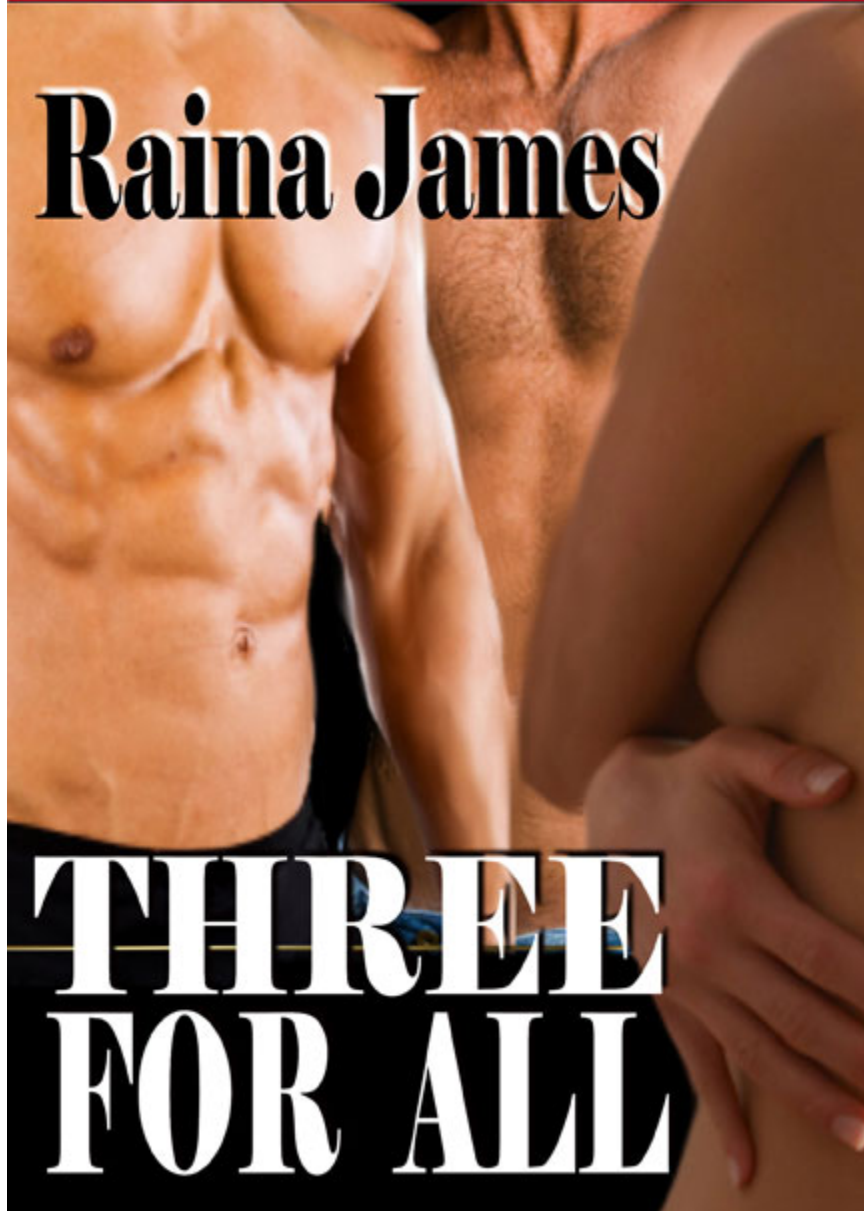


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Raina James

**THREE
FOR ALL**



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MENAGE AMOUR



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Raina James

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Chapter 1

Shelby Daniels stirred to wakefulness with the realization that a man's hand was between her thighs and a hard cock was snuggled hotly against the cleft of her buttocks.

Damn, she hadn't meant to fall asleep. Still, what Paul was doing felt so delicious that she crooked her knee in invitation. Her lover was quick to accept it, sliding his condom-covered erection home in her pussy with flattering eagerness. Despite her rising desire, she was a bit surprised. Paul had never been the initiator in their no-strings-attached relationship. Generally, he seemed content to let her take the lead. In fact, the more forceful she was, the more he seemed to enjoy it. There was definitely a bit of the submissive in him.

A gym-sculpted arm lightly dusted with blond hair tightened around her waist, pulling her more firmly against an equally sculpted chest as the sound of ragged, masculine gasps filled her ear. Paul slid one leg between her thighs to plant both knees on the mattress and began to rock into her in earnest. All the while, his fingers kept up

their play on her clit, strumming it with delicate touches that turned rougher as his excitement mounted.

This definite change in their roles, he taking charge and she accepting it, was as thrilling as it was alarming.

Determinedly, Shelby pushed aside her misgivings and concentrated on the push and pull of Paul's long, narrow cock, willing herself to be swept away in sensation. Unfortunately, with her eyes closed and her thoughts all on her own pleasure, it was easy to imagine she was being controlled by a firm hand she didn't often let herself miss. That was what pushed her over the edge.

Shelby cried out and sank her nails into Paul's forearm as he clutched her closer, the strong contractions of her pussy dragging him along with her. His shout of completion was guttural as his cock pulsed and jumped inside her. For long moments, his sweat-slicked body slumped heavily against hers, pinning her to the bed, another unwelcome reminder of what it felt like to relinquish control to a dominant man.

Paul kissed her shoulder and got out of bed, pausing to considerately pull the sheet up to her waist. Shelby stayed curled on her side, facing away from him. She listened to Paul's feet scuff against the carpet as he walked to the bathroom attached to his bedroom. The light flicked on, and she could hear water running behind the door he hadn't bothered to close all the way. The darkened bedroom was so quiet, it was easy to discern the faint ffffft sound as he plucked a couple of tissues out of the dispenser to dispose of the used condom.

Shelby flopped over to her back, dragging her fingers through her tangled blond curls as she stared up at the ceiling. That was the most satisfying orgasm she'd ever had with Paul. Too bad it wasn't Paul's face she'd seen in her mind as pleasure swamped her senses. Too bad it wasn't just one face she'd seen. She glanced toward the bathroom, but there was no sign of Paul yet.

