



In the Runes: Silk Hauntings

By Shelli Stevens © 2006

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In the Runes: Silk Hauntings

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Dedication

Thanks to my wonderful editor Leanne, and to fellow Cobblestone Press writer Vivienne King for advice on my first paranormal story. And once again thanks to all my family and friends for their continuous support.

Chapter One

An ass like that should be illegal.

Gavin MacKenzie shut his laptop and stared at the red leather miniskirt—and the ass under it—swinging back and forth as it passed by his window. The woman walking turned her head and caught him looking.

Damn.

Her platinum blonde hair lifted with the warm spring breeze. She was young. Mid-twenties. At least ten to twelve years younger than him. Her mouth, full, sexy, and designed for all kinds of sin, curved into a smile.

Ah, shit.

If Taylor Ammons didn't use that as an invitation to knock on his door, he'd keel over from shock. The woman had been trying to get in his pants for days now. And the more she came around, the harder it was to feign indifference. Hell, like she believed he was indifferent anyway. He got a mammoth-sized hard-on every time she came within two feet of him.

Sure enough, Taylor veered off the trail that crossed both of their properties and headed straight for his front door. A second later she gave it a cute, musical tap.

Gavin stood up, grinding his teeth together as he went to open it.

"Gavin." Taylor winked and strode past him, dropping the groceries she'd been carrying onto the table in his entryway. "How's it

going?" She turned and ran her brazen gaze over him. "You ready to have some wild monkey sex yet?"

Damn if she didn't have a mouth like a sailor. Gavin pushed his glasses further up his nose, and hoped the look he was giving her was reprimanding.

"Is this a social visit, Miss Ammons, or was there something you needed?"

"Miss Ammons?" She quirked an eyebrow and walked over to his desk, picking up the half drunk glass of whiskey. "Naughty, naughty, Mr. MacKenzie. Drinking during the day?"

She tilted the glass back and swallowed the rest in one gulp, not even so much as flinching at the fiery liquid.

Hmm. There was something to be said about a woman who could appreciate good Scottish whiskey.

He folded his arms across his chest. "It relaxes me."

She sat down on the edge of the desk and her skirt hiked up another inch. "I know something else that could relax you."

His gaze dropped to her smooth, pale thighs atop long legs. Relax wasn't exactly the verb he would have chosen.

His jaw clenched. "Are you still using the mansion as a brothel?"

Taylor's smile turned tight, her eyes narrowed. "It isn't a brothel." She crossed one leg over another, and for the briefest second he'd caught a glimpse of black lace.

Damn, here comes the hard-on. He clenched his fists so he wouldn't reach out and drag her to him.

"It's a retreat for women who want to further their ability to please themselves and their partners during sex."

Images of her pleasing *him* filled his head. "I'm not interested in the particulars, Taylor."

She laughed, a husky sound that lengthened his cock another inch. "Oh, I think you're very interested, Gavin. And that's why you're being so uptight."

She'd hit the nail on the head, but he had no intention of admitting it.

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Time to change the course of the conversation. "Tell me something, Taylor. Notice anything strange up at the mansion?"

* * * * *

Taylor swallowed hard, her thoughts turning from her sexy, closed-off neighbor to her new home. She stared into Gavin's mocking blue eyes, and a shiver of unease shot through her. *Anything strange? How could he possibly have known...?* No. It was nothing. Just her overactive imagination. Things weren't disappearing; she was misplacing them. And Gavin was just playing up on the ghost rumors. Well, she wasn't going to buy into it.

"Are you still insisting the place is haunted, Gavin?" She rolled her eyes and shook her head. "Sorry I outbid you on the house, but claiming it's haunted is hardly going to drive me out."

That pissed him off. His jaw hardened, and she had the sudden urge to yank those silly glasses off his face. They just didn't fit. It was the whole Clark Kent affect. He was a brainiac with the body of a baseball player on steroids. Not that he did steroids. Well, that she knew of.

He was just so sexy, and the fact that he'd been turning her down for that past couple of weeks just made him that much more of a challenge. *He's talking again.*

"...that I didn't get the house, Taylor. But you can't discount the fact that there's been proven paranormal activity there. If you'd give me the chance to come up and run some tests—"

"Umm, no. Sorry, Gavin." She slid off the desk and approached him. "I'll give you the chance to go to bed with me, but you're not running any ridiculous tests in my house."

She understood sex. It was her forte. But ghosts? It was like asking her to believe in the Easter Bunny.

"Taylor..." He backed up.

"Gavin." She followed him until he hit the table in the entryway, and then she crowded close. "Why won't you kiss me? I promise you'll like it."

He glanced down at her grocery bag. "Isn't that ice cream? You should really get that home before it melts."

"It'll stay hard." She grinned and then shook her head. "Boy, you don't make this easy on me, do you, Gav?"

She slid her hands up his starched cotton shirt until she reached his shoulders. They were broad, the defined muscles rippled under her touch. Yes, definitely a Clark Kent complex. Hell, he even had the dark hair and blue eyes. Too bad he was such a stick in the mud. Well, she'd fix that.

Being just a few inches shorter than him, she only had to stretch a little as she pulled his head down to hers.

"Taste me," she whispered. "You won't regret it." She made no further moves, and gave him a second to resist.

Beneath the glasses his eyes darkened with heat, and then he lowered his mouth, crushing his lips down on hers.

Yes. Her whole body tingled at the sudden contact, excitement racing through her blood. Her fingernails dug into his shoulders as his tongue skimmed the perimeter of her mouth before thrusting deep inside to take control of hers.

Holy crap! Who is this guy? The passive geek was gone and in his place was a man who liked to dominate. He held her head still for his assault on her mouth.

His tongue caught hers, and he sucked on it hard—as if to punish her for initiating the kiss.

He grabbed her hips to jerk her closer, and his erection stabbed against her belly. The sensation rushed liquid heat between her legs and she groaned, moving closer to ease the pressure.

Gavin lifted her onto the table, pushing the groceries aside. He spread her legs open and moved to stand between them, never breaking the kiss.

She wrapped her legs around his waist, sliding forward until her pussy encountered his cock. Even through his pants she could feel the size and hardness of him. Cream soaked her panties.

He tore his mouth from hers, kissing the side of her neck and then lower. Jerking down the fabric of her low cut top, he pulled her breasts up

and over the V.

His thumbs did a firm stroke over each bra-covered nipple, and her mind spun. Then he reached into the bra and closed his hands around her breasts, freeing them from their restraints. He lowered his mouth to one hard nipple.

His tongue, wet and rough, stroked against her flesh, making the tip of her breast tighten, and she pushed deeper into his mouth.

She whimpered, clutching his head against her. He sucked harder, bruising her. Loving it, she laced her fingers in his hair tighter.

His teeth grazed her before he pulled back, releasing her nipple with a wet sucking sound.

Oh, he can't stop now! But instead of leaving her, he pushed her skirt up around her hips and she lifted her ass up to help him. Then he sank to his knees.

"You said to taste you, Taylor." He caught her gaze, and her pulse tripled at the intent she saw there. "And I intend to."

He moved his hands up her inner thighs until he reached the lace-covered triangle between her legs. He jerked the fabric to the side and lowered his head. His smooth wet tongue slipped inside her throbbing heat before he ran it from the bottom of her pussy up to the swollen clit.

"Gavin!" She gasped and pushed herself against him.

"You like that?" He repeated the process, starting at the bottom and moving up. But this time he stopped to plunge his tongue into her channel. She jerked against him, but his hands held her still as he continued to fuck her with his tongue.

"Please!" she cried, which turned into a groan of pleasure.

Gavin growled against her and thrust his tongue deeper as he rubbed her clit. It built so fast. The spiraling pressure, the lightheadedness. Her hips lifted and fell with each stroke of his fingers and penetration of his tongue.

She curled her hands into his soft hair, clutching him as he brought her to the edge. When his mouth moved up to capture her clit, sucking hard, she exploded in his mouth.

Her thighs tightened around his head, her body shuddered, her

scream echoing in the entryway.

She floated back to earth. *Oh God. I'm such an idiot!* She'd never lost control like that before. It went against everything that was ingrained within her. Her control was what protected her from getting her heart broken. And she'd let that wall down with him.

I can't be that vulnerable with Gavin, she thought, as he stood up. Especially with Gavin. I can't let a man that close.

Time to regain the upper hand. Her hands were shaking as she reached for the zipper on his jeans.

Gavin knocked her fingers away with a growl.

She gasped, shocked by his reaction. Embarrassment heated her cheeks.

"You should go." He wouldn't meet her gaze, his eyes focused on some point on the wall behind her.

"I don't underst—"

"Just go, Taylor." The growled words held more than just anger. She could sense the frustration in them.

She swallowed hard, struggling to not let him see how much he'd just hurt her. Damn. Damn! *This is what happens when I lose control.*

Forcing a coy smile onto her face—though inside she wanted to cry—she slid off the desk and reached for her bag of groceries.

"All right, no need to get uptight." She walked towards the door, looked back once, and winked. "Thanks for the orgasm, Gavin."

Chapter Two

Gavin watched her shut the door, and then knocked his head against the wall.

Damn, that had been low. What the hell had he been thinking? The way her hazel eyes had filled with hurt before she'd schooled her expression into something less vulnerable.

Maybe she was the most sensual woman he'd ever known. Her sexuality was as blatant as a red flag to a bull. But that didn't give him the right to treat her like some whore off the street.

You're an asshole.

He'd call and apologize later. Yes. That would put things right.

Gavin went back into the living room, stopping in front of the window to watch her retreat. Her stride was brisk as she continued up the cliff trail that ran past their properties, her curves silhouetted against the backdrop of the Pacific Ocean, and the setting sun.

He groaned. The taste of her still lingered in his mouth, the image of the small birthmark on her inner thigh fresh in his mind. He'd wanted to fuck her. Hell, he still did.

Shit. This was going to be a problem.

He didn't need this. Not now. The deadline for his book was in three weeks, and all he could think about was getting into some brazen blonde's pants.

He watched as she turned and crossed the lawn towards the old Whitmore mansion. No, *her* mansion now. She'd been right, that did irk

him a bit. He'd wanted it, had the highest offer on the table, until she walked in. He'd been ready to put his own house on the market, take out a loan and purchase it.

His hope of acquiring the house had faded when he'd realized whom he was up against. The daughter of a wealthy CEO, Taylor had more money in her pocket than he did in his IRA.

Not getting the house had thrown a wrench in his plans to do paranormal research there. His hobby as an amateur ghost hunter had the potential to turn into so much more. He'd already gotten the go ahead from his agent for his first non-fiction book about the house and its history.

Most people blew off the idea that the place was haunted, laughed at his research, but they'd never been inside that mansion. And whether Taylor wanted to admit it or not, there was something going on up there.

Gavin shook his head and sat back down at his desk. He flipped open his laptop and scowled at the manuscript in front of him.

Damn book isn't going to write itself.

* * * * *

Taylor sat in bed, nibbling on the tip of her pen as she stared down at the notebook on her lap. Five women were coming to her retreat tomorrow. Perfect. She'd hit the maximum she could take for one retreat, seeing as she didn't have the accommodations for more than that. The first retreat had only had three clients. The second there were four. Word of mouth was spreading fast and she was booked for the next two months.

Taylor scanned the list of clients for the coming weekend again. There was one divorcee, one in the process of a divorce, a single woman, and two married. Not a bad line up, and definitely a variety of clients. Should make for some fun.

She started to jot down a schedule but glanced up, her nose crinkling as she sniffed the air. *Why did it suddenly smell like cigar smoke?*

Climbing out of bed, she went to the window and looked down into the yard, half expecting someone to be standing below with a stogie

in hand. But there was no one out there. Only the reflection of the moon on the ocean. And what a gorgeous view it was. She was so fortunate to have gotten this house.

Taylor started to close the curtain when she noticed a movement by the tree in the front yard. What was that? Some kind of illumination? She blinked and it was gone.

Shaking her head, she dropped the curtains back into place. The hairs on the back of her neck lifted, unease trickling down her spine. She rubbed her arms.

"Why the hell is it so cold?" she grumbled to herself. It was spring, and most of the time the house stayed warm. But she still left the thermostat at around sixty-eight degrees.

She probably needed to get the heating looked at. The realtor must have lied her bony ass off when she'd said the wiring and heating had been recently updated.

The phone rang. Taylor walked into the hallway and glanced down at the caller id display. *Damn bastard*. He was probably calling to take her up on that booty call offer. Well, screw him.

Too little, too late, Gavin. But part of her rebelled. I want to answer the phone. To tell him to come over. Have him kiss me until my mind spins and my panties are soaked.

No. That'd be the whole putting her heart on the line bit again, and it wasn't worth it.

She went back into the bedroom and shut the door. Thank God the cigar smell was gone. Good thing, because that was just a little too odd.

"Damn." She closed her eyes and groaned, remembering their sensual encounter with Gavin earlier today. Okay, maybe she was pissed at him, but he still turned her on. She squeezed her thighs together, trying to ease the sudden pressure in her pussy. *Great, now I'm all hot and bothered.*

Well, there was an easy enough way to take care of that. She was a pro at masturbating. Hell, she taught workshops on it.

Taylor slipped off her clothes and removed her panties and bra before climbing naked between the silk sheets.

Moisture pooled heavily between her thighs as she thought about the pleasure to come. Reaching over to the bedside table, she pulled open the drawer and stared.

"Where the *fuck* is my vibrator?"

* * * * *

Gavin knocked on Taylor's door, hoping she was awake this early in the morning. He turned and glanced back down the path, at the ocean, and then his house a quarter mile away. Damn if they didn't have the best view on the Oregon Coast.

The door creaked and he turned to find Taylor glaring at him.

Hand on her hip with a spoon in hand, she looked sexy and just the slightest bit combative. There were faint circles under her eyes. Eyes which seemed more green today. And those lips... God, the memories. He moved his gaze down her body and blinked in surprise. She was wearing a frilly pink apron over her jeans.

"Uh..." He cleared his throat. "Good morning, Taylor. I wasn't sure if you'd be up—"

"Why didn't you call and find out?"

"I did call. Last night and this morning." He blinked and adjusted his glasses. "You didn't answer. May I come in?"

She didn't answer right away, and tension coiled through his body. Damn. She wasn't going to make this easy for him.

Taylor nodded, and then stepped back, allowing him entry.

Gavin took the few steps into the house, the old wood floors creaking under his feet. He scanned the interior, almost horrified that she'd have redone the place with pink curtains, sexual art pieces, and God knew what else.

But she hadn't. The parlor—or living room—lay to the left and was decorated in a tasteful comfort. Plush cream couches, cherry wood furniture, and not a single bright color or dildo statue anywhere.

Now, if she'd only let him run some tests. He'd even brought his EMF detector just in case. So far he didn't notice anything abnormal, but

that's where the equipment came into effect. He'd still like to have the proof on record.

"So what can I do for you, Gavin?"

He turned around, almost having forgotten why he'd come.

"I came to apologize in person, seeing as you wouldn't answer my phone calls."

She raised an eyebrow and then turned on her heel, walking back into the kitchen.

Gavin's gaze honed right in on her ass swinging temptingly in old faded blue jeans. *Damn. Down boy.* He ground his teeth and followed after her.

