatical, but he thought Alfred was fishing, not working at his shop. Why was Al calling and not Rex?

Just as the doors opened, she wrapped her arms around him, giving him a rare hug.

He held her back, the smell of her bringing back childhood memories, of happy times, of the secrets shared between a mother and son. His heart ached for Lindsay. He wanted to share secrets with Lindsay. He wanted to see that secret smile she had for only him.

His mother pulled away, swiping an errant tear.

"Why are you crying?" He moved to pull her to him again, but she stepped away.

"Oh," she said, masking her face with bravery. "You know mothers, we get sentimental at the strangest times." She reached out to keep the doors from closing. "Go now, and call me when you figure things out."

He stepped into the elevator and gave her a grin, but then remembered Chopper.

"Oh," he called out.

"He'll be fine." She waved and the doors closed, leaving Grant a little disoriented, but sure of his path for now. Go home and see what's wrong at the shop, then fix the Hawaii problem, then back to finding Lindsay.

* * * *

"Let me out here." Grant paid the taxi driver and got out of the car. He took a deep breath, inhaling the crisp, clean air of the Ozarks as he took in his surroundings. His shop was still standing, there was no apparent physical damage to the shop. The entire flight he'd stewed over what could be so urgent that Alfred had to call him. He'd left Rex in charge, why was Al even calling? The only reasonable explanation was that the shop had burned down. But here it was, still intact.

The sounds of grinding filled his ears. The smell of motor oil and steel bringing him a sense of home he'd missed for the last five months. He stepped through the open bay doors and watched the work for a moment. He could see Al sitting at his desk through the glass walls that surrounded his office. Travis stood at the grinder, shaping a new tank. Manni and Sloane were at the pipe bender, shaping steel pipe into a new frame. Rex had some new kid in coveralls with the welder, tacking together metal for what looked like an oil tank.

"Hey, guys," he called out, stepping into the garage.

All work ceased. Sloane actually dropped the pipe she and Manni had been working on. Al stood, his eyes expectant and welcoming. The new kid swung around with the flame of the welder still going, almost singing Rex's eyebrows.

Like a negotiator taking a gun from someone, Rex slowly grasped the welder and turned off the flame. The kid still had his helmet on, probably embarrassed at his rookie mistake.

"Where's the fire?" Considering Al's call, Grant thought they'd be happier to see him.

"Hey, boss," Travis called lamely, setting down the grinder and shuffling off to the

back offices. Al gave a quick wave and followed Travis.

“Sup?” Manni said, grabbing Sloane’s hand and following Travis and Al down the hall.

“What gives?” Grant asked, approaching Rex and the new kid. The newbie wrung his gloved hands together like he was about to be sent to the principal’s office. *Boy, Rex picked a winner with this one.*

“Hey, G,” Rex’s deep, rumbling voice matched his large frame. “What you doin’ back? Thought city life was workin’ for ya?” He moved to step a little in front of the new kid, now visibly shaking.

“What do you mean, why am I here? Alfred called my mother and said there was an emergency.” Grant was starting to get pissed. Everyone was acting strange and the new kid tugged at him for some reason.

“He did, did he?” Rex glanced at the new kid who nodded at him. Rex turned back and shrugged. “Must have been about Sam here.” He pointed back at the new kid, then turned to walk away toward the offices.

“Rex? Get back here!” Grant took a moment to control his anger. What the fuck was going on? He glanced at Sam, still wringing his gloved hands and still wearing the fucking helmet.

“Take the helmet off.”

Sam shook his head no.

Grant didn’t want to scare the kid so much he pissed his pants, but his patience was wearing very thin.

“Take the helmet off ... please,” he ground out between clenched teeth. He didn’t know what Rex had told Sam, but he was the boss around here.

Sam turned and lifted his hands to the helmet, slowly took it off, revealing long, silken, golden-brown hair.

Holy shit, Sam was a girl?

“Hello, Grant,” the new kid named Sam, who was really a girl named Sam said, still facing away from him.

Sam’s voice was eerily familiar and it took a few seconds for Grant to register why.

Hope and fear coalesced in his chest.

“Lindsay?”

She turned around, a shy smile on her face, but fear at what he was going to do in her eyes.

“What ... Why ... I don’t...”