She was a healthy, sexual woman in her late twenties who didn't want a long-term relationship. Light and casual sex with an agreeable lover was just about perfect in her books. No dinners, no dates, no meeting each other's friends and definitely no sleepovers. Those were the rules. Unfortunately, Paul's new, assertive style set her emotional warning bells jangling.

Definitely time to go.

By the time Paul came out of the bathroom, Shelby had her panties and bra back on and was shaking out the dress she'd worn over to his apartment.

After a brief hesitation, he continued into the room, catching her hands in his. "Hey, why don't you stay? I've got some cheese and crackers, some fresh fruit. We could open another bottle of wine—"

"Thanks, Paul, but I really should be getting home," Shelby said. She couldn't help taking a last, wistful look down his naked body, from his broad shoulders to the strong tendons in his feet, swallowing a sigh at his well-defined abs and that long, tasty cock. Summoning up a smile, she took a step away and slipped the silky dress over her head, smoothing it into place along her hips. "I've got a busy day tomorrow."

"Listen, Shelby, I've been thinking," Paul began.

"Yes?" She strove to keep her expression as politely inquiring as her voice.

Undeterred, he soldiered on. "I want us to start seeing each other. Socially, I mean."

"Paul—"

"I think it would work, Shelby. You're a wonderful woman. Intelligent, beautiful, sexy as hell. I think it's past time we find out what kind of relationship we could have. Out of the bedroom."

And there it was. The death knell on her free pass to good sex. Leave it to a man to complicate things.

Shelby sighed. She really didn't want to hurt him. "Paul, I'm sorry. I think you're great, but I'm not ready to have a relationship

with anyone.” True. Not the whole truth, but that was her business. “That’s why I made it clear at the start of this that I wasn’t looking for anything more. I thought that was what you wanted, too. Since it’s not, I guess there’s really not much more to say.” She turned away and started into the apartment’s tastefully decorated living room.

Paul grabbed a pair of sweatpants out of a drawer, hastily put them on and followed her to the ceramic-tiled foyer, which was lit by a one-of-a-kind chandelier selected by the exclusive interior designer Paul had hired. “Wait, Shelby. I understand if you’re not ready. That’s fine. We don’t have to stop getting together. You can take all the time you need.”

Shelby slipped on the sexy spike heels she’d kicked off at the door in their rush to make it to the bedroom and scooped up the shawl that had somehow become draped over the tiny lamp on the decorative table by the door. Lucky thing the spider-silk-thin fabric hadn’t knocked it over. The lamp was just as unique as the chandelier.

“That’s not fair to you, Paul. You’re obviously ready for a relationship, and you’re not going to be able to get that as long as you’re sleeping with me.”

When he would have protested, Shelby stopped him with a friendly kiss on the cheek. “Thanks for everything, Paul. I hope you find what you’re looking for.”

Even though she knew she was doing the right thing, she felt like a puppy-kicker as she closed the door on his sad, frustrated expression, not to mention bummed at the loss of a comfortable arrangement. It was always a hassle finding the right kind of guy for what she wanted. He had to be amiable enough to have a commitment-free affair, but not someone who wanted to bounce around in bed with her because he was running around on a wife or girlfriend. Maybe she’d take a long break from sex. Clear her head. Who said she needed a man in her life anyway?

The cab ride back to her apartment building was mercifully quick. She felt unbearably tired on the elevator ride up to her floor, drained

by a combination of sex, emotional tension and plain, old-fashioned work. The thought of getting up early to meet a potential new supplier for the restaurant didn't help. That's what happened when you were the head chef at an upscale eatery who was demanding about quality. Then again, she didn't know a respected chef who *wasn't* anal when it came to their culinary creations. She hadn't come this far to settle for substandard anything, and that included men.

A part of her said she was being too hard on Paul, who really was a great guy, but she was starting to get annoyed about the situation all over again.

Letting herself into the darkened apartment, one that was much less extravagant than Paul's tony address, Shelby was weighing the merits of a fast shower versus a relaxing bubble bath when she noticed the light flashing on her answering machine. She almost ignored it. Two steps past the counter, she turned to glare at the machine. She just wasn't the kind of person who could ignore either a ringing phone or a blinking light. Resigned, she hit the playback and started to fold her shawl.

The husky voice was recognizable even before the speaker identified himself.

"Shelby, it's Gabe. Call me as soon as you get this message. I'm sorry. Something's happened to Mike."

* * * *

Shelby picked Gabe out of the crowd the instant she cleared the automatic doors into the arrivals area. Leaning comfortably against a post near the baggage carousel, Gabe in form-fitting black denim and a soft gray sweater that matched his eyes was enough to send the blood pressure of any heterosexual female skyrocketing. He didn't appear to notice the appreciative glances tossed his way, but Shelby did. Sternly ordering her libido down, she nodded to indicate she'd seen him. Hitching the strap of her carry-on bag over her shoulder,

she made her way to the mechanical monster that was starting to spit luggage onto the conveyer belt.

Her flashy red suitcase was one of the first to make it onto the belt. Shelby reached for the handle, but a tanned, very male hand with a plain silver band on one finger beat her to it. Gabe's scent, spicy and crisp with only a hint of cologne or aftershave, seemed to wrap around her. Her body's reaction was instantaneous. Her belly clenched, her thighs trembled and her breath caught in her chest. It had been almost eight years since she'd been this close to him and the sensual awareness he ignited simply by standing beside her was devastating.

"Shelby."

She swallowed and again told her unruly hormones to cool it before tilting her head to meet his gaze. She was a bit startled by the heat in it, then chided herself for being foolish. Gabriel MacKenzie had always had a way of making a woman feel like a goddess. "Gabe," she said, "thanks for meeting me. I could have taken a cab to the lawyer's office."

He stopped her demurrals with a look, a faint smile quirking his lips. "As if Justin and I would let you take a cab."

"Justin's here?"