The kitchen walls and all the cabinets were painted white, the table in the room he recognized to be an antique. Overall she'd done little to change the house. If anything, she'd improved on it.

Taylor was stirring something on the stove. He sniffed the air as he walked closer. Something sweet and fruity bubbled in the pot.

"What are you cooking?"

"Strawberry jam."

His stomach rumbled. He hadn't even eaten this morning; he'd been too determined to get over here and get the apology out. For some reason it was important that she forgive him for yesterday.

She gave him a knowing glance. "Let me guess. You didn't eat any breakfast?" Walking over to the table in the center of the room, she pulled out a chair. "Have a seat."

Gavin blinked. Did this mean he was forgiven? Not wanting to look a gift horse in the mouth, he sat down in the chair she'd offered.

"I'm making eggs and toast. Take it or leave it."

"Take it."

"Good boy." She went back to the stove to stir the jam before going to the fridge and leaned down to grab something.

Ah, that ass was going to be the death of him.

"You didn't happen to take my vibrator, did you?"

What? Gavin's gaze jerked up from her ass. "What did you s—"

"I suppose that's ridiculous." She stood up, eggs in hand. "Never

mind. It was a stupid question. Unless you had a key to the house, or broke in or something. But you seem too stick-in-the-mud to do something like that."

His eyebrows shot up as irritation pricked deep. "Did you just call me a stick in the mud?"

"Forget I said anything." She grabbed two mugs and went to the coffee pot to fill them. "A quarter cream, right? No sugar."

How the hell could she know that?

"Don't look so surprised. I know your type."

I'm a type? Gavin accepted the mug of coffee prepared exactly the way he would have done it.

"And I assume you prefer wheat toast?"

His jaw clenched. "Yes, please."

She smiled and gave a throaty laugh. "And I scramble my eggs, unless you prefer them over easy?"

He almost wanted to say over easy, just so she wouldn't have to be so annoyingly accurate. Damn if the woman wasn't a psychic.

"Scrambled is fine." He took a sip of coffee. *Perfect.* "About yesterday —"

"Let's not talk about yesterday." She cracked the eggs into a bowl and started whipping them. Her glance shot towards him, and there was something in her eyes. Almost a vulnerability. "I mean, do you regret it?"

Hell no. "Of course not."

"Well, then let's leave it at that." She shrugged, her relief obvious in the tension that left her shoulders. "Besides, I'll make it up to you."

He jerked his head towards her. "What? Make it up?"

She laughed again, and images of what *make it up* might mean flew through his head. Taylor on her knees in front of him, stroking him, her blonde head bobbing as she sucked his cock. Blood rushed to his groin at the explicit thought.

"Oh, I've got big plans for you, Gavin. *Big.*" She grabbed two plates and dished up their breakfast, setting one in front of him before returning to the counter.

Gavin picked up his fork and stabbed into the eggs, then took his

first bite.

"They taste okay?" She glanced over her shoulder from her post next to the toaster.

"They're great." And they were. They didn't taste anything like the eggs he made. Which was weird. Didn't she just crack them in a pan and let them cook?

"Good." She came back and plopped two pieces of toast on his plate, along with a jar of strawberry jam. "I made this batch of jam last night."

"You said you had big plans. Do you want to elaborate on them?"

Taylor took her seat across from him, spread a piece of toast with jam, and then licked a drop off her thumb. "Nope."

They ate in silence, nearly finishing the meal before the phone rang.

Taylor set down her fork and glanced into the hallway. "I'd better get that. It could be a client."

Gavin watched her leave the room. Well, watched her ass, anyway. *This is my chance.* After she'd rounded the corner, he reached into his pocket.

Chapter Three

Taylor's heart pounded, even after she'd ended the phone call with her client. Her nerves had nothing to do with the client and everything to do with the man sitting at her kitchen table.

He'd come to apologize. How sweet. His gaze had been following her since he'd arrived. Even when she'd been at the stove, she could feel it boring into her back. He still wanted her. Which was a good thing, because the plans she had for him were going to be fabulous.

Why she had a thing for her geeky writer neighbor was a little strange in the first place. Totally out of par with her normal choice in men. But now that she'd seen what he was like when the sexual beast was unleashed...mmm. Her pussy got wet just thinking about it. Maybe after breakfast they could do a little dessert, so to speak.

She returned to the kitchen. "That was just a client saying she was going to be late." She cocked her head. "What are you doing?"

Gavin was wandering around the room with some kind of device in his hand. He turned around, a sheepish smile on his face.

"It's an EMF detector. It picks up disruptions in electronic fields. Look, I know you said you didn't want me to run any tests. But this isn't really a—"

"You're checking for ghosts?" Her eyes widened and she shook her head. Then it hit her, and her stomach dropped. "Oh, my God, I'm such an idiot. You didn't come here to apologize. You snuck in here to run some of those ridiculous tests."

He froze, his expression shocked. "No. No, Taylor. That's not it at all—"

"And I even fed you breakfast." She laughed, feeling stupider with every passing second. Man, she'd been an idiot. Deciding to let him in this morning and taking his apology at face value. "You had me going."

"Taylor—"

"I'm sorry, but I have clients arriving tomorrow and a house to prepare. Run your damn tests, Gavin, and then leave."

Stupid! She was so stupid. Before he could respond, she turned and stalked away. She'd barely taken two steps when his arm wrapped around her waist and jerked her to a halt, then spun her around.

His gaze, hard and determined, caught hers.

"Let go of m—"

Gavin's mouth closed over hers, cutting off her protest.

Taylor slammed her hands against his chest in an attempt to push him away, but it was like trying to move a brick wall.

His tongue thrust past her lips to take control of hers, his hands gripped her hips and he jerked her tight against his erection. His cock ground into her stomach and her damp arousal coated her panties. She stopped trying to push him away and instead, slid her hands up to wrap around his neck, pulling him closer.

He backed her up, not breaking the kiss, until she was against the wall.

"I want you," he ground out, untying the strings of her apron.

"Yes." She undid the fly of his jeans, and then moved to the zipper.

"Now." He pulled the pink apron off her body. "Right here."

"Yes, Gavin." She jerked his jeans down and pulled his cock from his briefs. Wrapping her fingers around the smooth length of it, she moved her hand up and down the soft skin.

"Taylor." He slammed his hands against the wall on each side of her head, his cock thrusting against her hand with the movement of his hips. She glanced down at his erection; he was an average length, but so thick, the head of his cock a round and smooth.

"You like that, Gavin?" She leaned forward and lightly bit his

lower lip before running her tongue over it. Her hand worked his cock until the first drop of pre-cum rubbed against her thumb. "Mmm, I guess you do."

Gavin lowered one of his hands and unfastened her jeans, pulling the sides apart so the zipper slid down. His fingers delved into her panties, rubbing over the slit of her pussy.

"Christ, you're all wet for me."

Taylor moved her feet apart, allowing him better access. His fingers curled inside her folds, and then sank deep into her pussy.

"Oh, God." Her head fell back against the wall. He fucked her with his fingers as she increased the pace of her hand on his cock.

"Gavin...now. I need you *now*."

He stepped back from her and shoved down his pants, then reached over and jerked hers down as well.

He lifted her, and she wrapped her legs around his waist.

He cursed. "No condom."

"I'm on the pill, and I'm clean. You?"

"I'm clean."

She wiggled until his cock teased the entrance of her pussy. "Then fuck me, Gavin. Fuck me like you've wanted to since the first day you saw me."

He lowered her over him at the same time he thrust his hips, imbedding his cock deep inside her. "Damn, you've got a tight pussy, baby. Hot and wet. How's that feel?"

"Oh...that's..." The room spun. He held her up, pressing her against the wall. Her nipples were hard, every nerve in her body tingled. "That's very nice."

"Yeah?"

He pulled out slow, and then thrust deep again. So thick, he stretched her, filling her until she gasped in pleasure. Her head fell back against the wall.

He pressed her harder against the wall, his fingers digging into her ass cheeks as he thrust in and out of her.

"Just nice?" He thrust deep and rotated his hips, making his cock

hit sensitive spots inside her.

She gasped and closed her eyes, her nails digging into the shirt on his shoulders. "Better than nice."

He thrust harder, his pace quickening as she moved up and down on his cock.

Colors swirled behind her eyelids as the combination of his cologne and sweat teased her senses. He hit a spot that set her off, and she cried out, squeezing her inner muscles around him.

Gavin choked out a gasp. "*Taylor!*"

"*Gavin!*" She pushed herself down as hard as she could, and the head of his penis stroked the tip of her womb.

He stayed buried deep, and the pleasure peaked and spilled over into an orgasm. She clenched around him, lowering her mouth to bite his shoulder through his shirt as she rode the waves of her own climax.

He started moving again, thrusting faster as her body contracted around him. Lights flashed in her head and everything went fuzzy for a second. He groaned and his hands tightened on her ass.

Taylor felt him spurt hot and thick inside her. She groaned and grabbed his head, forcing his mouth down onto hers. Their tongues curled together as he emptied himself.

His grip on her ass eased, and he lifted his head.

He nuzzled her neck. "That was..."

"One of my biggest fantasies," she finished for him with a weak laugh.

"Getting fucked against a wall?"

"Pretty much. Out of control, hard sex with just enough time to remove the necessary bits of clothing."

He laughed. "I'm sorry. I didn't even take off your shirt."

Smiling, she pushed a damp tendril of hair off his face. "I'm not complaining. Besides, remember me mentioning that whole part about it being a fantasy of mine?"

"Yeah. But you've got some nice tits I wouldn't have minded looking at."

She giggled. "I don't get it, Gavin. You come across as this uptight,

conservative...well, geek almost—

“Gee thanks.”

“—but you’re a total freak in the bedroom.”

“Freak?” His eyebrows drew together as he lifted her off him and set her on her feet.

“It’s an expression, Gavin.” She reached for her panties and jeans, and pulled them on. “Anyways, how about you?”

“What about me?” He pulled his jeans up, and Taylor watched the thick muscles in his thigh clench. She drew her gaze further down to equally impressive calves.

“Any fantasies?”

He hesitated and then shook his head. “Not really.”

“Come on, every guy has a fantasy. And you hesitated, meaning there is one.”

Gavin opened his mouth to say something, and then closed it again. He turned in a slow circle, his gaze scanning the room.

“Uh, what are you doing?” Taylor cocked her head as she watched him.

“Do you feel that?” he asked. “The temperature’s dropped in here.”

“The temperature? Oh. No you didn’t. Gavin, if you get out the EMT thing, so help me God—”

“EMF. And that wouldn’t give me a temperature reading, it just notices changes in electronic fields.”

“Right.” She put her hands on her hips. Was he going to start with that shit again? He’d just fucked her brains out and was back to believing in the boogey man?

Finally he nodded and turned back to her, closing the distance between them and cupping her face between both of his hands. The tension in her body dissipated.

“Thank you, Taylor. For breakfast and...”

“The fuck?” She lifted an eyebrow, her heart pounding as his eyes dropped to her mouth.

“It wasn’t just a fuck.” His mouth covered hers, a gentle caress. “At least not for me.”

She wanted it to be just a fuck. It would have been easier that way. But somehow...somehow she got the feeling it might not be that simple. The notion curdled in her stomach.

He sighed. "I've got to get back to my book. My deadline's creeping up my ass and if I don't—"

"Go write." She waved him away. "My retreat starts tomorrow. So I'll be a little tied up for the next few days."

"Mmm." His mouth twitched. "Literally?"

She gave his shoulder a playful smack. "And wouldn't you just love to know what happens during a women's retreat."

"Yes, actually, I would."

"Well, then you should've been born with a vagina."

He laughed and headed for the door. "I'll call you."

They all said that. "We'll see."

His smile twisted a bit in confusion, but then he nodded and left.

What a morning, she thought as he shut the front door behind him. Now that playtime was over, it was time to do some serious cleaning.

But oh, what a way to start the day. Humming, she ran upstairs to grab her bathrobe.

Chapter Four

Gavin sat at his desk, ignoring the view of the ocean and stared at the EMF reading he'd managed to get at the mansion this morning. This was just his base reading, so there was no way to tell if it was normal or not. He'd need to go back and take a second reading to find that out. The best time would be when there was a report or hint at paranormal activity.

Damn. If only Taylor would open up to him. Talk to him about the bizarre things going on up there. And there *were* strange things going on. He wasn't an idiot, and she was a terrible liar.

He had to find a way to convince her to let him set up his equipment, do some more tests and readings. There was so much to discover at the house, to investigate. But Taylor was so close-minded to the whole idea.

Taylor... Images of this morning flickered through his head. She was amazing. So young, yet mature and confident in her sexuality. He remembered the way her tight pussy had squeezed around his cock.

Why had he been so against them sleeping together? God, what a waste of time. He should have slept with her the minute she'd moved in two months ago. He should have, but had been too irritated that she'd gotten the mansion and he hadn't.

At the time she'd seemed kind of flaky. A little too sexually confident. He hadn't realized her vulnerability until she'd let the mask slip the day she'd come to his house. A vulnerability that had turned his opinion of her upside down. And since then he hadn't been able to say no.

In the Runes: Silk Hauntings

Had no intention of ever saying no again.

* * * * *

Taylor's eyes snapped open. Her hands clenched the blankets that covered her as she lay completely still. What had woken her? She listened, waiting for it to come again.

The air in the room was cold, making the hair on her neck stand on end. *There.* Out of the corner of her eye she saw a flicker of shimmering white. *Don't turn your head, Taylor.*

Her grip on the blanket tightened and she squeezed her eyes shut. *Go away. Just go away!*

The chill lifted in an instant, and the sense of unease vanished. She peeked through one eye and turned her head to look at the doorway. Nothing.

The tension drained out of her body and she went limp. *You idiot. Of course there's nothing here. Gavin's got your imagination in overdrive, and you're freaking out over absolutely nothing.*

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath as her thoughts turned back to Gavin. *Mmm.* Yesterday morning had been fabulous. Her body was still the slightest bit sore. He'd fulfilled one of her fantasies without even knowing it.

So what was Gavin's fantasy? He'd certainly been tight lipped about it. Well, whatever it was, it'd be fun to return the favor. She'd have to work on him, figure it out. Or find some way to please him.

A yawn popped her jaw and her eyelids drifted shut again. She'd think more about it tomorrow. When she'd gotten more sleep.

* * * * *

The first knock on Taylor's door the next day came almost exactly at noon. *Here we go.* Her first full retreat was about to be underway. She brushed her hands down her jeans, and then swung open the door.

"Hiya! Taylor Ammons, I suppose?" The petite blonde girl giggled.

"I'm Cherry. I'm so excited for this weekend. I can't even tell you."

She looked so barely legal that Taylor had the urge to ask for the girl's driver's license. "Err, yes, I'm Taylor. Please, come right..."

The girl rushed past her. "You said feel free to bring a vibrator, but I thought, heck, why stop there?" She lifted her suitcase. "I've also got an array of butt plugs, nipple clamps, anal beads, clit clips—"

"Oh..." Taylor bit her lip, her stomach shaking as she tried not laugh out loud. "Umm...you certainly came prepared. I can't guarantee we'll have the chance to go over all of them, but we'll certainly try. Why don't I show you to your room?"