“What am I doing here?” She flipped her hair off her shoulder. “Why am I here?” She brushed a stray strand of hair from her face.

The flip nagged at him, the brush of her hand on her sweaty brow dug at his gut, but the passion filling her eyes bowled him over.

“You don’t understand?” Fear shuttered through her eyes again, closing her passion away.

He was so thrilled at seeing her alive, so close to him, he was at a loss for words. He reached for her, to pull her to him and never let her go.

She stepped back, just out of his reach. “Why are you here?”

Grant froze, bewildered. “Al called me, he didn’t say why. God, Lindsay I’m so glad to see you.” He reached again, but she took another step back.

“Why, Grant, why are you glad to see me?”

“What? I’ve been searching high and low for you, Linds. Did your family know you were here?”

She shook her head and retreated again, only this time she’d gone as far as she could, the wall was at her back.

“They’re worried sick as much as I was. Why did you leave? Why did you leave me?”

She stood, looking down at her feet, but didn’t answer.

“Lindsay, please, why did you leave?”

She looked up at him, the passion creeping through her eyes again. “Because I love you.”

His love boiled up and answered her confession, his cock stood at attention, impatient to be deep within her moist heat.

“You left because you love me? Somehow that doesn’t make a lot of sense, Linds.”

She moved away from the wall and paced, close to him, away from him.

Each step away was like a yo-yo pulling on his heart strings. He finally had her and wanted nothing more than to hold her, kiss her, make love to her, but there was something he was missing.

“Talk to me Linds,” he pleaded.

“I heard you. On the phone that day.” Her voice broke and she stopped pacing, took a deep breath and began pacing again. “I know you were going to ask me to marry you.”

“You knew? But if you love me, then why did you leave?”

“It was because I love you that I left. I can’t be the wife you want, Grant. I heard you tell my mother I was perfect for you because I knew Chicago and had contacts there! I won’t live in a cold marriage. I’m not a piece of jewelry to dangle on your arm. I will not stand by while you fuck the nanny!” She threw off her gloves and stood facing him, as if she was looking for a fight.

“I am better than that. I won’t cross that line.”

Desire ripped through him at her anger. Her wild eyes capturing him in her trap.

“I deserve better than that.”

He stepped toward her; she was too busy being angry to notice.

“I want better than that!”

He swooped in and captured her in his arms.

She struggled, but he held fast. He wasn’t going to let go. Ever.

“Let me go, I’m not going to be like my mother.”

“Thank God, I wouldn’t want you to.”

She stopped struggling. “You don’t like my mother?”

He laughed. “I do like your mother, but that’s not what I meant.” He pushed her away from him enough so he could look into her eyes.

“I love you, Lindsay.”

She gulped and yipped back her tears.

“Our marriage will be anything but cold.” He caressed down her back to her ass, pressing her to his erection.

“I won’t dangle you like jewelry. I promise never to use you as such.”

He bent to her and placed a gentle kiss on her lush lips.

She moaned and leaned into him.

“Look at me, Linds.”

She looked at him, happy tears shimmering her eyes.

“If we had a nanny, which I hope we don’t—I want our children to be raised by their mother—I would never fuck her. In fact, I’d make sure it was an old crone just so you wouldn’t think I was tempted.” He swiped at a tear running down her cheek with his thumb.

“I love you, Lindsay. You are better than that. You do deserve better than that. And I hope that you want me.” He pressed her close, placing her head on his chest, cradling her to him. “Will you have me, Lindsay? Will you marry me?”

“Yes,” she muffled into his shirt. “Oh, yes, I will marry you.” She reared back and met him in a searing kiss.

He kneaded her ass, grinding his cock against her soft stomach.

She jumped up and wrapped her legs around him, pressing her peaked breasts against his chest.

He walked with her to the wall, thrusting against her core, wishing he could de-clothe them with a thought. He fumbled with the zipper opening of the coverall. “I need this off you.” His hand found its way inside the coverall, shoving aside her tank and pinching her hardened nipple.

“We can’t, not here,” she moaned.

“The guys won’t be coming back, and there’s never much business on the street.” He braced her against the wall with his hips and shoved the top of the coveralls down, revealing her slender arms and plump breasts, hidden beneath a black tank top.

She reached up and took it off, her breasts bouncing as they settled, enticing him.