Taking her elbow, Gabe guided her to the edge of the crowd of passengers still waiting to retrieve their luggage. "He dropped me off to meet you while he went to park the car. It wasn't until I called the airline on the way here that we realized your flight was landing early, so we were a bit pressed for time."

Before Shelby could comment, someone grabbed her free arm, spun her around and clamped her tight against a broad chest covered by a white T-shirt and a worn leather jacket. Then, in a move that could have come straight out of a silver-screen classic, she was tilted back over a strong arm and given the kind of kiss that wouldn't have made it past the decency censors of old Hollywood. Her carry-on bag slid off her shoulder and landed at her feet with a soft thump. Shelby

closed her eyes and clasped a square, rough-shaven jaw in her palms. After only the briefest hesitation, she opened her lips and his tongue surged into her mouth.

He ended the kiss before she was ready to. Reluctantly, she let go of his face and let him steady her as he brought her upright. His eyes blazed blue flames and he grinned at her with unabashed happiness. “Welcome home, babe,” Justin said.

“Yeah, Shelby,” Gabe said, drawing her attention back to him. He’d picked up her abandoned carry-on and slung it over his own shoulder, shooting her a sexy smile that was surprising, given that she’d just been lip-locked with his former rival. “Welcome home.”

Chapter 2

Shelby looked from the lawyer to Gabe and Justin and back again.

“Let me see if I’ve got this straight. Uncle Mike left his place to the three of us?”

“That’s right, Ms. Daniels,” Franklin Bell said. “He doesn’t go into the details in his will, but he has left you a letter in which I assume he explains his intentions. He left letters for all of you, actually. As per his instructions, Mr. MacKenzie and Mr. Walters have already received theirs.”

Shelby listened numbly as Bell explained that there were papers to be signed, a few decisions to be made and some specifics of the funeral arrangements Uncle Mike had organized months before his death.

It stunned her to learn that Uncle Mike had been well aware of his declining health and had, in fact, prepared so thoroughly for his death. Never mind that he hadn’t told her about his heart trouble. It was just like him to keep something like this a secret, to not want her to worry about what couldn’t be changed. What she found most shocking of all was his decision to leave his property equally to his niece and the two men he couldn’t have loved more if they had been his own flesh and blood.

She’d never come right out and told him, but Shelby knew Uncle Mike had understood why she hadn’t come home again after going away to culinary school. Inexplicably, he’d used his last wishes to tie her to Gabe and Justin, at least for the time being.

As Bell droned on, she surreptitiously watched the two men seated on either side of her, putting her, as always, between them.

Justin's face was open and friendly, with electric blue eyes that sparked with humor and mobile lips that were ever ready to flash a movie-star smile complete with dimple. The smile went with his chiselled looks, the kind of male beauty that made one think of an angel come to Earth.

If Justin was an angel, Gabe was a fallen one. Thick black hair curled over his ears and broad forehead, the coppery tan of his skin enhancing silver-gray eyes that held the secrets of heaven and hell. His face had none of Justin's boyish charm, but was just as compelling. He was all man, hard angles, rough edges and the kind of predatory grace that appealed to men and women alike, if for different reasons.

And she loved them both.

"Shelby."

"Hmmm?"

"Do you have any questions about the will?"

The three men watched her with varying degrees of amusement or concern, which made Shelby realize that Gabe was repeating the lawyer's question. She flushed at having been caught not paying attention. She offered Bell an apologetic smile. "I'm sorry. I guess this is just a lot to take in right now."

"I understand," he said, waving a hand to dismiss her apology. "Why don't you take these papers home, go over them with Mr. MacKenzie and Mr. Walters. Set up another appointment with my assistant and we'll clear everything up when you've had a chance to absorb it."

Shelby followed the men to their feet and automatically accepted Justin's arm. Gabe collected the folder of documents from Bell and shook his hand.

"Thanks, Frank. We'll call you if we have any questions."

The contrast between the cool, dim legal office and the brilliant sunshine as soon as they left its doors made Shelby squint. Gabe slid on dark, aviator-style sunglasses and Justin put on the baseball cap he'd stuffed into the back pocket of his wash-softened jeans. Uncomfortably aware of the men walking on either side, Shelby let go of Justin's arm and shoved her hands into her trouser pockets. She felt rumpled and travel-weary in her cool, white cotton blouse and khaki pants. A stray breeze blew a lock of hair over her eyes. Warily, she tucked it behind her ear.

"Did you know Uncle Mike was sick?"

Gabe answered first. "Not specifically, no. He never said anything to us. But looking back, yeah, we'd started noticing some changes in him."

"It wasn't any one thing, Shelby," Justin said, his hand settling on her shoulder. "He'd been easing back from a lot of things in recent months. He wasn't a young guy, so it was understandable."

"I just wished he'd called me ..."

"And what?" Gabe asked, coming to a stop in front of her and catching her chin gently on the back of his hand. His eyes were full of understanding. "Worry you? Make you feel bad because you weren't here? We all know that is exactly the kind of thing Mike *wouldn't* do. And he wouldn't want you feeling guilty about it either."

"Mike went on his own terms, sweetheart," Justin added, holding her shoulders in a one-armed hug. "Just like he wanted. There is absolutely nothing for you to feel guilty about, okay?"

Shelby dipped her head to surreptitiously wipe her watery eyes on her shoulder and started walking again. "You guys think you know me so well," she grumbled, trying for a pout but failing.

She missed the look that passed between them behind her back, but not Gabe's reply. "You have no idea."

* * * *

Shelby blew out the match and sank back into the cushioned bench, propping her bare feet up on the footstool. The half-dozen candles on the small table beside her sent a warm glow flickering around the screen-enclosed porch, bright enough for comfort, but not so brilliant they dimmed the fiery beauty of a mountain sunset. Shelby took a sip of red wine from the ceramic goblet and contemplated the unopened letter balanced across her lap.