"Oh, that'd be fabulous. I'd love to warm up the vibrator."

Taylor had just returned from showing Cherry to her room when there was another knock on the door. *Please let the rest of them not be so intense.*

She swung open the door. Her brows drew together, her mouth opened in surprise.

The elderly lady smiled. "Hello, dearie."

"Hi." Taylor hesitated and looked around the woman, half expecting someone else to be behind her. "I'm sorry, are you lost?"

"No, at least I hope not." The woman stepped back and looked at the numbers on the house. "I'm Meredith Winters. I'm here for the retreat."

Oh, Lord. It'd be like teaching her grandma how to give a blow job! *She's a paying customer, Taylor, get over it.*

"Of course." She smiled and opened the door wider. "Meredith, so glad you could make it. Come right in."

The rest of the clients arrived over the next couple of hours. At four o'clock they were all sitting in the living room, chatting animatedly while Taylor prepared coffee and tea in the kitchen.

While the coffee brewed she peeked out at her clients. *Man, what a variety.* Meredith, the old woman, was just a trip. She and Denise were the only two that were married. Cherry was single and had just turned nineteen, thank God. Definitely legal. Serena was the divorcee. And Gina was in the process of a divorce.

Taylor giggled and ducked back into the kitchen. The coffee was done brewing so she filled a few mugs, and then made tea for the two that didn't like coffee.

She placed them on a serving tray with a pot of cream and sugar, then walked back into the living room.

"How's everyone getting along?" she asked, setting the tray on the coffee table.

"Wonderful." Denise reached for a mug of coffee. "Meredith was just telling us that she's been having multiple orgasms with her husband for years now."

"It's true." Meredith sat with her wrinkled hands folded politely on her lap.

Even if it was something she'd rather not visualize, Taylor had to give the woman props.

"Well, Meredith, you'll have to share your secrets." Taylor smiled. "Everyone, please help yourself to the coffee and tea. Let me grab some cookies."

"Oh, what a great weekend," Serena said on a sigh. "We get to stay in an old mansion next to the ocean while discussing sex and eating cookies."

Taylor laughed, still able to hear them as she made her way back to the kitchen.

"You know, I heard the mansion's supposed to be haunted."

Taylor's laughter dried up as her hands clenched. She recognized the voice of Gina, who was the thin older woman with frosted blonde hair and pale blue eyes. *How the hell had the woman heard that?*

Their voices faded and Taylor grabbed the tray of cookies. Damn. Just what she needed. Hopefully none of them were too superstitious.

Carrying the tray of cookies, she walked back into the living room. Fortunately none of them looked too freaked out.

Serena, a gorgeous dark skinned woman who'd said she'd been born in Honduras, snagged a cookie off the tray and smiled. "Mmm, sugar. I can only last so long without it. So is it true, Taylor? Is this place

really haunted?"

Cherry giggled. "Ooo, that'd be kind of fun. A ghost watching over us while we talk about dildos. Kinky."

Great, next they'll want to have some kind of freaky exorcism-orgy.

"Yes, Taylor." Gina glanced over at her. "Is it true? Notice anything strange around here?"

"Sorry, ladies. This house is one-hundred-percent ghost free." She smiled as she took a cup of coffee for herself.

"Good." Gina sat back on the couch. "So what do we cover first?"

"First, let's talk about why everyone's here. Denise, why don't we begin with you?"

"Me?" Denise tucked a strand of her red hair behind her ear and cleared her throat. "Well, I'm here because I can't have an orgasm. I've been married for ten years and was only with one man before Bobby. But neither of them have ever been able to get me off."

Several of the women gasped in horror.

"Ten years?" Meredith cried. "You poor child."

Taylor didn't even flinch. "How about during masturbation, Denise? Are you able to climax then?"

Denise blushed and turned several shades of red. "I...I don't masturbate."

"Houston, we have a problem." Cherry giggled.

Taylor shot her a warning glance and then turned back to Denise. "Well, after this weekend you won't be able to say that. This weekend is all about you, ladies." She stood up and began pacing in front of them.

"You're going to learn how to let go of your inhibitions and find the ultimate sexual pleasure. And best of all, not feel guilty about it."

"I should have brought a few cigars." Cherry grinned. "I love to smoke after an orgasm."

Gina's nose wrinkled as she crossed her legs. "I despise smoking. My first husband used to drink a glass of sherry every night and insist on having a cigar with it."

"I don't mind them," Meredith joined in. "My husband has one every night after we have sex."

There was a moment of silence as everyone stared at her with wide eyes. *Every night?* Taylor shook her head. Wow, to have that kind of stamina when she was Meredith's age.

"We're also going to learn how to give men pleasure, right?" Serena rushed. "I mean, I'm not sure I do it very well. Give men...pleasure."

"Spit it out, dear." Meredith patted the woman's knee. "Are you talking about blow jobs?"

Oh, God, this was getting so out of hand. Taylor grabbed her case full of sexual toys and set it on the coffee table.

"We'll be covering everything, ladies. Now, as you know, you'll all be receiving a pleasure bag that's yours to keep after the weekend is over. It was included in your registration price."

Serena giggled. "I can't wait for the pleasure bag."

CRASH!

Everyone jumped and turned toward the stairs.

Chapter Five

Taylor's gaze lifted from the stairs up to the landing. *What the hell had that been?*

"Let me go check it out real quick."

"Would you like me to go with you?" Gina stood up.

"No, thank you though. You ladies just entertain yourselves for a moment. I'll be right back."

She left the room and slowly made her way up the stairs.

The conversation between the women grew fainter as she reached the top of the stairs. Everything was quiet; the sun dappled a ray of light from a window at the end of the hallway. The air felt thick and a sudden chill swept over her.

Taylor hesitated. *Stop being a pansy and go check!* She took a deep breath and then moved down the hallway. Everything seemed fine. She glanced in each room to double check. In Gina's room she found the lamp. It was lying in pieces on the floor.

Chills raced down her spine and she glanced around the room, half expecting someone to be inside.

"This doesn't make sense. How could this happen?" Leaning down, she began picking up the various size fragments of glass. Maybe the lamp had just been too close to the edge...or something.

The sense of being watched prickled at the back of her neck, and she looked around. No one. She was still alone.

"You're ridiculous, Taylor. Of course there's no one here."

She dumped the broken glass in the bathroom garbage can and then hurried back downstairs, more eager to get back with the group of women than she cared to admit.

"Everything okay?" Meredith asked, still sipping her tea.

"It was just a lamp that tipped over in Gina's room, but no worries. Gina, I'll let you use my lamp."

"In my room?" The woman's skin paled. "What happened?"

"I'm not sure, probably just balanced precariously." Taylor's smile tightened. Shit, she did not want to feed this ghost hype. Best not to let them dwell on lamps that broke themselves. "Now. Where were we? Oh yes, the pleasure bag."

Cherry clapped her hands. "Ooo, do go into details."

"Everything I'm about to show you, you can expect to find in your own bag." She flipped open the case and pulled out a purple latex dildo.

"Who here owns a dildo?"

Gina laughed. "I doubt he does, judging by the color of his face."

"He?" Taylor spun around. Gavin was standing in the doorway, his face definitely an amusing shade of red. She kept her eyes on him as she said, "I'm sorry about this, ladies. If you'll excuse me for just one more moment. Please feel free to look through the case."

"I get the dildo..."

Taylor wiped her hands on her jeans, lifted her chin and strode towards him. Maybe she should ask him to look into that ghost thing. Mention the lamp. No. There was no ghost. Just an overactive imagination. Besides, if she asked Gavin to start ghost busting during her retreat, her clients would run screaming.

"Knock much?"

He blinked. "What?"

"You didn't even knock, just came into my house." She walked past him and waited for him to follow her into the kitchen. "I'm starting to wonder if you do have a key."

"I don't have a key. I promise. The door was unlocked, and I did knock first. No one answered." He pushed a hand through his hair, making the strands stand up in a tousled, sexy way. "This is going to

sound ridiculous, and it is ridiculous. Hell, I don't even know why I'm here—"

"Easy, Gavin." Taylor giggled and grabbed his hand, giving it a light squeeze. "Just tell me what the problem is."

He took a deep breath. "You."

"Me?" She raised an eyebrow. "I'm the problem?"

He nodded his head and gave a disbelieving laugh. "Yes. You."

"How am I the problem?" Annoyance had her pulling her hand away and folding her arms across her chest.

He took a step towards her and grabbed her waist, jerking her against him. "Because I can't stop thinking about you. About what happened yesterday."

Taylor's scowl tipped into a smile as warmth spread through her body. Hmm... So he was hooked on her? "Well, why didn't you just say that, sweet cheeks?"

"You don't understand. It's a problem."

"It doesn't sound like much of a problem." Taylor wrapped her arms around his waist and nipped at his bottom lip. "In fact, it sounds like a solution."

"Taylor, I have a deadline. And the only words I keep typing are, *Must fuck Taylor again.*"

"Ooo, I like it. Kind of like a perverted version of *The Shining*. When does your book come out? I'll be first in line to buy it." She brushed her mouth across his.

"Yeah?" He slid a hand between them and covered her breast, squeezing lightly.

"Do we have any—oops! Sorry."

Taylor jerked away from Gavin and spun around. "Gina, I... Never mind."

The woman had already left the kitchen.

"See." Taylor sighed. "Now *this* is a problem. There went my professionalism."

"You're giving a sex workshop. Do you think they're honestly going to care if you get felt up in the kitchen? Just say you're on a break."

Taylor reared her head back and glared at him. *So they were back to that, were they?* Gavin thinking that this retreat was just a sleazy excuse to talk about sex.

"You know, Gavin, you're real good at getting me from horny to pissy in about two-point-five seconds."

He shook his head. "Shit. I'm sorry. I'm a pro at sticking my foot in my mouth."

"Yes, you are."

He sighed. "I'll make it up to you. Can I see you tonight?"

"I don't know." She hesitated, not sure she wanted to forgive him that easily again. "I've got a group of women staying here. I have responsibilities—responsibilities I'm shirking as we speak."

"Well, it's not like you're with the women all night, are you?"

"No. I'm not." She finally nodded. "Okay, I plan on wrapping things up with the women around nine. At that time they'll be sent off to bed to work on their exercises. Why don't you come by at ten?"

Gavin tilted his head, a funny smile on his face. "Exercises?"

"You don't want to know. Or maybe you do, but I'm not going to fill you in." She pushed two fingers into his chest. "Go. Write your book."

He pulled her close again. "Kiss me first."

She lifted her mouth and he brought his down to hers. His tongue slipped past her lips and took control. Pressing her against the wall, he ground his cock against her pelvis.

"I need to touch you," he whispered against her mouth.

He pushed his hand down the waistline of her jeans, into her panties, and then curled a finger into her pussy.

"Gavin." her knees went weak and she clutched him tighter. "I'm in the middle of my retreat. I really need to get back to the women."

"I know." He kissed the side of her neck. "Just come for me real quick, and then I'll go."

"Come for you? Talk about performance anxiety." She gasped as his finger sank deep. The way he affected her was insane. No man could make her feel the way he did. Panic clawed at her belly. Losing control... She couldn't lose control like this. Taylor pushed at his chest. "I can't. I

want to, but I can't."

Gavin slowly pulled his finger from her pussy, and then lifted it to his mouth. He held her gaze as his tongue flicked over the tip.

"I want more of this tonight, Taylor. I'm going to lick you until you're screaming my name."

Her knees went weak, and the pressure between her legs was near to bursting.

"Then you'd better cover my face with a pillow, because I can't exactly scream down the house with my orgasm. Or maybe I could." She laughed. "I'm sure the others will be having their own battery operated orgasms. But you'd still better sneak in the backdoor. I don't want to have to fight anyone for you."

"You think that'd happen?"

"Are you kidding? You're the only guy in a house full of six horny women. And I don't share." She paused and gave him a curious glance.

"Unless...is that your fantasy? It wouldn't surprise me. I've never done it before, but if we found the right person I might be persuaded. Most men have that threesome fant—"

"No. That's not my fantasy. And I don't want anyone else, Taylor. Just you."

Pleasure warmed her body and she smiled. "Good. You'd better be here at ten sharp."

"I will." Gavin squeezed her hand one last time, and then left.

Well, shit. Like she was really supposed to go in there and discuss orgasms when she was on the verge of one?

Taylor walked back into the living room and then laughed. At least the ladies were having fun. They had just about every toy out. The room was filled with buzzing and whirring sounds, and Cherry and Serena were having a mock sword fight with two latex dildos.

This was only the third retreat that Taylor had held at the house, and she had yet to tire of the same old jokes and the giggling women atmosphere. The clients loved it, too. Not only did they get a bunch of information out of the two days, but they also had a good old-fashioned girls' weekend out.

She frowned and glanced around the room. Where was Gina?

"Did anyone see where Gina went? Did she go upstairs?"

"She said she was going outside for some fresh air."

She'd probably fled after watching her and Gavin going at it in the kitchen. Taylor strode to the window and spotted Gina kneeling beside the massive oak tree in the front yard.

"I'll go grab her." She went to the front door and walked out onto the porch. "Gina!"

Gina stood up quickly and strode to the porch. "I lost an earring out here earlier and was hoping I could find it."

"I'm sorry. Any luck?"

The older woman dropped her gaze and shook her head. "But no matter, I've got a pair like them at home."

Taylor wasn't surprised. The woman was dressed head to toe in designer labels. Taylor knew her brand names, and this woman obviously had money.

"Besides, my husband gave them to me and we're in the process of divorcing. So I probably would have thrown them away anyway."

Taylor glanced sideways at the other woman, guessing Gina to be in her mid forties.

They walked back into the house and sat down on the couch.

"Gina told us she caught you making out," Cherry said immediately. "Way to go, teacher. A hands-on demonstration."

"I spilled the beans without thinking." Gina flushed. "And I apologize for walking in on you and Mr. MacKenzie."

Taylor gave her a sharp glance. "You know Gavin?"

"No, but I know his books. Gavin writes horror novels. He's a bestseller on the New York Times list." Gina looked at the other women, as if assuming Taylor already knew all this. "He's being touted as the next Steven King. You read him, right, Taylor?"

No, I just fuck him. Jeez, wouldn't that be embarrassing to admit? Gavin was a bestseller? She knew he wrote, but hadn't realized he was one of *those* writers.

"I adore Mr. Mackenzie's books. That's how we met, of course. I

was just another adoring fan." *Right*. Time to get them back on track. "Anyhow, ladies, I see you're having fun with the toys. Does anybody have any questions about them?"

"Yes, I do." Denise held up one of the toys. "This one is supposed to be like a tongue, right? Does it feel as good as having a guy go down on you?"

No. Taylor bit back a groan and glanced at her watch. Damn. Ten o'clock was still a long time away.

* * * * *

Taylor stared out her bedroom window, listening to the sounds of the house. Every once in a while one of the women would giggle or talk to themselves. It was a pretty common reaction. Taylor had seen it before in the past two retreats.

The ladies were off to do their homework, namely, experiment with the toys and learn how to let go during masturbation. Which in turn would translate into how to let go during sex with a partner. How to have that eye-crossing orgasm that eluded some women.