He bent and took a rosy nipple deep into his mouth.

“Grant!”

He released her hips and pushed the coveralls down.

She scrambled, undoing his belt and zipper, unleashing his throbbing cock.

“Take those off,” he said, pointing to her shorts.

She pushed them down, exposing her bare pussy to his heated gaze.

“Oh, God, you shaved.” He knelt at her feet and breathed in the scent of her. A car drove by and she stiffened. “Shhh, this is you and me Lindsay, no one else.”

He bent and licked from the base of her pussy lips to the top of her mound.

She moaned and dug her fingers into his hair, pressing him to her.

He spread her open and tongued her, mimicking what he wanted to do with his shaft. In and out, savoring her taste.

“Grant, please.”

He moved up and nibbled on her clit, pressing two fingers inside her moist heat.

“Fuck,” she yelled, standing up on her toes as her orgasm crashed through her.

Grant stood, unbuttoning his jeans and pushed them along with his underwear down to his knees, releasing his ready shaft. He lifted her against the wall, wrapping her legs around him and thrust into her.

Her sex clenched around him as he stroked faster and faster. She dug her heels into his butt, urging him deeper and harder. She scraped her nails up his back and arched her breasts up.

He surged, in and out. His orgasm boiled up until it burst through. He sucked her breast into his mouth and thrust one last time, filling her with his seed.

She came around him, milking him until he couldn't stand any more.
He slumped to the ground, taking her with him, and pulled her close.

"I love you, Lindsay Samantha Taylor."

She pulled back and gave him a heated kiss, bringing his blood to boil and making his cock hard again. She broke the kiss, wide-eyed at his response.

"And I love you, Grant Callahan," she purred with a devious twinkle in her eye. She looked over his shoulder at the motorcycles along the far wall. "Wanna go for a ride?"

Epilogue

“Excuse me, sir.” The flight attendant tugged gently on his sleeve. “You have a phone call.”

Grant shifted a sleeping Lindsay from his shoulder and got up to take the call. He walked to the small office in the back of the plane and picked up the phone.

“This is Grant Callahan.”

“I see you’ve resolved the issue at your shop.” His mother’s voice sounded robotic through the phone line on the plane, but happy.

“Thank you, Mother, yes, I did.”

He’d taken Lindsay up on her suggestion for a ride and had a new found love for women riding motorcycles with a skirt, well, for Lindsay wearing a skirt and nothing underneath on his motorcycle with him.

“We’re on our way to Maui now. I’ll look into the finance department and head home soon enough.”

“Oh, well, that’s why I was calling dear. Seems I misunderstood the exact nature of the problem. It wasn’t actually a problem after all, and everything’s fine.”

“Really?” Suspicion growing, Grant glanced down the walkway to see if Lindsay had woken yet. “That’s too bad. I guess I can see if they can turn the plane around.”

“Oh, no, dear.”

Grant chuckled and shook his head. His mother had pulled a fast one on him.

“You take some time off. I don’t want to see you here for at least two weeks. There will be a car waiting for you to take you to the beach house.”

“Thanks, Mom.”

“I love you, dear, have fun.” She hung up.

He turned around and hung up the phone.

“Grant?”

He spun and pulled Lindsay into his embrace.

“Is everything okay?”

He kissed her, separated her lips with his tongue and thrust in until she was moaning in his arms.

“Everything is wonderful, love,” he said. “How would you like to tour Maui on a motorcycle?”

She pulled back and looked at him, her love flowing over him like a balming river.

“Only if I can wear a skirt.”

The End

About the Author:

Paige spends her days contemplating the complexities of romance and passion. She puts pen to paper, scribing elaborate stories for her many fans in her lush, secluded office at her beach cottage...

In reality, Paige tries to convince her two growing boys that her space at the dining room table is an invisibility capsule, and she's not really there writing stories laced with humor and passion. Her husband of ten years looks on in devotion and love, encouraging her to write her little heart out. Oh, wait—reality. He wants her to be the next Rowling so he doesn't have to work anymore and can play more golf.

Paige is a master juggler of many personas—mom, wife, granddaughter, sister, jewelry designer, and coffee maker. Her family is her passion, and writing is the perfect outlet.

For romance that sizzles, come visit Paige and add fuel to the fire.

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