Urging her to take a nap when they'd arrived at the house, Gabe had disappeared into the home office and Justin had volunteered to take care of dinner. "I can't promise one of your fancy concoctions," he'd said with a wink, "but you won't starve." To her surprise, she actually had fallen asleep in her old room, waking only when the smell of steaks on the barbecue became too much to resist.

Through dinner, Gabe and Justin kept the conversation light, refusing to talk about Uncle Mike's will or the funeral until the next day. Afterwards, they insisted she leave the clean-up to them, which she did with wry amusement, remembering all the times they'd skated on her when they were younger.

So now she sat with Uncle Mike's letter in her lap, too tense to open it. For some reason, she knew that opening the letter would make Uncle Mike's death more real. She traced her fingers over the bold, black lines that formed her name. The stark letters were as no-nonsense as the man who'd meant so much to her, his younger brother's daughter, and the countless troubled youths who'd found their second chances at the Daniels Ridge Retreat. Though his gruff affection and paternal guidance had meant a lot to dozens of young men, Gabe and Justin were the only ones who'd stayed when their time in the program was up. They each had their own places now, but Shelby knew they often came to visit with Uncle Mike, staying in the rooms he kept ready for them.

In recent years, Uncle Mike had phased out the youth work program at the Retreat. He kept busy by periodically renting out the

tiny cabins or guiding the odd hiking group along the miles of trails throughout the expansive property and adjacent federal land.

Shelby took a deep breath, inhaling the rich blend of pine, loam and green growing things that the evening breeze carried through the screens all around her. She hadn't quite realized how much she'd missed the Retreat until this moment.

Sighing, she set her goblet aside and opened the envelope. A single sheet of paper was inside.

Dear Shelby,

Well, my girl, here we are. Or rather, here you are. I'm somewhere else, somewhere good, I hope, so don't you worry about me.

You're probably wondering why I left everything to you and Gabriel and Justin. I'll get to that.

First, remember those nights when we'd sit up talking, and you'd tell me all about the fancy restaurant you were going to open? It may not have happened yet, but I never once doubted you'd do it, my girl. You've got fire and determination, and that will take you a hell of a long way in this world. But I also know something else about you, Shelby – never mind that you spent your first twelve years with your mom and dad in the city, you are a mountain girl through and through.

So how about this: here you've got this big old house, spectacular scenery, and you're still an easy drive into town. A bit of modernization, some inspiration, and I'd say you could get a first-rate kitchen and dining room set up. Get the picture?

I realize it'd be a trick to run it by yourself. Here's where the boys come in. With Gabe's head for business

and Justin's carpentry, among other things, they'll be good partners for you.

Regardless, whatever you decide to do, know that I'm proud of you.

*Love,
Uncle Mike*

Shelby sniffled and dragged the back of her hand across her eyes, wiping away the tears that clung to her lashes. Leave it to Uncle Mike to figure out a way to get her back here, complete with a plan designed to make her stay put. Her laugh was watery but real. *Good partners*. As if Gabe and Justin hadn't both been chasing her since they were all teenagers. As if such fierce rivals could ever work together. She should have just chosen one or the other of them. It would have made things so much easier. But that was the problem. She couldn't choose, so she'd left.

Carefully folding the sheet of paper, she fed it back into the envelope, which she set aside on the table. Retrieving her goblet, she took another sip of wine. The air around her was chilling rapidly with the setting of the sun. It wasn't cold enough to chase her inside yet, so Shelby tucked her feet under her bottom and curled up in the corner of the bench.

Idly, she assessed the screened room. Four or five tables for two would easily fit out here. And some of the rooms on the main floor could be converted to intimate dining spaces with a little effort. That would leave the second floor as living space for the three of them. That is, if Gabe and Justin wanted to live here, too. She supposed three small suites would do the trick, if they shared a communal kitchen. It would be pretty close quarters, though. Shelby shivered, and knew it wasn't because she was cold. *Uncle Mike, you schemer*.

She was about to head inside when she saw a figure jog from one of the trails into the clearing that circled the house like a green moat.

It was Justin, wearing a sleeveless muscle shirt and loose shorts. Noticing Shelby in the screened room, he changed course to lope up the short staircase.

“Hey,” he said, stopping with the screen door half-open. “Mind if I join you?”

“Of course not. Come on in.”

“Great.” The screen door slapped closed behind him as he continued inside with long-limbed grace, ignoring the other seating to drop down beside Shelby on the bench. The heat coming off his body immediately made her feel warmer. Uncapping the water bottle he’d carried dangling loosely from two fingers, he tilted it back to take a long swig.

Sipping her wine, Shelby appreciated the way his Adam’s apple bobbed as he swallowed. His skin was lightly glazed with sweat from his jog, though his breathing was even. The candlelight glinted off the thin gold chain nestled in the hollow of his throat.

“You still wear it.”

Following her gaze, Justin lifted the chain on one finger and smiled crookedly. “Well, sure. My first sweetheart gave it to me.”

“First?”

“Only sweetheart,” he amended.

“Right.” Shelby tipped her goblet to her lips, only to find it was empty. Bemused, she set it down on the table, thinking that maybe now was a good time to call it a night. Justin stayed her by the simple expedient of leaning across her to put his water bottle on the table next to her goblet. Instead of returning to his own side of the bench, he braced his hand on the armrest, caging her in an almost-embrace.

“It’s true,” he said, the breath of his words caressing her ear. “You stole my heart when I was eighteen and you haven’t given it back yet.”

Shelby, a woman who hadn’t lost her cool with a man in a long, long time, gave a shaky laugh. “Come on, Justin. If you’re going to

put the same old moves on me, aren't you supposed to stretch your arms and 'accidentally' leave one resting over my shoulders?"

Instead of being insulted, his sly, satisfied smile said he knew how much it cost her to utter those flip words. "How's this for same old?"

His lips came down on hers like they were coming home. With the skill of a master, he licked along the seal of her closed mouth, tantalizing, enticing until she couldn't resist opening to him. Justin's tongue sank in to tangle with hers, a conqueror she was only too happy to surrender to.