She sighed and leaned closer to the window, hoping if she turned her head just right she could see the path that led to Gavin's house. But it was dark, and she couldn't see any further than the perimeter of her fence.

It was five after ten, according to the clock. This was ridiculous. Men didn't keep her waiting. If anything, it was the other way around.

A tall shadow darted across the front yard.

Bingo. Jeez, she'd been about two minutes away from grabbing one of the vibrators out of the spare pleasure bag, seeing as hers had yet to turn up.

But why didn't Gavin go to the backdoor like she'd told him to?

Men! They couldn't even follow the simplest of instructions.

She left her room and started down the stairs.

Chapter Six

Gavin finished typing the paragraph he'd been writing, hit save, and then closed his laptop. He'd written and rewritten the same page two times. Shit. Taylor was the epitome of a distraction. He'd forced himself to at least knock out three pages before he left to go to her place, and now he was going to be late meeting her.

Grabbing a lightweight jacket, he headed up to her house. The night would have been warm if it hadn't been for the wind sweeping in off the ocean. He inhaled the night air, enjoying the salty tang of coastal sea breeze and the moon reflecting on the water.

Because Taylor had told him to sneak in the backdoor, Gavin skipped the front yard and went to the back of the house. The door was unlocked and he slipped inside, shutting it silently behind him.

God, he couldn't wait to touch her again. Heading straight for the stairs, he just barely noticed the front door was open. Gavin turned and walked back toward the door, spotting Taylor standing on the porch.

Her back was to him, and he took the moment to admire the way the blue silk pajama pants clung to her ass and hugged the swell of her hips.

He snuck up behind her and slipped his hands around her waist. "Hey—"

Her yelp of surprise cut him off. "Shit, Gavin!" She spun around and glared at him. Her eyes narrowed and a frown crossed her face.

"Hold on a minute, I just saw you in the front yard. How did you get in

here?"

"I came straight to the backdoor, didn't even cross the front yard." He paused. "Did you see someone out front?"

She hesitated. "I thought I did, but maybe I was wrong. Where are you going?"

Gavin moved toward the steps to the front yard. "I'll do a quick check."

"Gavin, no! I probably imagined it..."

Her words faded into a groan of frustration as he moved out of earshot. Damn, what if there was somebody out here? The thought of someone sneaking around, watching Taylor.... The thought sent his blood pressure soaring.

And what would happen if he found someone? He didn't even own a gun, let alone carry one on him. Of course he was in good shape, worked out. He could probably win in an honest fight.

Gavin walked slowly around the perimeter of the house. The wind had picked up and cut through the darkness of the night. He searched the front yard, the back, and all along the sides of the house.

If anyone had been out here, they were gone now. Unless what she'd seen hadn't been a human at all, but an apparition.

Excitement at the possibility had him increasing his stride. Damn, he should have brought his equipment.

He headed back inside the mansion and found Taylor sitting on the couch nursing a steaming mug.

"Kind of late for coffee, isn't it?"

"It's not coffee. It's warmed milk with a little almond syrup in it." She stared at him, the look in her eyes said that she was obviously still worried. "Did you find anyone?"

"No. If there was anyone out there, they're gone now." He sat down beside her and touched her knee, squeezing lightly. "You doing okay?"

She met his gaze, and he saw that flash of vulnerability again. "Better, now that you're here."

"Baby..." He tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. "About the

person you saw. Did anything seem odd about them?"

Taylor raised an eyebrow. "Define odd. It was dark. It just looked like a shadow standing outside by the fence."

"Did it...seem transparent at all, or faint?"

"What? Now how does a person look transparent? They looked— oh, I see. Back to ghosts again, are we?" She brought the mug to her mouth and drank the rest of the liquid in two gulps. "You know, Gavin, I don't know how much clearer I can make this. My house is not haunted. I don't believe in that crap."

Whether she believed in it or not, it wouldn't make one scrap of a difference if her house was haunted. And Gavin was pretty damn sure it was. The trouble would be convincing her. He was surprised she wasn't more afraid to be staying alone in a house that was obviously haunted.

"Okay." He gentled his tone in an effort to soothe his ruffled feathers. "Forget I asked, baby."

"Done." Taylor stood up and glanced at him from under her lashes. "Are we going to talk about the boogie man all night, or did you come here to get in my pants?"

Hell, when she put it that way... "Pajamas."

"What?"

"Get in your pajamas." He reached out and undid the first button on her silky top. "And I definitely want in them. Or you out of them."

Taylor covered his hand, stalling his process of undressing her. "Let's take this upstairs. Against the kitchen wall was fun and all, but this time, I'm in the mood for a bed."

Gavin gave a slow smile as his head filled with the image of her naked, writhing on the bed, with his tongue buried in her pussy. His cock stirred. "Then let's go."

She took his hand and led him up the stairs, putting a finger to her lips in a command for him to keep silent. Which was fine since he was too busy staring at the curves of her ass as she walked ahead of him.

He ran the pad of his thumb over the inside of her wrist, and was rewarded by the tremble that shook her body.

Once in her room, he shut the door behind him and leaned against

it.

Taylor turned around to face him, her mouth curving into a sensual smile. She reached for the buttons on her top and slowly began undoing them.

Gavin's cock hardened as the swell of her breasts appeared. She pulled the edges of her pajama top to the side and then off her body, exposing her pink, puckered nipples.

He took the few steps that separated them, reaching out to take a breast in each hand. His thumb stroked over the silky flesh and then reached the hardened tip.

"Taylor," he murmured, backing her up until her feet hit the edge of the bed. "Taylor."

He lowered his head and dragged his tongue over one of the hardened peaks. She groaned and grabbed the back of his head, holding him to her breast. Her floral perfume filled his nostrils.

Gavin pushed her back until she fell onto the bed, then he climbed on top of her and covered her breast with his mouth. He alternated sucking soft and hard on her nipples, the soft cries coming from her mouth encouraging him. He groaned and ground his cock into her soft belly.

He slipped his hands under the waistband of her pajama bottoms to cup her ass, squeezing the soft flesh and curling his fingers downward to find the moisture between her legs. Damn, she was wet.

"Gavin!" She gasped, arching her body so her breast pushed further into his mouth and her legs fell open.

Sitting up, he jerked the silky pants off of her to bare her body to his hungry gaze. He wrapped a hand around each thigh and spread her legs. Sliding down, he trailed kisses as he went, letting his tongue linger in the tiny dip of her belly button, before he dragged his kisses further south.

His tongue stabbed through damp curls at the apex of her sex and into her folds to taste her musky cream.

"Oh..." Her body jerked against him.

He imprisoned her thighs, keeping her spread open as he dipped again and again into her hot pussy. Her soft groans encouraged him, and

he thrust his tongue deeper.

He reached his thumb up to circle her clit while continuing to lap at her pussy.

"Gavin!"

He dragged his tongue up to replace his thumb.

"Oh, God." Her hips bucked as she ground herself down on his face.

The power he had over her at the moment excited him, made him bolder than he'd ever been with a woman.

"Tell me what you want, baby..." He circled his tongue around her clit faster, and then flicked the swollen flesh.

"I want..." she gasped, her stomach muscles tensed. "I want...you to make me come. *Please.*"

He sucked her clit between his lips and thrust two fingers into her hot, slick channel.

Her screams grew muffled, and he looked up to see she'd pressed a pillow over her face.

He gave a husky laugh, and then went back to eating her pussy. He thrust his fingers harder and faster into her, sucking and licking her clit. Even through the pillow her scream was loud as her thighs tightened around his head. Her body shook, her hips rose off the mattress, her legs trembled, and then her body went limp beneath his mouth and hands.

Gavin nuzzled the curls between her legs and smiled. Her body was flushed and damp from her climax. She was beautiful. Sexy, smart, and beautiful. He still had no idea why she'd picked him as a lover, but thank God she'd kept up her persistence in seducing him.

He slid up her body and pulled the pillow off of her head. "You okay under there, baby?"

She gave a long sigh. "Oh, that was amazing. Thank you, Gavin."

"No. Thank you." He rose to his knees, so he was straddling her chest.

Her gaze turned mischievous as she reached for the zipper on his jeans. She dragged the tab down and then unfastened the button at the top.

"I've been meaning to give this guy some attention," she

murmured as she pulled his dick out from the slit in his boxers. "Seems like I've been missing out. I'm awfully partial to your cock, Gavin."

Her thumb dragged across the head of his erection, spreading pre-cum over his length.

"Yeah?" He leaned forward, bracing himself above her with hands on each side of her head. His cock nuzzled her mouth. God, he wanted those lips wrapped around him.

"Yeah." Her eyes narrowed and her smile widened before her tongue flicked out to lick at his flesh.

The little vixen was dead set on tormenting him.

"Show me how partial you are, Taylor." He flexed his hips just a bit, so his cock slid between her lips.

Taylor moaned while her hands slid around to cup his ass. She drew him forward, opening her mouth wide to take him deep.

When her hot mouth closed over his erection, Gavin's eyes slammed shut and the breath hissed from between his teeth.

She wrapped her tongue around his erection, sucked hard, and then brought him deep.

"Dear God...you're amazing."

He thrust his hips, moving in and out of her mouth until his sac tightened. Damn, if he kept this up he'd come down her throat.

Pulling out of her mouth, he rolled to the side of the bed and stood up to jerk his shirt over his head.

"I wasn't through with you, Gavin." She had a satisfied smile on her face while she rubbed a manicured finger over her clit.

"You'll have me," he murmured, returning naked and settling between her thighs. "You'll just have me here, baby."

He thrust deep, smiling as her eyes closed and she groaned. Her hot cunt squeezed his cock, pulling him deeper into her tight, wet, heat. He moved forward until he was nestled at the entrance to her womb. *Damn.* She was heaven.

"Gavin..." Taylor writhed under him. "Oh, damn, you're big."

Gavin grabbed her wrists and pulled them above her head, holding them there with one hand as he slowly pulled out of her, then thrust back

inside.

"Yes... Harder!" She lifted her hips and groaned again.

Spurred on by her request, he slammed into her, glancing down to see where their bodies were joined. He pulled out again. The sight of his cock, shiny with her juices, made his sac clench with an impending climax.

He released her hands and reached between them he rubbed her clit. He wanted her to come with him. She cried out and then grabbed his head, jerking his mouth back down to hers.

His fingers moved faster on her, and held himself back until he felt her inner muscles clamp around his cock, and then there was no stopping it. She cried into his mouth, her fingers raking down his back. Gavin groaned as he came hard, spilling himself inside her.

She went limp under him, and when his arms started to shake, he rolled off of her and stretched out beside her. She blew his mind; was unlike any woman he'd ever been to bed with before. And now...would he ever want another woman?

"That was even better than the against-the-wall-sex we had yesterday," Taylor murmured. "Which I didn't think was possible. I wonder if I'll ever get used to this side of you."

Gavin propped himself up on his elbow and frowned. Damn. Had he gone too far? "Was I too aggressive? Rough? Sometimes I—"

"You were amazing." She grabbed the back of his head and pulled him down for another kiss. "Absolutely amazing."

He smiled and smoothed a strand of hair off her forehead. He wanted to know more about her. Take away the layers of control she kept so tightly wound about herself. "Who are you, Taylor?"

She giggled and wrinkled her nose. "Haven't you figured it out? I'm Taylor Ammons, sexual goddess extraordinaire."

"Well I know that, baby." He tapped her nose. "But besides all that. Who lies beneath the goddess?"

She gave him a skeptical look and then shrugged. "What do you want to know? Ask me anything."

"All right...what's your favorite ice cream?"

"Ice cream? Strawberry."

She didn't look like a strawberry type of girl. Strawberry made him think of a little girl with pigtails riding on her daddy's shoulders. But then, maybe that's who she had been as child.

His thoughts turned to her father and the wealth she came from. The opportunities she must have had. "I'll bet you went to Europe on vacation before you were five."

Her eyes widened in surprise. "I was four the first time I went to Paris. How did you... Why would you ask that?"

"When we were in a bidding war for this house, I found out your dad was Prescott Ammons."

It was like a wall had come down. Her expression became shuttered, and she glanced away.

What an odd reaction. He continued, watching carefully for her reaction. "And I was just thinking you must have had an amazing childhood."

Her mouth tightened. "Yes, I was spoiled."

"That's not exactly what I meant." *Back off, Gavin, she's not enjoying this conversation.*

"It doesn't matter."

But it did. It was obvious by the sudden tension in her body. Time to change the subject.

"So, how come no serious boyfriend? You're gorgeous, confident, smart—"

"I don't do long term relationships. Never have."

His gut clenched. What was she saying? What did that mean for them? Was he just some random guy in a long line of men?

"My turn." Her gaze sharpened, her chin lifted. "What were you like as a kid?"

"I had a great childhood. I have a younger brother and sister. We never made it to Paris, but there was a lake nearby our house where we spent the summers."

"Having siblings must have been nice." She seemed to relax again as a whimsical smile flitted across her face. "What were your parents

like?"

"Broke. My dad was an artist who couldn't sell a painting." He laughed. "My mom worked in the deli at the local grocery store. But...they were great. They loved each other."

"That's sweet." She kissed his chest. "Sometimes I wonder if that kind of love exists. I mean, I believe in that intense lust. But love..."

"It does."

She sighed. "I'd love to be able to believe that."

Gavin frowned. "What—"

"Eeeaaahh!"

The shrill scream pierced the air, ripping through the silence of the house.

Chapter Seven

Gavin jerked away. "What the hell?"

Taylor had already jumped out of bed and was reaching for her robe. "I don't know. It has to be one of the ladies."

Even though Taylor had wanted his presence in the house to be a secret, Gavin jerked on his pants and followed her into the hallway; not convinced there wasn't some unknown threat.

Taylor flipped on the light. Doors in the hallway opened and several of the women peeked out, wide-eyed.

"Damn. Who was screaming like their nuts just got cut off?" Cherry asked from her doorway.

Gina's door swung open and she charged out, her face white, her eyes round with horror.

"Gina?" Taylor's tone was worried as she took a quick step towards her. "What's going on?"

Gina blinked and then looked around at all the people staring at her.

"I..." she hesitated and then gave a brittle smile, lifting her chin. She smoothed her hands over the floral nightgown that covered her from head to toe. "It was nothing. I had a bad dream."

A bad dream, my ass. Gavin stared at the woman, noting how her hands trembled and the way she cast quick glances back into the room.

Gavin stepped past the ladies and into Gina's room.

"What are you doing?" the woman demanded, but didn't follow

him inside.

"Just having a look," he replied ambiguously. The temperature inside the room was notably cooler. He glanced towards the window to make sure she hadn't left it open. No, it was shut.

Adrenaline and excitement pumped through his blood. *Shit. If I only had my equipment.* Of course, he didn't need a damn EMF meter or Ion detector to convince him there was a ghost in this room. He knew it. Had been in enough houses that were haunted to recognize the signs.

"Hey, Taylor? How come you send us to bed with sex toys, but you get the hot best-selling author between your legs?"

Gavin smiled, momentarily distracted by the voice of the young woman in the hall. Hell, the girl didn't even look old enough to be at this retreat.

"I'm sorry to do this to you, Taylor," Gina said. "But I'm going to have to leave."

Gavin turned around to see that Gina had come back into the room and grabbed her suitcase.

"What?" Taylor's voice rose in disbelief. "Tonight? Right now?"

"I really am sorry." She began loading her clothes into the case. "I just have these nightmares sometimes, and it's... I just need to speak with my therapist."

Speak with her therapist? Gavin's brows drew together. *At eleven o'clock on a Saturday night?*

Taylor looked a little stressed now. "But you've already paid, and I don't offer refunds—"

"I won't be needing a refund, thank you. I'm going to change clothes and then, Mr. Mackenzie, if you would please escort me out to my car?"

Gavin caught Taylor's despondent glance, then she nodded and looked away.

"Of course." Gavin took the woman's suitcase and headed for the stairs, mouthing, *call you tomorrow*, to Taylor.

She didn't look happy. The poor woman was probably terrified the rest of the ladies would pack up and head out.

Hmm. Maybe he should try and sneak back up later and talk to her. He glanced at his watch. Almost midnight. Scratch that plan. He'd catch her in the morning.

* * * * *

Taylor opened her eyes and yawned. Memories of Gavin and last night put a smile on her face.

Gina... The smile faded and she sighed. Oh, this just sucked. This was the first time a customer had run out on a retreat. And boy, it sure wasn't a good feeling.

She glanced at her alarm clock. Hmm, she'd actually woken before it was set to go off. Well, it wouldn't hurt to get breakfast ready for the ladies a bit early.

Sliding out of bed, she threw on some clothes, and then made her way downstairs, trying to keep her steps light so the cold floorboards didn't squeak beneath her bare feet.

She reached the kitchen and turned on the lights.

"Good morning."

Taylor gasped and pressed her hand against her chest. "Denise. You scared me."

"Sorry." The other woman yawned. "I couldn't sleep. I made myself some tea. I hope that's all right."

"It's fine." Taylor grabbed the glass carafe from the coffee maker and went to fill it with water. "I hope Gina's leaving last night didn't upset you."

"No, that wasn't it at all." Denise hesitated, a slow blush coloring her cheeks. "I couldn't sleep because I was so excited. I've... I did all those things you talked about yesterday during the classes. About freeing your mind and focusing on the pleasure. You know, instead of focusing on the fact that I can never have an orgasm."

"And?" Taylor bit her lip and gave the woman an encouraging smile.

"And I had one. It was a little one, but I know it was orgasm." She

giggled. "It was really nice."

"Yay, Denise. That's fabulous." The coffee was brewing, so Taylor went to the fridge and pulled out the stuff for breakfast. "And now that you've had one, chances are you'll have even bigger and better ones."

"Oh, I hope so! Because my husband's taking us on a second honeymoon to Hawaii next month."

"How wonderful. You'll have a great time—both inside and outside of the bedroom. Just make sure you get out and play on the beach, too." Taylor smiled. "And I just love it when my classes really help someone."

"Oh they did...you have no idea." Denise glanced at the table and the bananas Taylor was laying out by each plate. "I'm on a low carb diet, I probably can't eat a banana."

"Yes, I remember that from your registration form. We aren't eating them, technically." Taylor hid a smile. "They're going to be used for our next lesson."

"Oh. Pamela told me about this part—she was at your last retreat. They raved about your oral sex lesson. I'm so excited!"

"Did someone say something about oral sex?" Cherry came into the kitchen wearing tiny boxer shorts and a thin tank top. "Boy, what I wouldn't give to have some guy to lick my pussy right about now."

Taylor's eyebrows rose. *Good thing Gavin went home.* Even though he said he didn't do threesomes and that he only wanted her, Cherry could prove to be his temptation.

"In good time, my dear. But this morning's lesson will be about giving the pleasure, not receiving."

"Bummer. Although..." Cherry stretched. "...I have to say, I'm a little sore from last night."

"Good job, girl!" Denise gave her a high-five and then pulled out the chair next to her. "Did you try the vibrating egg?"

Taylor laughed and went back to cooking breakfast. Meredith and Serena came downstairs over the next half hour, and soon all the women were gathered around the table.

"All right everyone, here's your breakfast, but don't touch the

bananas. Yet."

Taylor set out plates full of bacon, pancakes, eggs, and cinnamon rolls for the women to choose from. Everyone dove in, eating and chatting animatedly.

Sipping her coffee and nibbling on a cinnamon roll, Taylor watched the four ladies and smiled. Despite Gina's middle-of-the-night flight, the weekend had turned out to be another success.

When breakfast seemed to be winding down, she cleared the empty plates. "Everyone full?"

"Oh, I haven't eaten so much in years." Meredith groaned and rubbed her stomach. "It was wonderful, Taylor. You're a terrific cook."

"Thank you, Meredith." Taylor warmed with pleasure. "Well, I think we'll go ahead and start our next lesson then. If everyone could please pick up their banana and peel them almost all the way down."

The giggling started as all the women picked up their bananas and peeled them.

Taylor waited until they were all finished and looking at her expectantly. "All right. So who here would say they're fairly good at performing oral sex on a man?"

Cherry's hand shot up, and Meredith gave a slight shrug. Denise and Serena just stared at her with blank expressions.

"Well, novice or pro, you're going to learn a few more tips right now. I guarantee you'll walk out of here tomorrow morning able to please the most difficult of men."

Bam!

Taylor glanced at the ceiling, frowning at the sound of a door slamming upstairs. How was that possible when everyone was down here?

"What was that?" Meredith asked.

"It was one of the doors upstairs. Did someone leave their window open?" Taylor asked. When a strong cross-breeze came through the house, it could blow the doors closed.

Everyone shook their heads and murmured denials.

Weird. She tried not to express her own puzzlement as she

shrugged. "No matter. Now, on to the bananas. I want you to wrap your hands around the base of the banana, and cup the bottom of the peel as you would a man's sac."

The giggling resumed as they all moved to obey.

Taylor smiled, remembering last night with Gavin as she held her own banana in a similar manner.

The hair on the back of her neck suddenly stood, and a chill swept down her spine. She glanced around, not even sure what she was looking for. With a sense of unease, she turned back to the women.

Shit. They were all looking around too. Meredith was frowning and touching the back of her neck.

"Did it just get cold in here?" Cherry asked and laughed, but her laughter didn't sound as relaxed as it had before.

"The house sometimes gets a draft." Taylor's own smile felt tight. Oh, God. Don't let them freak out.

The lights blinked off and then back on.

Shit! Sweat broke out on the back of her neck. "This house is pretty old, it probably needs rewiring."

The women looked dubious.

"Ow!" Serena's eyes widened and she turned to glare at Cherry.

"Did you just pull my hair?"

Cherry wrinkled her nose. "Pull your hair? Umm, no. Why would I pull your hair?"

Serena turned to Taylor. "What's going on here?"

"It's the ghost." Denise looked around wildly, her voice shaking. "It has to be."

"Of course not. That's silly." Panic clutched at Taylor's gut.

"There's no ghost, ladies. Trust me. I would know if my house was haunted."

Meredith stood up. "I need more coffee. My nerves are getting jittery."

"And coffee will help that?" Cherry scowled, rubbing her arms and looking around nervously.

"Well, it won't hurt—" Meredith yelped and pushed down her

skirt, which was floating off her thighs and moving up her hips.

Taylor put her hand over her mouth as she stared in disbelief. What the hell was happening? It was as if an invisible hand was lifting it the old woman's skirt.

"What? Oh, oh heavens..." Meredith slapped at her skirt again, but it was now almost around her waist. "Stop!"

The fabric relaxed and fell back to her knees.

Everyone in the room was silent, and tension hung thick in the air.

Taylor swallowed hard. *Say something!* Maybe if she just pretended that whole possessed skirt thing didn't just happen...

"Umm...back to the oral sex lesson. Now, using the hand that's wrapped around the banana, go ahead and slide it up—"

Crack!

The light bulbs overhead exploded, raining fragments of glass down on the room and everyone in it.

* * * * *

Gavin's fingers hovered over the keys on his laptop as he stared at the words in front of him. A yawn popped his jaw and he reached for his coffee again.

A light breeze drifted through the open window and he stared out at the ocean. Damn. He was so distracted.

This is what happens when you spend half the night up at Taylor's getting laid.

After a long sip of coffee, he set the mug down and started typing with determination. The words started flowing, the pages added up, and soon he was in the zone; the zone which had on more than one occasion produced him a three hundred page novel in under a month.

The first shrill noise barely registered. But when the volume started building and didn't let up, his zone dissolved.

Gavin blinked in confusion, cocking his ear to listen for it again. There it was. Somebody was screaming.

He scooted out of the chair so fast it fell backwards. He ran to the

front door and jerked it open, and stepped onto the porch.

"Shit." He started running.

The screams, from more than one person it sounded like, were coming from Taylor's house.

His lungs burned with how fast he was running and sweat broke out all over his body. *God, let them be okay!* The possibilities of what could be happening made his blood freeze.

He jerked open Taylor's fence and ran into her yard just as the front door opened. The women came running out screaming, arms waving. Some were only in their pajamas.

"Help us!" one of them cried.

"Oh my God!" The young blonde flung herself at him. She was barely wearing any clothes, standing barefoot in the dewy grass. "There's a ghost in there! I swear to God, there's a ghost!"

Gavin lifted his gaze to the doorway just as Taylor appeared in the opening. Her face was pale, her eyes wide, but she made no move to run into the front yard like the other four women had.

"It isn't a ghost, ladies." Taylor's voice shook, and her smile seemed strained. "Come back inside and we'll get back to work on those bananas."

"*Hell no.*" The blonde clutched Gavin's arm even tighter. "I refuse to go back in there. That place is haunted."

"Something pulled my hair."

"My skirt just went and flew up around my waist. It was horrible!"

Gavin's eyebrows drew together, and he looked down at the woman who stared up at him with terrified eyes.

"You look like a strong man who isn't afraid of anything. Will you go get my bags?"

"Your bags?" Taylor blurted from the porch, finally stepping forward and joining the group in the front yard. "No, please, Cherry, there's no need to leave. I'm sure—"

"I'm leaving too," another woman interrupted quietly.

"I'm sorry, Taylor. I don't feel comfortable staying either," another piped up.

The last one finally spoke. "Me neither, Taylor. Sorry. This is just too scary for me."

Gavin's stomach clenched as, one by one, the four women at Taylor's weekend retreat announced they were leaving. He watched the myriad of emotions flicker across Taylor's face before she gave a resigned nod.

"All right. I'll refund everyone's money."

"I don't need any money back. I learned plenty yesterday from you," Another woman said, fidgeting. "Besides, it's not your fault. I just can't stay, Taylor. This is way too scary for me."

Gavin had the urge to run up the stairs and pull Taylor into his arms. Her maturity tended to make him forget how young she actually was. But now, with her fists gripped at her side, and the confusion and disappointment in her eyes, she looked vulnerable, tired, and young.

Of course, if he tried to go hug her, she'd probably get embarrassed and push him away.

"So how about it, cutie? Will you do it?"

Gavin glanced down at the blonde, having forgotten she was still clutching his arm. "Will I do what?"

"Will you go inside and grab my stuff?" She shuddered. "I can't go back in there. I refuse to."

The lines on Taylor's forehead deepened. "I'll do it Cherry." She turned and went back into the house.

Gavin pried the blonde's fingers off of his arm and ran after Taylor. Except for Cherry, all the women followed him back inside the house.

He found Taylor in Cherry's room, loading up the woman's suitcase.

"Taylor?"

"Yes?" Her movements were deliberate, and seemed a little too controlled as she folded the clothes and placed them in Cherry's suitcase.

Gavin cleared his throat. "Are you okay?"

She stopped and looked up at him, her eyes narrowing. "Come on, Gavin. What do you think?"

Poor girl. He nodded and stepped into the room, taking the packed

case from her hand.

“I’ll run this down to her. We can talk when I get back.”

Taylor sat down and the bed, her smile tight. “Bring some vodka, too, will you?”

Chapter Eight

Gavin left the room, and Taylor watched as, one by one, the three women passed by the room and waved goodbye. A few minutes later the house was quiet.

She glanced around, waiting for more light bulbs to explode. To feel cool air in the room. Hell, anything bizarre that had happened a half hour ago.

"Where are you now, shit head?" she screamed, pounding her fist on the bed.

But there was no response. She hadn't really expected one. That would have been a little too convenient. Standing up, Taylor went back downstairs to clean up the mess.

After sweeping up the broken glass and dumping it in the garbage, she started on the dishes. Gavin knocked on the back door a few minutes later.

After shaking her wet hands over the sink, she went to open it.

His smile was tentative, and he raised a bottle for her inspection.

Taylor's lips twitched. "No vodka?"

Gavin shook his head and shut the door behind him. "Sorry, my poison is whiskey. Can I make you a whiskey and coke?"

"I thought it was rum and Coke."

"I hate rum. Whiskey and Coke is just as good, trust me. So what do you say?"

"I don't know. I probably shouldn't." She sat down at the table and

glanced at the clock. "Besides, it's only eleven in the morning."

"Yes, but you've had a hard morning. You had to face the fact that your house is haunted."

Taylor nodded and pursed her lips. "Good point. Make mine a double."

Gavin laughed and went to her cupboards, flipping through them until he found two short, squat glasses.

"So you're actually convinced there's a ghost now?" he asked as he mixed their drinks.

"What happened was...not normal." She sighed and pushed a hand through her hair. The events of the past few days flitted through her head, causing an uncomfortable heaviness to settle in her belly.

"No, it wasn't." He stirred her drink and then handed it to her.

Taylor took a sip and winced. He'd taken her seriously on that double thing. She set down the glass, folded her hands on the table, and gave a resigned nod. "Okay, Gavin. You win. I want you to run the tests on my house and see what you can find."

His hand tightened around the glass, his mouth widening into an excited smile, like a little boy who'd just found out he'd gotten a new puppy. "Are you sure about this, Taylor?"

"Oh, hell yes. I want you to find that ghost and get rid of him!" She leaned forward and met his gaze with determination. "I don't want anymore lost revenue."

Gavin leaned back in his chair, eyeing her thoughtfully. "What makes you think the ghost is a man?"

Taylor snorted. "Women were getting their skirts lifted and their hair tugged. Besides, the ghost was more active than usual when I had a houseful of women."

"So you're admitting there has been activity before?"

Lowering her gaze, she scowled. She hated admitting it to him, especially after having denied it for so long. "Yes."

"Why don't you tell me exactly the type of things that have been happening."

She sighed. "Let's see, where to begin...? My keys disappeared and

then reappeared in the most random place. My vibrator disappeared, and still hasn't been found." She pointed a finger at him. "Which is another reason why I'm convinced it's a male ghost. He's a kinky ghost. And then there's the cold. Sometimes it just feels really cold in a room, and the hair on the back of my neck stands up."

"Any room in particular where you notice most of the activity?"

"My room. And then, I think maybe last night in Gina's room...." She hesitated. "Although Gina didn't admit it."

"Those were my thoughts as well." Gavin drummed his fingers on the table. "Is that everything, or can you think of anything else strange that happened?"