She'd been sixteen the first time Justin had kissed her. Then, she didn't know how amazing he was. Now, she had the experience to appreciate his talent. His kiss was the kind that reached deep inside a woman, shot desire and lust to the very core of her, then made it burn even hotter with nothing more than a flick of his tongue or the perfect graze of his teeth. If there was a man who could make a woman come with nothing more than his lips on hers, Shelby was a believer when it came to Justin. She'd certainly come close enough to it in the past. No one kissed better than Justin. No one.

Justin groaned. "Oh, sweetheart. You should never have stayed away." With an easy move, and not so much as a whimper of protest from Shelby, he gathered her in his arms and slid them both down until he had her positioned under him on the cushions. Bracing one foot on the ground, he twisted his hips until she could feel his cock pushing against her pussy, separated only by their clothes.

Shelby melted. If she could only think, she'd be mortified that she'd fallen so quickly into her old patterns. At the Retreat not even a day and here she was ready to tear her clothes off and beg to be fucked.

Justin surged against her, the insistent press of his cock rubbing the seam of her jeans against her clit as his tongue fucked her mouth. It was an act of will for Shelby to slit her eyelids open enough to look at him. His features were limned in gold, his lashes crescents of antique gold above distinctive cheekbones.

As if he sensed her watching him, Justin opened his eyes, the brilliant blue of them seeming deep green in the candlelight. His gaze locked to hers, Justin braced himself on his forearms and slowly levered away from her. His chest heaved for breath and his lips glistened, wet from their kiss.

“We shouldn’t be doing this,” she said.

“Why?” His voice was harsh with desire, and something else. “Why shouldn’t we be doing this? Or would you rather I’d taken you up against a wall at the airport, like I wanted to?”

Shelby felt her cheeks flush at the mental image his words aroused, knowing she should be ashamed that it didn’t bother her as much as it should have. “Because it’s been a long time since we’ve been ... together. We don’t really know each other anymore.”

He snorted. “Yeah, right. Like I don’t know that sparkle in your eye is because you’ve got me right where you want me. Like I don’t know that little catch in your voice means you want to come so bad you can taste it. And that when I do this,” he thrust his hips forward, “you wish it was my dick sinking all the way inside your little kitty cat until your heartbeat touches mine.”

Her breath caught exactly as he said it did and, damn him, she did wish his cock was sliding into her until his pubis ground against her clit. But what really got her was when he brought his mouth next to her ear and whispered, “Like I don’t know that you still love me as much as I love you.”

When he eased back on his knees, she clenched her leg around his thigh to draw him back. He resisted, red spots of color flags on his cheeks. Desire and temper warred in his expression, and that shocked her more than anything. Easygoing Justin in a temper? He never got upset, even when he had every right to.

“Why are you angry?”

His eyes narrowed. “Who says I’m angry? It wouldn’t be because my girlfriend ran away and never came back, would it? Never wrote, never called.”

“You know why—”

“Never talked to me and Gabe about what happened.”

Shelby huffed in exasperation. “Right. Talked to you about it. That would have made everything all right.”

Justin hooked his arm under the leg she’d wrapped around him and started to ease it away from him. “I guess we won’t know, will we. Since you *ran* away.”

Shelby clenched her thigh tighter, refusing to be moved. “When you’re twenty, it’s called moving out.”

“Whatever you say, sweetheart.”

Despite their argument, Shelby was intensely aware of the feel of him between her legs. She bit her lip and felt a flash of satisfaction as his eyes darted to her mouth. His expression tightened. His erection was a solid bulge that was obvious even under the drape of his cotton muscle shirt and the fleece of his shorts. Shelby still wasn’t sure what she *should* do, but she knew what she *wanted* to do. Maybe it was time to forget about should and just follow her body’s lead.

Without realizing it, she’d been holding tight to Justin’s biceps, another unconscious ploy to keep him where she wanted him. Moving with careful speed, as if Justin was a wild animal she was afraid of spooking, Shelby let go of one arm and slid her hand down to his thigh, where the leg of his loose shorts gaped open. His muscles tensed as her fingertips touched him, carved marble under a sheath of hot, lightly haired skin.

“Shelby,” he said, the word both a warning and a plea.

“Shhh.”

She kept her eyes on his as her hand disappeared under his shorts. The lightest touch of her fingers on his cock made his arms tremble on either side of her chest. When she wrapped her hand around him, her name burst out of him on a great whoosh of air. Shelby ran her palm up and down his cock, relearning the feel of him, the throb of the thick vein that ran from root to bulb, the soft-solid groove that ringed his glans, the dimpled tip seeping pre-cum. Rolling her palm

over the wide bulb, she coated it in the slippery fluid, using it to lubricate the rest of him. By the time she gripped his root he was thrusting helplessly into her hand, head hanging low until she couldn't see his face. The click-click-click of his flesh pounding into her fist sped up. He was so sexy in his passion, she felt her slit seeping with need.

Justin came hard, hips jerking uncontrollably as each spurt of seed dragged a grunt from him that made her belly clench and her clit throb. The thick scent of sea and sex seemed to drench everything around them.

Shelby didn't know what made her look up. When she did, it was to lock eyes with Gabe. He had come a few steps into the screened room, a steaming mug in each hand. He was holding the handles so tightly his knuckles were white. His eyes blazed.

With a small, horrified cry, Shelby shoved a dazed Justin back until she had enough room to scramble away from him. In her rush, she stumbled into the small table, sending the candles flickering in wild leaps and jumps. Her empty goblet rolled off the table and shattered on the wooden floorboards. It wasn't until later that she noticed the small slices the broken ceramic had left on the heel of one foot. At this moment, all she could concentrate on was getting away.

"Shelby!"

She ignored Justin's call, shoving past Gabe as he started to say something. Justin's cum felt like lava in her hand, burning hot and just as dangerous. Angrily, she scrubbed her palm against her pant leg, but it didn't do any good. She could still feel him in her hand, heavy and hard, pulsing and powerful. Could still smell him. Taste him.