The other night. "There was something...a couple of nights ago. I woke up." Taylor swallowed hard, feeling a chill run down her spine just remembering that moment in her bedroom. "And I swore I saw something out of the corner of my eye."

"What did you see?"

"I don't know. I didn't exactly look." She picked up her drink and took another sip. "It was kind of like a white glow."

"Hmm. When can I start the tests?"

"As soon as possible." Taylor shook her head, frustration biting at her. "Because I can't live like this anymore. And I certainly can't hold anymore retreats until this is taken care of."

Gavin stood up. "Let me go get my equipment and an overnight bag. I'll be staying here tonight."

* * * * *

Gavin returned an hour later with his case full of equipment and his bag full of clean clothes. He itched to get started; the anticipation and excitement made his blood pound.

First things first, though. He went back inside Taylor's house, set his case down, and snapped it open. Taylor wasn't in sight, but he heard the shower running upstairs.

Gavin took out his notebook and jotted down the start time, the

weather conditions, and activity that had occurred earlier that morning. Then he moved on to setting up the equipment.

Taylor came downstairs a few minutes later, looking clean and sexy with her hair damp and skin dewy. Gavin swallowed hard, all thoughts of ghosts and research disappearing. Lord, she was beautiful.

Her eyes widened as she looked around the kitchen. "So what is all this?"

Get with it, buddy. Get your mind out of your pants. Gavin jerked his chin to the right, gesturing towards the counter as he loaded a camera with film. "I've set up a motion detector on your counter."

"Okay..." She went to the table where his case lay open. "I can't believe how much stuff you have in here. How could anybody possibly use this many batteries?"

"Anytime you're investigating paranormal activity you want to bring extra batteries." He set the now loaded camera on the table and reached for the EMF detector. "Ghosts are considered to be electromagnetic and can run down the batteries pretty quick."

"Are you serious?" She practically flung the batteries back into the case.

Gavin hid a smile. "Very serious."

He turned on the detector in his hand.

"And what's that?" She peered over his shoulder, and her familiar perfume tickled his nose. He resisted the urge to throw down the equipment and pull her into his arms. But he couldn't. Not right now. She'd agreed to let him do some investigating, and he was damn well going to take advantage of that in case she changed her mind.

"It's an EMF detector. This is what picks up the disruptions in the electronic field."

"Oh, that's kind of cool. And what is it telling you now?"

"I took an initial reading the other day. And it's about even with that one. Meaning your electronic field is normal right now." He set it down on the counter, leaving it turned on in case something changed. There was an alarm that would go off if the reading became questionable.

"So what do we do?" She sat down at the table. "If we find there

really is a ghost, how do we get rid of him?"

Gavin's lips twitched. "Are you back to doubting there's a ghost?"

"No, I'd say I'm pretty convinced." She shrugged and her smile seemed reluctant. "It's just a hard habit to break. Besides the fact that I have to admit I believe in ghosts now."

"Well..." He pulled out the audio recorder. "First it's *when*, not if, we prove there's a ghost. After that we'll need to figure out who it is and why it's hanging out."

"And how do we go about that?"

"Property records, public records, old newspapers, there's plenty of ways, I'm sure. And you'd be surprised what you can find on the Internet."

"No, actually, I wouldn't." Taylor's smile turned sardonic.

"In any case, I have never been put in the situation where we didn't know who the ghost most likely was."

"How many times have you done this, Gavin? This ghost-hunting thing."

He hesitated. "I've only done about four other houses. I tagged along with a ghost hunters group out of Portland. That's what got me hooked. It was originally research for a book I was writing, but then after one case, I was hooked."

"I'll bet. And so now it's just a hobby?" Taylor raised an eyebrow.

"A time consuming, obsessive hobby, yes." Gavin stood back up. "I'm nowhere near being a professional at this, but I'm not half bad, either."

He picked the talcum powder out of the case. "Okay, we're going to need to leave the kitchen after I put some of this on the floor."

Taylor's gaze lifted to the container in his hand. "You're going to dump powder all over my kitchen? Any reason why?"

"It captures footprints and handprints."

She stood up. "Right. So when Mr. Kinky Ghost takes a jaunt to the fridge for a snack, bam! We got him."

Gavin glanced at her, this time not fighting the smile that crossed his face. "I'm glad you can laugh about this."

"It's either that or go upstairs and bawl my eyes out about how the weekend turned out." She shrugged. "So I prefer to joke about it instead."

There was the vulnerability again, only she wasn't trying to hide it. Just leaving it right smack down between them. If that wasn't an invitation to hold her, then he didn't know what was.

Gavin closed the distance between them and pulled her into his arms. She didn't resist but instead, wrapped her arms around his waist and buried her head against his shoulder.

He sighed, loving the feeling of having her in his arms. The closeness, the intimacy of it. And in a completely non-sexual way. "I was thinking we should head into town and check out the library to search through some old articles and records. Maybe go out to lunch." He stroked a hand down her back. "That would give the spirit the opportunity to show itself while we're gone. Do you like Thai food?"

"I love Thai food. Chicken satay?"

"What ever you want, baby."

She lifted her head to look at him, wrinkling her nose in the cutest way. "I like the way you call me baby. It's so not your style. That's why it's so hot."

Gavin laughed and dropped a smooth, quick kiss on her mouth. "Why don't you grab your purse while I get everything set in here? I'll meet you in the living room in a few minutes."

"Deal, Superman."

"What?" His eyebrows rose.

"Nothing." She kissed him again, and then turned to walk out of the room, calling over her shoulder, "You just have this total Clark Kent complex."

Clark Kent complex? Gavin shook his head and then pushed his glasses back up the bridge of his nose. *Where did she come up with this stuff?*

Chapter Nine

Taylor didn't protest when Gavin wanted to take his Honda into town. She was never big on driving herself, anyway. It probably went back to having a chauffeur when she was growing up.

She shifted in the leather passenger seat. *Ugh, don't go there.* Not that she had any right to complain about the good old days. Hell, she wouldn't have been able to afford her house, or get the retreats off the ground, if she hadn't had her father's financial backing.

But money was about the only thing her father had generously parted with. His love and affection for his daughter obviously wasn't considered a priority.

Taylor looked up at Gavin and the old bitterness faded. She slid her hand onto his leg and squeezed lightly.

He turned to her and smiled. "How are you holding up?"

"Doing all right. So lunch first or public records? Are you hungry?"

"Starving," he answered immediately. "You mentioned satay chicken and it's all I've been able to think about?"

"Really?"

"Well, that and you naked in my bed." He smiled at her again. That intimate smile that had been making her knees turn to jelly the past few days. "You asked about my fantasy the other day, Taylor. If you're game, I'd like to try it tonight."

"Hmm. Sounds kinky." What was his fantasy, if it wasn't the threesome thing?

Taylor tore her gaze away from him. She needed to remember to keep things on a sexual level with Gavin. She wasn't happy about the way she'd practically flung herself at him this morning. Hugging him and clutching him like she was some kid afraid of the dark. *He's just like every other man you've ever gone to bed with*, the voice in her head reminded her. *Don't delude yourself into thinking this is more than sex. He'll fuck you for a week, do some ghost busting, and then he'll just be your friendly neighbor again. Only calling when he needs to borrow a cup of flour. Well, maybe not flour.*

"We're here."

Taylor blinked and looked out the window. They were parked in front of the Thai restaurant. How long had they been sitting here?

Gavin's gaze probed hers. "You're sure you're okay?"

"I'm fine." She forced a smile. "Let's go eat."

* * * * *

Taylor wandered around the library, glancing through the self-help section and thumbing through a few books. She sighed and rubbed her stomach. *Too much food.*

Lunch had been fun and enjoyable. The food had been delicious, and Gavin had gotten all cute on her; feeding her bits of chicken with his chopsticks.

Someone tapped her shoulder, and Taylor spun around. Gavin was standing behind her with a bunch of papers in his hand.

"Okay, I've printed out some records that we can go through when we get back to the house. Property stuff, newspaper articles and such."

"Wow, you're good."

His face reddened slightly. "Is it too much to hope that you mean beyond the intelligence stuff?"

"Boy, you've sure got something on your mind, don't you, buddy?" She jabbed him lightly in the side as they walked out of the library. "And no, it's not too much to hope. You're good pretty much everywhere. Like you really needed to ask."

He laughed as he opened her car door. "Hey, some of us guys have

fragile egos.”

Taylor snorted. “Right. Somehow you and the word fragile don’t really go hand-in-hand.”

They arrived back at the house about five minutes later. Taylor swallowed hard and stared at the house. She hadn’t really been creeped out before, but now that they were setting out to trap the ghost...well, it kind of changed the game.

“Let’s go see what we missed while we were gone, shall we?” Gavin practically jumped out of the car, but still opened her door before sprinting ahead of her up the steps to the porch.

Taylor rolled her eyes and hurried after him. He couldn’t even get inside until she unlocked the door. She pulled her keys from her purse and slid them into the old lock.

Her fingers shook and the keys dropped from her hand. Cursing, she bent to retrieve them, but Gavin beat her to it. He gave her a searching look as he slid the key into the lock with ease and opened the door a second later.

Holding it open, he let her walk in first. She moved past him and stared at the doorway to the kitchen. Part of her wanted to run over, to be as excited as Gavin was to find footprints in the powder and crazy readings on all those gadgets. Then part of her, the sensible part, was pretty much scared shitless to see the proof.

“Why don’t you wait in the living room, baby?” He kissed her forehead and gestured towards the couch, as if he sensed her unease.

Screw that. She didn’t want to look like a total coward. “Are you kidding? I want to see this as much as you do.”

She took the last few steps to the kitchen doorway.

“No marks in the powder,” Gavin murmured, stepping past her into the kitchen. He grabbed the gadget off the counter and raised an eyebrow. “Although the EMF reading shows something is up.”

“Really?” She peeked over his shoulder at the meter. The numbers and flashing lights meant nothing to her.

“Yeah. A normal range would be between nine and thirty on the meter, and that’s pretty typical for an EMF reading in the home. Anything

that registers in the one to eight range is usually due to some kind or spirit or paranormal activity.”

It still meant nothing to her, but that didn’t stop a tremor from running through her body. She folded her arms across her chest.

He gave her a bright smile. “Looks like we’re in for a fun night. Let me run upstairs and set up a few things. I’ll be right back.” He set the papers from the library down on the table. “Feel free to flip through these. There’s some interesting stuff in there.”

He left the room, and Taylor grabbed the papers off the table. What exactly was she looking for?

She decided to look at the newspaper articles first. There were two of them. The first one talked about the drowning death of a local resident back in 1986. It also stated the man had lived in this mansion. Interesting, but not necessarily the smoking gun.

She set down the first article and picked up the second. Her nerves jumped and her pulse race. Now this was more like it.

The article was obviously very old. And it discussed a man who’d been shot dead on the porch of this house back in 1898 over a property dispute.

“What are you finding?”

Taylor spun around.

“I think this is him! Our ghost!” She waved the article about the property dispute victim.

“I was thinking the same thing. There were only two deaths linked to this house—that were printed in the papers at least.”

“Oh, Gavin! This is fabulous! To find out who the ghost is.” She set down the paper.

“I agree. We’ll look into it further later tonight. And I’ll run some more tests.” He slid his arms around her waist and pulled her close, so her hips nestled against his. “But first I was hoping we could spend some time together.”

Warmth spread through her body as she twined her arms around his neck. She fluttered her eyelashes innocently. “Whatever do you mean, Mr. Mackenzie? We are spending time together.”

"Yes, but I had a different type of...socializing...in mind." He moved his hands around to cup her ass, squeezing the flesh beneath her clothes.

Liquid drenched her panties and she pressed her lower body tighter against him. "And what might that be?"

He circled his hips, his erection jutting into her lower belly. "My fantasy."

"Ah...let me guess." She pressed her ass hard against his hands. "You'd like to do me back here. I suppose I could go for that."

Gavin laughed and shook his head. "That's not it, although I may take you up on the offer one of these days."

Then what the hell was his fantasy? Curiosity and frustration tugged at her. She nibbled at his bottom lip, and then brushed her mouth over his. "I'm dying here, Gavin. What's your fantasy?"

He slipped his tongue into her mouth to rub against hers for a brief second, and then pulled away. "Let's go upstairs."

* * * * *

Gavin took Taylor's hand and tugged her towards the stairs. She followed without hesitation, an impish smile on her face.

How would she react? He let her walk into her bedroom first, wanting to see the reaction on her face.

She took a few steps into the room and stopped. First her gaze focused on the bed where the outfit and toys lay, then turned to the candles that were flickering in various spots in the room.

"When did you set all this up?" Her voice was breathy.

"When I came up here a few minutes ago." He stepped forward and slipped his hands around her waist, drawing her back against him.

"I thought you meant you were setting up equipment for more tests on the ghost."

"Nope."

"And I see you found one of my pleasure bags." She giggled and gestured to the toys lined up on the bed.

"I just found the bag a minute ago. It was kind of a last minute addition to my fantasy." He slipped his hands under her shirt to rub against the silky bare skin of her stomach. "Will you wear the outfit?"

"You know I will. That kind of outfit is the reason I work out." She slipped away from him and picked up the scrap of leather. "I'll be right back."

Soon as she left the room, Gavin went to his overnight bag and pulled out the silk scarves and laid them out on the bed next to the toys.

He heard her returning from the bathroom and turned around to see her. The breath caught in his throat and his cock went rock hard.

She looked like pure sin in the leather outfit. It was designed with strips of leather and tiny metal rings that held it together. More skin was bared than covered; there were holes for the breasts and an open crotch. It wasn't so much practical as it was eye candy for the man.

"Sweet God." He crossed the room toward her, his gaze dropping to the pink nipples jutting proudly out from the leather.

"You like?" She placed her hands beneath her breast, cupping them and running her thumbs over the tips.

"Very much so." His voice was husky. He lowered his gaze to her pussy, somewhat covered by the leather. But he knew the moment her legs were spread there would be a large gap in the leather. Damn. If he didn't slow down he wouldn't even get to the full fantasy. "Are you ready?"

"Of course. Where do you want me?"

"On the bed."

She winked and sauntered to the bed. His gaze followed her, resting on her round ass cheeks that were separated by a strip of leather. Fucking that ass sounded pretty good right now. But no. Not tonight. It wasn't part of this fantasy.

"Lie down," he instructed her. "On your back."

Taylor crawled across the bed and then rolled over onto her back.

"I'm all yours, Gavin." She laughed, the throaty sound making his control level slip another notch. "I can't wait."

Gavin walked to the bed and picked up the first scarf, then reach

for her ankle.

“Wait!” She sat up, dragging her ankle up towards her stomach.

“What are you doing?”

“Tying you up.”

“No.” Her eyes widened, and panic flickered in her gaze. “That’s something I absolutely, will not do.”

Chapter Ten

Gavin blinked, shock and then disbelief hitting him. She wouldn't let him tie her up? The woman who would have let him fuck her in the ass, possibly have a threesome, wouldn't let him tie her up?

"What's going on, Taylor?" Had something happened to her? Had...had she been raped at some point? God. If she had... "Is there something I don't know about? Something that happened to you?"

"No! It's nothing like that. I just won't let myself be tied down."

"Figuratively or literally?"

"Don't analyze me." She jumped off the bed, the panicked expression still on her face. "I can't, I won't—"

"Easy, Taylor." He caught her arm and stopped her. "I'm not trying to pressure you into anything. Actually, I didn't even think this fantasy was all that extreme. It seemed a bit mild in my head."

Her shoulders slumped and she looked down. "It is mild," she whispered. "I just...can't."

"Can't what?" He tipped her chin, tilting her head up so she would meet his gaze.

"I can't give a man that kind of control over me." Her voice cracked. "If I give him the control..."

"You're vulnerable. I understand. This is something you should do with someone you trust."

"Exactly. That's why I've never done it before."

His heart sank. "You don't trust me."

"No." Tears filled her hazel eyes. "I do trust you. And that's the problem. I don't want to trust you."

Relief swept through him, lighting the darkness that had threatened to overwhelm him. "Taylor." He pulled her into his arms and brushed the tear off her cheek. "Why don't you want to trust me?"

"Because if I allowed myself to trust you, then that would mean...that would mean I cared about you."

Her words made his blood pound with pleasure, and he had to hold back the massive smile that threatened. He pulled her into his arms. "That's not such a bad thing, is it?"

"Yes. It is." Her voice was muffled against his shirt. "This is supposed to be sex only."

"Says who?"

She didn't answer for a moment. "I guess I just assumed. That's all most men seem to want. You...think there's more here than just sex between us?"

"Damn straight, baby." He stroked a hand down her back. "A lot more. And I was hoping you felt the same way."

"I do. God help me, but I do, Gavin." She pushed away and looked up at him.

"Is this why you don't do relationships? You were afraid to get to close to a man?" He touched her cheek.

She hesitated, and then lowered her gaze. "I grew up with a father who could give me money but showed very little affection." She shrugged. "So I started dating young to fill the void...and pretty much got my heart stomped on by a guy in high school. And then it happened again in college. After all that, I swore it would only be sex with any man I dated. No complex emotions that would put me at risk."

His heart ached for the girl she'd been. For the vulnerable woman he held in his arms.

"But with you it's different." She looked up at him. "I didn't want it to be, but it is."

"I'm glad, baby." He lowered his head and kissed her slow and thorough. When he lifted his head her eyes were closed.

"I want you tie me down, Gavin."

"No." He shook his head. "We don't have to do that—"

"No. I *want* you to." She opened her eyes, walked back to the bed, and laid down. She stretched out her legs and arms spread-eagle. "Tie me up, Gavin."

The site of her like that shot lust throughout his body, and his cock pressed painfully against his jeans.

He stepped forward and picked up one of the scarves. Taking her wrist, he gave her the chance to protest before tying a loose knot around it. Taking the other end of the scarf, he secured it to the corner of the headboard.

He repeated the process with her other arm, and then both of her legs, until her body was restrained and spread out like a decadent buffet on the satin sheets.

"How are you feeling, baby?" He trailed his fingers from her ankle to the top of her hip.

Her laugh was husky. "Exposed. Sexy. Vulnerable..."

"You're all of those things." His glance dropped to the V between her legs. The strips of leather were on each side of inner thighs, but the mound of her pussy was bared; the lips forced open so the pink folds inside could be seen.

He glanced at the array of toys on the bed and picked up one. It looked like some kind of rubber egg and came with a remote control.

Gavin turned it over his hand, and then lowered it between her legs. He wiggled it into the folds, making sure it settled nicely over her clitoris.

Taylor watched him, her breathing growing heavier. When she was all set, he grabbed the remote and turned it on to the lowest level.

Taylor's hips bucked on the bed, and her eyes closed. "Oh, Gavin..."

"I want to drive you crazy, Taylor." He turned the speed up another notch and she groaned, her nipples tightening. "I want you to beg me to fuck you. Beg for my cock inside you."

"Now, I want it now." She gasped and wiggled against her

restraints.

"But we've only just started..." He turned up the egg another notch, and then leaned down to suck one of her nipples into his mouth.

Her groan was low as she arched under him.

Gavin drew back, releasing her nipple with a popping sound. He lowered his gaze to her pussy. Cream shimmered between the folds of her cunt.

Damn. Keeping control was going to be just as hard for him as it was for her. He stood up and unzipped his jeans, pushing them off his body along with his boxer shorts.

"I love your cock, Gavin." Taylor's gaze had honed in on his erection, and she licked her lips. "I want it inside me. Now. You're so thick, so long. You fill me up."

Semen appeared at the tip of his cock, and he wrapped his own hand around his length. "You want this, baby?"

"You know I do. *Please.*" She panted. "I'm asking nicely. I don't think I have the patience to go through all this. I need you. *Now!*"

"Not just yet." He pulled his shirt off, so he was naked, and then again perused the variety of toys on the bed.

He picked up a latex dildo, which was shaped with veins and ridges to resemble an actual cock. Holding it up to the light he murmured, "This looks fun."

Taylor groaned and arched her hips again. "Gavin..."

He brought the dildo to the entrance of her pussy and slowly started to insert it. She gasped, her body clamping down around the device until he couldn't push it any further.

"Baby, you've got to relax."

"I can't. Gavin..." But even as she protested, her body loosened, her muscles relaxing.

"Yes, you can." He leaned down again and flicked his tongue over her nipple, helping her relax so he could slide the dildo all the way inside her. "There you go, take it all, baby. How does that feel?"

She cried out, but didn't open her eyes.

He closed his mouth over the tip of her breast and sucked hard.

Then he pulled the device out of her a bit and then pushed it back inside, repeating the process and creating a rhythm. As he fucked her with the latex object, her hips lifted and fell against the penetration, her cries growing louder with each thrust.

Finding the egg remote with his free hand, he turned it to the maximum speed.

Taylor screamed and her nipple grew even stiffer in his mouth. Her arms and legs pulled against the silk scarves, her stomach trembled.

"That's it, come for me." He sucked harder, closing his teeth over her nipple as she rode out the orgasm.

Gavin lifted himself off of her and removed the egg from her body. Her skin that wasn't covered by leather was damp with perspiration, her musky scent permeated the air and made his mouth water.

"Now I'm going to lick you."

"No, don't lick me, fuck me!"

He slid down her body and parted the hood of her pussy, exposing her swollen clit above the dildo that was still inside her.

Adjusting his body, he worked it so his cock was lined up above her mouth. He waited, and then groaned when her lips closed over the sensitive head.

He closed his eyes for a moment, taking a few seconds to enjoy her hot mouth working his erection before turning his attention back to her.

He started slow, drawing his tongue over her clitoris. Stroking over the pearl of swollen flesh to soothe it. Then he flicked it rapidly, swirling his tongue around it again. When her body started responding, her hips started lifting, he drew it into his mouth and sucked.

The taste of her had his cock hardening even more. He flexed his hips, sending himself deeper into her mouth until he touched the back of her throat.

Her stomach tightened underneath him and her hips lifted, forcing her clit hard against his mouth. His blood pounded at the thought of her climaxing again so soon. She gasped against his cock, her thighs trembled, and she groaned before she went limp under him.

He removed the dildo from her pussy, and then sat up, pulling his

cock out of her mouth.

Gavin reached for the scarves on her hands, untying them first. His original plan had been to fuck her while she was tied up, but now he wanted her hands on him, scratching his chest and holding him tight.

By the time he was undoing the silk scarves from her ankles, she was already sitting up to touch him.

Once she was free, Taylor pushed him so he was flat on his back. Then she crawled on top of him and kneeled above his cock then slowly sank down onto him. Her eyes closed and she groaned.

"This can't compare to a dildo," she muttered, rotating her hips. "There's no comparison, Gavin. And don't you ever deprive me of your cock again."

"Are you saying you didn't enjoy that?" Gavin grunted as her satiny, wet flesh hugged his cock.

"I loved it." She reached a hand down to massage his sac.

Damn. She was going to be the death of him. His fingers dug into the leather straps on her hips as she started bouncing on him. Her breasts jiggled, practically demanding to be touched.

Gavin reached up to pull on her nipples, tugging and twisting them while she rode his cock.

Taylor seemed to have excess energy after having been tied up. She rode him hard, increasing her pace and squeezing her inner muscles around him.

"Your turn, Gavin." She moaned. "Come for me."

Her words sent him to the edge. He rolled her over and pinned her arms to her side and started pounding into her until she cried out. He exploded, emptying himself into her as she clenched around him.

"Three orgasms in one night!" She giggled and kissed his damp chest. "Gavin, you rock my world."

His chest shook with silent laughter as he wrapped his arms around her and lay down beside her. "Likewise, Taylor."

So this is what it felt like when you fell for someone. His arms tightened around her. It all felt so natural, so right with her. Just holding onto her made him happy in a way nothing else in life had.

They cuddled for a while, quiet and listening to the wind blowing outside.

"As much as I'd love to lay here with you all night, I should really run some more tests." He kissed her forehead and then climbed out of bed. "I'm going to make myself a drink first. Would you like a whiskey and coke?"

Taylor stretched and then climbed out after him. "No thanks. I think I'll just grab some warm milk."

They went downstairs together and Gavin went to mix his drink, while she picked up the papers from the library.

"So, it says here that Jonathan Wallace was shot dead on the porch of this house on June second 1898. There was a property dispute between him and his neighbor, Lewis Donaldson." She set them down and sighed. "I'm convinced he's the ghost."

Gavin nodded. "It would certainly make sense. Most ghosts are stuck between worlds. They don't realize they're dead, they have unfinished business, different situations like that. Or at least that's the theory."

"What I don't get is how we get him to move on." Taylor leaned against the counter, looking around the room.

"Good question. I suppose we could hold a séance—"

"Uh, a little too creepy." She shuddered.

"Or we could go to the church and ask someone to come give a blessing on the house."

"Right. How very *Exorcist* of us." She sighed. "Although, I guess I'm willing to try anything at this point."

Gavin picked up his camera and another piece of equipment out of his case.

"I'm going to run upstairs and do some tests in Gina's and your room."

"All right." Taylor yawned. "I think I'm going to need to go to bed soon, though."

"All right, baby. I won't be long."

Chapter Eleven

"...Next to the oak tree...."

Taylor opened her eyes, sleep fading fast as she looked around, searching for who ever had just spoken in her ear. Gavin was still asleep, his arm wrapped around her waist.

Had she dreamed it?

The smell reached her then, tickling her nostrils. She sniffed the air. Cigar smoke.

Taylor slipped out from beneath Gavin's arm and ran to the window. It took a second, but then she saw it. The flicker of light under the oak tree. It was the ghost. There wasn't a single part of her that doubted it.

You're crazy, don't do this! Even as she mentally screamed at herself, she threw on her robe and left the bedroom, rushing down the stairs to the front door.

She flipped on the outside light, ran down the steps of the porch and walked straight to the tree. The light she'd seen earlier had faded, but she could feel its presence. Knew it was still there waiting.

She started digging in the grass with her bare hands, pulling chunks of earth from the ground and breaking every nail on her hand. But something was driving her, and she couldn't have stopped even if she'd wanted to.

"Taylor?" Gavin came running out of the house towards her.

"What the fuck are you doing? Have you gone insane?"

"He's here," she mumbled, not slowing down a bit. "I know he's here."

"Taylor." Gavin's voice shook. "Baby, come back inside."

"No! He's here, Gavin. He's *here!*"

"Shit. Before yesterday you didn't even believe a ghost existed. Now you're digging him up?"

"Make yourself useful and get me a shovel." She kept digging, and her finger jabbed against something hard. "Gavin, I hit something..."

He dropped to his knees, now jamming his own hands into the

earth and prying up more chunks of dirt. There was a glimpse of white and they dug faster. Taylor stopped when she found herself face-to-face with the vacant eye sockets of a human skull.

"I think you'd better get that shovel now." Her voice was surprisingly steady. "I have a feeling we just found Jonathon Wilson."

Gavin was quiet for a moment. "Don't touch anything, Taylor. We need to call the police. I'm going to run inside and use your phone."

The moment he ran inside her house, Taylor started digging again. She managed to free more of the skeleton, revealing patches of fabric and the upper torso.

"Taylor!" Gavin came out again and cursed. "Damn it, I said to stop digging. Your phone isn't working. I'm going to run down to my house to make the call. Do you want to come with me?"

"No." She shook her head, a sense of peace falling over her. All the fear was gone. It was as if the ghost had just wanted its body to be recovered.

Gavin hesitated and then nodded. "Okay. Try not to touch anything else. This stuff is going to be evidence."

"I won't."

He left her, and Taylor turned back to the skeleton. Something prickled at the back of her mind. Something wasn't right. Her gaze narrowed and she spotted the shine of gold next to the skull.

Despite her promise not to touch, she reached down to pick up the earring, turning it around in her hand. An earring? For a man? She wasn't much of a history buff, but as far as she knew, men hadn't worn earrings in the late nineteenth century. But they had been very popular in the 80's....

Her gaze dropped back to the few patches of fabric that remained on the torso. The color was a faded, yet obviously fluorescent, green. Now she definitely knew that hideous color had been invented in the twenty-first century.

"Something's not right." Taylor stood up and ran back into the house, grabbing the papers off the kitchen table she'd looked at earlier.

Bypassing Jonathon's death certificate, she went straight to the

article about the other man who'd died.

June 2, 1986

Don Edwards, age 28, was reported missing and presumed drowned during a boating trip with his wife, Regina Edwards. Though the coast guard searched extensively, the body was never found.

Taylor set down the article and picked up Don's death certificate. No body had ever been found. Meaning it was entirely possible...he was never on a boat.

She glanced back to the article. Regina Edwards. Why did that name sound so familiar?

"You dumb bitch. You couldn't leave well enough alone."

Chapter Twelve

Gina. The moment Taylor heard the voice behind her it all came together. The comments on her first marriage. Her husband had been a cigar smoker, and the cigar smoke Taylor would occasionally smell. The way Gina had been digging in the dirt one day under the tree.

She turned slowly to see the Gina glaring at her, the barrel of a gun leveled at her chest.

"Gina." Stall, Taylor, stall. "Did you come for your refund? Honestly, I was just about to mail it."

"Oh, just shut up. You disgust me. Teaching classes on sex toys and orgasms." The woman sneered. "You're exactly the type of woman Don would cheat on me with. You're a perverted, stupid tramp—the shame of society."

Taylor took in the older woman's conservative attire. Her cardigan sweater and pleated slacks, the pearls around her neck, and her perfectly coifed hair. *"You're right. And murderers like you are the pride of society. Right, Gina?"*

Okay, not exactly what she should have said to the woman who had a gun pointed at her. But, hell, things weren't looking so good for her right now, anyway.

Gina gave a cold, tight smile. *"Come on, Taylor. We're going to take a little walk outside."*

Walking stiffly ahead of Gina, she followed the instructions as the woman called them out.

The moonlight lit their path as they went outside, crossing through the front yard. *Oh God.* Taylor swallowed hard. Gina was taking her to the edge of the cliffs.

Tears pricked her eyes. *Why now? I finally meet the perfect man, fall in love, have the chance to be totally happy...and now I'm going to die?*

"Stop. Turn around. Good girl." Gina cocked the hammer on the gun. "Now take three little steps back."