Shelby broke into a run, barely bothering to hold the banister as she raced up the stairs to her room, where she slammed and locked her door. "Oh, my God," she whispered. "Not again."

* * * *

“That went well.”

Justin glared at Gabe. “She goes tearing out of here like the hounds of hell are on her heels, and you say it went well?”

Gabe shrugged, though Justin was a little mollified to notice the frustrated arousal in his friend’s eyes. “You didn’t expect it to be easy, did you?”

“No.” Justin sighed and slouched back in one corner of the bench, running frustrated fingers through his mussed blond hair. “I didn’t expect it be easy.”

Gabe nodded and handed him one of the mugs of coffee. “Nothing worth having is. Look on the bright side.” He stared ruefully at the erection that was mashing his cock against the fly of his jeans. “At least you got a hand job to start things off.”

Chapter 3

They left her alone for two days before Shelby ran out of ways to avoid them.

She slept in, stayed up late, went out on errands, spent hours in her room penning thank-you notes to the many people who'd sent messages of condolence and wrote long e-mails to her friends. Avoiding them in the hall was a bit of a trick, but she managed it. She even tried to stay distant from them during the funeral service — Uncle Mike had been adamant in his wishes that he didn't want a viewing or wake, just the simple grave-side farewell — but Gabe and Justin stoically ignored her attempts and made her lean on them, bracketing her in the comfort of their shared grief. She had herself back under control by the time they returned to the Retreat from the funeral, and she locked herself in her room, pleading exhaustion.

They ambushed her in the kitchen. She had to eat. They knew it, and planned their attack accordingly.

A ringing doorbell announced their first salvo. It was soon followed by the tantalizing odour of tomatoes, garlic, oregano and yeasty dough. Shelby's mouth watered. The bastards knew she loved pizza.

She was a bit surprised when no one knocked on her door to invite her down for dinner. Pacing across the rag rugs covering the hardwood, she pressed her ear to the door. No one was coming up the stairs, either. If she listened really hard, she could just make out the sound of male voices coming from somewhere downstairs, then a puzzling roar and more talking. Shelby frowned and eased the door

open. Abruptly, she realized what she was hearing. Gabe and Justin were watching a baseball game. And eating pizza.

Shelby hesitated. While she'd needed the past two days to herself, she'd also done a lot of thinking. She wasn't a young girl anymore. She should be able to handle Gabe and Justin. She would just treat them each like the mature adult she expected them to consider her. She wasn't so pathetic as to let her hormones rule her.

Yeah, right.

She couldn't stay up here forever. Decisions needed to be made, and that wasn't going to happen with her hiding out in her room and Gabe and Justin giving her some "space."

Mind made up, she started down the stairs. As she neared the base of the staircase, she could make out the brilliant green of some baseball diamond somewhere on the old television in Uncle Mike's living room. There was the sharp crack of a bat, and Justin yelled at someone to, "Get it! Get under it!" Apparently, someone didn't get it or under it or whatever, because Justin cursed and Gabe taunted, "That twenty bucks is as good as mine."

Resolve to be an adult aside, Shelby wasn't so confident that she was ready to join Gabe and Justin quite yet. A furtive glance showed each man had a huge slice of pizza on a paper plate, but there was no sign of the pizza box. Heartened, Shelby made for the kitchen with sock-footed stealth. Bingo! The pizza box was in the middle of the counter. She pried up the lid and closed her eyes in bliss as the wonderful, tantalizing aroma of spices, crust and melted cheese wafted out. Shelby helped herself, not bothering to take the time to find a plate. Tangy pizza sauce gushed into her mouth with the first bite.

"Hey, Shelby girl. Help yourself. Our pizza is your pizza."

Hearing Gabe's voice, Shelby spun around to see both men watching her with triumphant expressions. Gabe quirked an eyebrow at Justin, who rolled his eyes, dug a limp twenty-dollar bill out of his pocket and slapped it into his friend's hand.

Shelby chewed and swallowed, savouring her illicit pie before asking, "How'd you get someone to deliver out here?"

Gabe answered. "What can I say? The pizza kid can be bought."

He sauntered away from the doorway to take a seat on one of the benches in the kitchen nook. Without a word, Justin went to the fridge and pulled out three colas, then joined Gabe at the table. They both sat there, watching her expectantly.

Shelby swallowed another bite of pizza and made a show of ripping off a section of paper towel. A predominantly male domain, the Retreat was a napkin-free zone. "What's up?"

"We need to talk." Gabe popped a tab on one of the cans and set it down on the table in front of the chair positioned at the end of the nook.

"Uh, well, I don't know," Shelby stalled. So much for treating them with mature sang-froid.

"What do you think of Uncle Mike's plan?"

"You know about Uncle Mike's plan?"

"Sure. Like the lawyer said, he left us a letter, too."

"Of course, it also helped that we were here to talk to him."

Shelby sucked in a breath as the jab hit home. Justin was right. She hadn't been here when Uncle Mike needed her.

Gabe shot the other man a look. "Justin."

"Right." He shook his head as if disgusted with himself. "Sorry, sweetheart. I didn't mean that like it sounded."

Shelby cleared her throat and nodded. Gabe nudged the chair away from the table with his foot.

"Talk to us, Shelby."

After a moment, she walked to the table and sat down. "So, Uncle Mike mentioned his plans to you?"

Gabe gave a brief nod. "He did talk to us about maybe turning this place into a restaurant for you. We could also upgrade the cabins, make them appeal to a higher class of clientele. More defined trails for summer and winter would help bring in the tourists, too."

“Wow. You sound like you’ve really thought this through.”

“He should,” Justin said. “He’s a business consultant.”

“A business consultant?”

Gabe shrugged. “Small businesses, mainly. I help them figure out how to make the most of what they have. But I’ve also been thinking about what to do with the Retreat. Mike asked me to come up with some ideas.”

“And you did.” She looked from one man to the other. “You really want to do this?”

Justin put his hand on hers, the simple contact enough to send her pulse leaping. “Yes.”