Taylor glanced behind her. Those three little steps symbolized the end of her life. The jagged side of the cliff yawned below her as arcs of white water sprayed into the air from the waves slamming onto the massive rocks below.

"Gina, you don't want to do this." Taylor shook her head. She considered telling the woman that the police were on their way, but then Gina might just shoot her.

Besides, the older woman was nervous, and nervous people did stupid things. Which could work to her own advantage.

"I have to do this. It's not personal. I just refuse to have this come to light." Gina's face looked ready to crack there was so much tension in it. "I have kept this a secret for twenty years, and I won't let you ruin everything."

Taylor spotted Gavin running up the trail and relief flooded through her, calmed her. "So why did you come to my retreat?"

"Because I heard the asshole was haunting this place!" she raged. "And he is! I saw him in my room last night. I'm not surprised he'd show up during a retreat that talks about sex. The bastard is horny whether he's dead or alive."

Taylor took a step away from the cliff edge. "So you killed him because he was cheating on you?"

The woman's eyes widened and Taylor watched as her control slipped a bit more.

"I mean, come on, Gina. If every woman killed their husband just because he cheated on them, there'd be no men—"

"Will you shut up and just jump?" Gina stepped forward, her gun arm lowering slightly with her frustrated steps.

Taylor swung her leg up and kicked Gina's wrist. The gun went flying and Gina shrieked in fury.

She dove after it, wrapping her fingers around the cold metal just as Gina grabbed her ankle.

Rolling over, she pointing the barrel of the gun towards Gina and saw the rock just before Gina smashed it into her temple.

Pain exploded in her head and her grip on the gun slackened.

"Give me the gun!" Gina shrieked, trying to pry the pistol from Taylor's hand.

The woman's nails pierced through the skin on her wrist, but she refused to let go. Her head was spinning, and she could feel blood trickling down her cheek from the head wound.

The weight of Gina's body was suddenly lifted from her, and Taylor opened her eyes to see Gavin dragging the other woman away.

Gavin cursed. "What the hell is going on?"

Taylor stood up, her legs shaking. "Gina, it's over—"

"No!" Gina broke away from Gavin, her arms outstretched to push Taylor over the edge of the cliff.

Taylor jumped to the side and Gina stumbled, unable to stop herself as she went flying over the edge. Her shrill, horrified scream echoed until there was nothing. Just the sound of the waves crashing.

"Oh God. Oh, my God." Taylor pushed a trembling hand through her hair. "Did...did that just happen?"

"Taylor." Gavin dragged her against him. "*Oh, God, Taylor.* Are you okay? I saw what was happening and—damn it! Why the *hell* did she have a gun pointed at you, and why are you bleeding?"

Taylor gripped him, clutching him so tight she was surprised his ribs didn't break. "The ghost isn't Jonathan. It was Gina's first husband. It was the guy who drowned. Only he didn't drown. She murdered him and buried him in the front yard. And now I just killed her."

"You didn't kill her. She fell off the cliff while trying to push you over." He growled. "The police are on their way. I called them from my place. Oh, baby...why the hell couldn't I have figured this out earlier? And I should never have left you alone."

"You couldn't have known, Gavin. I didn't know." She raised her head and gave him a weak smile.

"No, I was an idiot—"

"Stop. You're not an idiot. In fact—no I shouldn't say this. No, I *have* to." She shook her head to clear the chaotic thoughts. "I love you. Maybe I'm only admitting it because I almost died, but I really think—"

He kissed her, cutting off the rest of her sentence. "I love you, too, Taylor. You have to know that."

Relief weakened her body, and she let him support her weight as she wrapped her arms around his waist.

"I do. I do, Gavin." She nestled her head against his chest and closed her eyes.

* * * * *

Two months later

"I think that's the last of it."

Taylor set down her book—a copy of one of Gavin's best sellers that was currently scaring the crap out of her—and glanced down at the box that Gavin had just dropped on her living room floor.

"All done, honey?" She smiled up at him. "Congratulations, it looks like you're officially moved in."

"Thanks, baby." He sat down on the couch beside her, picked up her bottle of water and took a swig from it. "Anything exciting going on with the house?"

"No." She frowned and shook her head. "Nothing. I hate to say it, but it's a little boring now that this place isn't haunted anymore."

Gavin laughed and adjusted his glasses. "Has anyone ever told you that you're difficult to please? First you want the ghost gone, and now you want him back."

"Well, it was a little exciting."

"You know, my younger brother told me about some strange things going on in Port Winlock. He's a ghost hunter, too. I told him I'd

come over next week and run some tests with him. You're more than welcome to join me."

"I may just do that. And I've been itching to meet your brother. Is he as cute as you?" Taylor reached for him, cupping the back of his head and pulling him down towards her.

"I refuse to answer that. Besides, he's just coming out of a messy divorce, and you're a taken woman." His mouth covered hers while his fingers slipped beneath the elastic band of her sweat pants and into her panties. "Mmm, I love how quick you are to get wet for me."

"Quick?" She giggled and parted her legs so he could further explore her. "I've been waiting for you for an hour."

"Sorry. I had to sign some final papers on the sale of my house." He circled his thumb over her clit and she gasped. "Why don't we get out of these clothes?"

"Sounds good to me." She smiled. "You know how much I love you, Gavin, right?"

"I know." He drew a finger down the side of her cheek. "And I love you too, Mrs. Mackenzie."

The End

Author Bio

Shelli Stevens is a musician, a second-degree purple belt in Tae Kwon Do, and most importantly, a mom. She has been a Supervisor for a International Phone Company, a Network Analyst, even a Medical Assistant, but her passion has always been for writing.

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Chapter One

Melanie Kemble took a sip of her Daiquiri and watched the Hawaiian sunset. The dramatic swirls of orange and purple clouds hypnotized her. Even after the sun melted into the water and the sky began filling with stars, the heat barely dissipated.

This was paradise. No doubt about it. Almost every item had been scratched off her To Do List. Parasailing, snorkeling, a helicopter tour, and ingesting enough alcohol to maintain a decent buzz throughout the entire trip.

There was just one item left. The one with a big honking question mark by it. A symbol in itself an admission that she wasn't sure she had the nerve to go through with it.

"Mel, you kinky broad!" a voice rang out, followed by a high-pitched giggle. "What the hell are you doing out here alone?"

Melanie tossed back the rest of her drink before turning to face her friend. Unlike her, Piper had absolutely no problem completing that last item. It showed in the glow in her face—not to mention the sexy Greek arm candy.

"You remember Nikolos, right?" Piper clutched the bulky arm of

the man next to her.

"Mmm hmm." Melanie glanced over the couple. God, they were disgustingly perfect. Piper was tall, blonde, and gorgeous. Nikolos was taller, dark and just as pretty.

Piper leaned forward, and in a bad attempt at a stage whisper asked, "You find someone to have sex with yet?"

Melanie's cheeks warmed. "Yeah, about that. I don't know if I will."

"Excuse me?" Piper's eyebrows shot up, and then she turned to Nikolos. "Baby, will you please get me another piña colada?"

He nodded and gave her an intimate smile. "Of course."

After the sexy Greek had left them alone, Piper spun back to face her. "We had a deal."

"I know." Melanie groaned and crossed her arms across her chest. She should've known it would come to this. "And I've been thinking about it, and well, I just don't know if—"

"No," Piper interrupted. "No, no and no. We booked this vacation with two intentions. One: to have fun and get a great tan. Two: we each have a fabulous fling that we remember when we're old, shriveled, and surviving on hormone pills."

"I know," Melanie conceded. Piper had every right to be mad. They'd made a pact. A pact she was trying to weasel out of. "I just haven't seen anyone worth flinging with."

"Hello there, beautiful."

Melanie turned to appraise the beefy blond surfer who'd come up to hit on her. He was pretty cute, but probably more bronze than brains. "Not interested, thanks."

After he'd wandered off, Piper shook her head. "You're too picky. He had a great ass."

"I saw that, but I'm looking for more than a great ass."

"For a fling? Why?"

Good Question. Melanie shrugged. When they'd made the pact, it had sounded so exciting and spontaneous. But now that she was here and actually contemplating the idea of throwing herself into bed with some

stranger—

“We have two days left, Melanie. Two days for you to find some yummy guy to hook up with.”

Melanie nodded, drawing her bottom lip between her teeth. What should she do? Just say screw it? That guy a minute ago would have been perfect to have a fling with. Hell, he’d been a walking sex symbol. Her gaze drifted back to the surfer who was now walking down the beach away from the resort.

“You’re going to back out on me.” Piper sighed. “I should have known. You’re way too straight-laced for this.”

“I’m not straight-laced,” Melanie protested. Who was she trying to convince, though, Piper or herself?

Tons of people had flings. There was no reason she shouldn’t do it too. Just as long as she took precautions and made sure it stayed purely sexual. Would it be so bad to let her hair down and have some fun?

“Go after the surfer, Mel. Come on, you’ve got to admit he was hot.”

“He was a little hot.” Piper was right. She needed to loosen up. This wasn’t about finding a soul mate; this was about having some good vacation sex. “Okay. I’ll do it. I need to lose my born again virginity anyway.”

“Mel’s gonna get some,” Piper sang, and then squeezed her hand. “Hurry, before he’s gone.”

Piper’s excitement for her made Melanie’s enthusiasm kick up a notch. “All right, here I go. Wait!” Melanie hesitated. “What if he says no?”

“To a cute, busty, redhead? Shut up and get going.”

“You’re just saying that so I’ll go have sex. But its okay, I expect no less from you.” Melanie grinned. “Wish me luck.”

“Good luck. I’ll stay with Nikolos tonight. You can have the room.”

Melanie barely heard her. She was too busy running. *Shit!* She was actually doing it. Her blood pumped through her veins with the adrenaline rush.

“Hey,” she shouted, trying to catch up with the surfer.

She emerged from the palm trees onto the sandy beach and tried to pick up her pace, but her feet kept sinking and slipping in the sand.

"Hey!" she yelled again, gaining on him.

He started to turn around. *Bingo. He's mine.* Her heel twisted in the sand and she yelped, flailed her arms, and fell flat on her face.

Of course. Of course I would fall. And why wouldn't I?

When she looked up, the surfer had turned and walked away.

How embarrassing. What the hell had she been doing? Chasing after a surfer to convince him to have sex with her? This was a whole new low for her.

Screw the pact with Piper. The whole idea had been ridiculous anyway. She wasn't that desperate for sex.

"Are you okay?"

Oh God, someone had actually witnessed her tumble to the ground? Melanie looked up.

"I'm..." she trailed off, dazed by the man who knelt beside her. He was... "Fine."

Visually, he was male perfection. His shoulders were broad, and a well-defined six-pack rippled his abdomen. Lowering her gaze further she observed the muscular legs under the black board shorts.

He must have been out for a jog, because a slight sheen of sweat shone on his mocha-colored skin and his breathing was slightly labored. He looked like a local.

"That was quite a fall," he said. "Next time you go running on the beach, you might consider taking off your heels."

Melanie's face warmed with a blush. "I didn't—what are you doing?" The man had unfastened her sandal and was pulling it free from her foot.

"I'm checking to see if you broke anything or if it's just a sprain."

At the mention of something actually being wrong with her foot, she became aware of its painful throbbing. But the pain faded the moment he lightly traced his fingers over her swelling flesh. Tingles of awareness moved up her leg. It felt right. Like he had every right to touch her. Like she'd been waiting an eternity for this moment.

Umm, not going to dwell on that bizarre thought. "Are you a doctor or something?"

"I'm just finishing up with my residency," he replied, circling his thumb over her ankle.

Wow, a doctor? Good guess.

"What's your name?"

"Melanie."

"Nice to meet you, Melanie. I'm Brian."

He lifted his eyes, and she almost heard a click as their gazes locked. His mouth curved into a smile. The whiteness of his teeth showed bright against his tan skin and dark brown eyes.

"Well, it looks like you've got yourself a minor sprain."

"Oh," was all she could say. God, he was sexy.

"Why don't we go get some ice on it?" he asked, sliding an arm around her waist and helping her to stand.

"Okay." The tingles followed wherever his fingers touched.

"Unless," Brian paused. "Were you meeting someone?"

Melanie thought briefly of the surfer and flushed again. Best not to bring up that moment of insanity. "No. I'm...no. Ice sounds great."

He gave her that smile again, and everything inside her turned liquid.

With Brian supporting her, they moved slowly across the beach. His hand rested on the side of her bare stomach, burning the flesh underneath. She stumbled and his hand slid up her ribcage to just beneath her breast. Her nipples tightened under her bikini top.

He glanced down at her. "How are you holding up?"

Brian's gaze went from her face to the swell of her breasts. His eyes became an even darker shade of chocolate, and she had no doubt that he'd noticed her hardened nipples.

"I'm okay." She dropped her gaze. Oh yes, he'd definitely noticed. The semi-erection he sported was pretty good evidence. "You know, my room's pretty close if you want to just drop me off there."

"What's the room number?" Brian asked, as he helped her through the lobby.

Melanie told him. Would he just drop her off and leave as she'd suggested? She hoped not. She wanted him to stay. Maybe even all night.

"What do you do for a living, Melanie?"

"I teach art to eighth graders."

"Really? I'm impressed." A small smile tipped his sexy lips. "Do you have your key?"

She blinked. They were already standing outside her room. *See what this guy does to your head?*

"Oh, yeah. Hold on." She grabbed the key card out of her wristlet purse and slid it into the lock.

Brian opened the door and went inside first, flipping on the lights.

"Thanks." Melanie hobbled in after him. Now was the moment he either left her or...

"I'll go grab some ice." He snatched the ice bucket, took the key from her fingers, and then headed for the door. "Why don't you sit down and stay off your foot?"

"Will do."

Watching him leave, Melanie realized he had a fabulous ass. Hmm. Had she actually diminished the importance of a great ass to Piper? She *must've* been drunk.

Melanie hobbled over to the bed and fell backwards onto it, throwing her arms above her head. She thought about sitting up, but the combination of too many drinks and a throbbing ankle made horizontal a much more appealing position.

A moment later the door clicked open.

"Here's your—"

He came over to the bed, his feet barely making a sound on the plush carpet, and sat down beside her.

Melanie's breath hitched as his gaze traveled over her body like a caress. A sensual caress that made her tremble.

"You look like a sacrifice to the gods," he murmured, his voice a bit thick.

She gave a throaty laugh. "Sounds kinky."

Brian dropped his gaze as he wrapped a few pieces of ice in a

towel, and then set it against her ankle. He was so gentle with her, so tender to someone he didn't even know.

She narrowed her eyes and moved her gaze to his naked chest. No hair, all smooth and defined. Solid. She bit her lip and tried not to groan at the heavy pressure settling between her legs. She wanted him, why deny it? Maybe she could still go through with the pact with Piper. Yes, having Brian as a lover seemed like a great idea. At least, her body seemed to think.

"Stop it," he said in a soft voice as his hand settled on her calf.

Uh oh, was I that obvious? "Stop what?"

"Giving me that look. You have no idea what it's tempting me to do."

Melanie's pulse raced. Okay, so she was that obvious. Ah, well, no going back now. She raised an eyebrow and said, "I confess, doc. I'm a little curious about your bedside manner."