Shelby flicked a glance at Gabe. He seemed unbothered by Justin’s hand on hers. “At least think about it,” he suggested.

She eased her hand away from Justin’s and clasped her fingers on the table in front of her. Tapping her thumbs on the table top, she sucked her bottom lip into her mouth as she thought.

Going into business with Gabe and Justin would be a totally crazy thing to do. She’d only intended to come back long enough for Uncle Mike’s funeral and to wrap up any legal matters that needed to be attended to. She’d built a different life for herself away from here, and she liked it. For the most part. A few more years, and she’d be in a position to open her own restaurant.

Then again, if she followed Uncle Mike’s suggestion and went into business with Gabe and Justin, she could be mistress of her own kitchens on a much faster timetable. A few tweaks and the menus she’d been refining would translate well here.

Looking up, she was startled to see both men staring intently at her mouth. She stopped nibbling her lower lip and straightened in her seat.

“What do you have in mind?”

Smiling slowly, Gabe pushed up from the table. “Let me get my laptop.”

* * * *

“Shelby.”

She paused outside her bedroom door and looked inquiringly over her shoulder at Gabe, who’d followed her up the stairs. He didn’t say anything more until he’d reached her side.

“I know you’ve got a lot to think about, but I hope you realize how important this was to Mike.”

Shelby shook her head, exasperated. “Don’t you think I know that? When a man lays out something in his will, generally that means he’s pretty damn serious about it.”

Gabe touched her cheek with his fingertips. “I know. Sorry. I don’t mean to push you into anything. I just want you to really consider this. Mike wasn’t the only one who wanted this. It’s important to me and Justin, too.”

“But why? Uncle Mike said Justin was starting to get some good commissions for his carpentry work and your consulting business is really taking off.”

He chuckled. “So you did know about that.”

Shelby mentally kicked herself. So much for hiding the fact that she knew very well what he and Justin had been up to over the years. Uncle Mike never failed to keep her informed, whether she wanted to know about them or not. To be honest, she hadn’t insisted very strongly that she wasn’t interested. “Uncle Mike might have mentioned something in passing. Anyway, you didn’t answer my question. Why is turning the Retreat into a restaurant important to you and Justin, specifically?”

“I think you know why.”

“What is it with you and Justin and all these cryptic comments? Am I suddenly supposed to be a mind reader?” Frustrated, Shelby twisted the doorknob and shoved her door open.

His simple words stopped her. “I love you.”

Shelby's heart leapt in delight before reality dragged it down to earth. Without looking at him, she said, "Well, maybe I don't want to be caught in the middle of the two of you again."

"Would that be so bad?"

She turned on him, mouth agape. "Bad? You know what's bad? Bad is feeling like a slut because you keep bouncing from one man to another. Bad is coming between two guys who are best friends, and knowing that whatever you decide, you're going to be hurting one of them. Why the hell do you think I left?"

He didn't hesitate. "You left because you love us. Now you've got to decide whether you want to stay for the same reason. Because you love us."

Gabe pressed a kiss to her forehead that was almost paternal, then eased her into her room and gently closed the door. Shelby stood there for a long time, simply staring at the faded paint on the old wooden panel. Gabe's words sounded in her mind, a reverse echo that repeated with growing intensity. *Because you love us.*

* * * *

Justin was waiting for him in the screened room. He twisted the cap off a beer and handed the bottle to him. "Do you think she'll go for it?"

Gabe sat in one of the cushioned chairs, stretched out his long legs and took a swig, the cold liquid sliding down his throat with welcome smoothness. "If we play our cards right."

"Dammit, Gabriel. We can't fuck this up." Gabe's lips quirked. Justin only called him that when he was really pissed. He watched as his friend paced to the other end of the room and back again.

"Relax, Justin." He lifted his eyes meaningfully in the direction of Shelby's room. It was cool again tonight, and he doubted she had left her windows open, but she'd be less than thrilled to overhear them

plotting about her. “She’s here now. That’s half the battle. Plus, she still loves us.”

Justin’s eyes heated as he looked towards the cushioned bench where Shelby had so ably taken him in hand. Gabe knew the other man was thinking that what had happened there was about more than sex. It had always been that way with Shelby and them. That’s why her inability to decide between them had torn her apart. Too bad they hadn’t realized what it was doing to her until it was too late.

“Yeah,” Justin said. “She does.”

“Now we just have to convince her that that’s okay.”

Chapter 4

Shelby spent the rest of the night in her room making phone calls. Once it got too late to do that, even with the time change, she turned to her laptop and started crunching numbers.

Sucking on the end of her pencil, she scanned through the notes she'd made over the years, comparing availability there with her estimates of what could be had here and for how much. It would take some substitutions, and of course not all of the menu items would be as popular here as they were in the city, but good food was good food. And like Uncle Mike had said in his last letter to her, determination would take her a long way.

The house was dark and quiet when she finally crept downstairs to shut herself inside Uncle Mike's study, where she refamiliarized herself with everything she could find about the area, the house, the land and the surrounding mountains, this time with an eye to opening a business here. Without a qualm, she turned on Gabe's computer – she felt a bubble of laughter rising when the password turned out to be her name – and started to go over his proposal with new, critical purpose. It came as a revelation how thorough he'd been. He'd explored areas she hadn't considered, extrapolated on how seasonal highs and lows would affect the business plan and what could be done to balance them.

Justin was right, Gabe was good at this kind of thing. And he wanted to drop it to open a restaurant with her and Justin. At the very least, he'd have to significantly scale back his consulting business while they got things off the ground.

And what about Justin? He'd always been skilled with his hands, in and out of bed. Uncle Mike had been so proud that people were starting to recognize Justin for the craftsman he was. He, too, would be giving up a lot to open the restaurant.

The restaurant was her dream, not theirs. In the end, they'd be sacrificing a lot to see her dream become a reality.

Gabe had given her a choice. *You've got to decide whether you want to stay for the same reason. Because you love us.* Both men insisted they loved her and wanted her to stay. How could they? That was what she couldn't understand. Didn't loving someone mean you wanted to keep them all to yourself? Wasn't that every little girl's dream, to find her *one* true prince?

Years ago, she'd gone from Gabe to Justin, and from Justin to Gabe, each time loving the one she was with while missing the one she didn't have. Their relationship was a never-ending merry-go-round.

The only thing that gave her the resolve to jump off the ride was seeing Justin's expression when he'd walked into the cabin that fall morning. Shelby was on her knees, her back braced against the cold brass headboard. Gabe had lashed her wrists to the brass rails, using her bra and panties to bind her, and was crouched down in front of her, face buried in her pussy. Without warning, the door that she'd thought was locked opened, and Justin strode in. She was sure she could read the betrayal in his face, even though he knew she was seeing both him and Gabe. Neither of them had ever verbally asked her to choose. It was almost as if each were afraid of what that choice would be. Or so she'd always thought.

Shelby had felt sick. She refused to speak to either of them, only relenting enough to order Gabe to untie her. Gabe didn't bother to cover himself as she quickly dressed. Settling on his side, his hard cock evidence of his continued arousal, he propped his head on one hand and watched her yank on her boots. Marching towards the door, she stood there until Justin silently moved out of her way.

“We’ll talk later, Shelby,” Gabe called after her. But they didn’t get the chance. She was gone by morning.

Shelby shut down Gabe’s laptop and collected the pad of paper she’d been using for notes. Flipping through it, she felt a cautious sensation of hope. This was doable. If Gabe and Justin were serious about wanting to be partners with her, they could get this done.

The big question now was, did she want to be partners with them?

Chapter 5

Shelby stifled a yawn and flicked the light switch on as she walked into the kitchen. Reflexively, she squinted against the glare as the bright overhead fixture blinked away the pre-dawn glow that was just beginning to appear in the window above the breakfast nook. She was tempted to flick the light back off, but figured she needed the added wake-up boost. God, she couldn't remember the last time she'd willingly gotten up this early.

Her toes curled on contact with the cool kitchen tiles and she berated herself for not pulling on a pair of socks before coming down here. She forced herself to shuffle to the counter. After some rummaging, she came up with ground coffee and set it to perking in the ancient Mr. Coffee plugged into the socket at the corner of the countertop and the fridge. She helped herself to a heavy white ceramic mug from the cupboard over the coffee maker, then had to smile. "The Boss," was printed on it in bold black capital letters. Below that, in smaller type, it read: "You got a problem with that, have your ass take it up with my foot."

She laughed softly to herself. "Uncle Mike." Stifling another yawn, Shelby leaned forward, crossed her forearms on the scratched and battered counter and laid her head on them as her eyes measured the slowly rising level in the coffee pot. Only enough for half a cup so far. Maybe she should just snag it as a starter ...

"Gotta like that kind of view first thing in the morning."

Shelby jerked upright as the sound of Gabe's deep voice seemingly filled the kitchen. She glanced over her shoulder to see his

eyes staring appreciatively at the hem of the man's flannel shirt she'd slept in. Since it ended mid-thigh, she knew a pair of shorts would show off more leg, but the way he watched her made her feel like she was wearing nothing at all. Of course, she had been bending over, so the hem was considerably higher a moment ago. And then there was the fact he actually *had* seen her wearing nothing at all.

She tried for cool. "Gabe. Good morning." Turning away from him, she reached for the cupboard where the coffee mugs were kept. "Coffee's almost ready. Can I get you some?"

She felt the warmth of his body, almost, but not quite touching her back before he spoke softly into her ear. "Something sure smells good." His exaggerated inhalation ruffled her hair as he nuzzled it aside to graze her neck with his lips and nose. An involuntary shiver tickled down her spine and seemed to sizzle a path straight to her nipples. Without looking, she knew they were pressing noticeably against the well-worn flannel of her shirt.

"Gabe, this isn't a good idea." Even to her own ears, the protest sounded less than certain.

He seemed to think so too as he pressed himself fully against her back. His erection, covered as it was by thick denim, was a hard, hot invitation as it nestled between her thighs. "Now, honey, I've gotta disagree with you there."

"But we have to work together and I think this might make things awkward."

"Really? I think it would make things a hell of a lot easier." His hands were on the outsides of her thighs now, calloused palms gliding up over silky skin, his wrists catching the hem of her shirt and dragging it up, too. She could feel the cool air as it touched her exposed panties, and knew the pale pink cotton was dampening with her rising desire.

She tried one last time. "Justin—"

"Won't mind. Trust me. Shelby, darlin', I'll stop if you really want me to." He nipped her neck where it met her shoulder, then

smoothed his tongue over it. “You remember the word, don’t you?” Her breath caught in her throat on a tiny gasp and he chuckled. “I see you do.”

She didn’t answer.

The bottom snap on her shirt let go with the smallest tug from his fingers. Hands braced on the counter, she could only watch as slowly, methodically, he released all the snaps until the soft flannel parted, exposing her breasts. Already erect, her nipples pebbled even more tightly as they lost the warm haven of the shirt. Gabe hooked one arm around her waist and pulled her tighter against his front. He rested his cheek against the side of her head, his breaths deep and steady, and for a long moment they both simply watched her breasts rise and fall with the motions of her own breathing. Mentally, she cursed herself for caving in so easily. *All it takes is a lick on the neck, a “Nice ass, baby,” and I’m his. Again.*

“You are beautiful, Shelby Daniels. Damn you for staying away so long.”

Before she could offer up a comment, an excuse, he let go of her waist and captured her breasts, long fingers dark and masculine against her much-paler flesh. The thick silver ring on his right hand was a spot of coolness as his warm skin touched hers. Holding her steady with the press of his hips, trapping her against the counter, Gabe began a tantalizing massage that within moments had Shelby gasping. She couldn’t help leaning forward into his grip, pushing her ass rhythmically against his cock.

“That’s it, honey,” Gabe crooned in her ear, accommodatingly meeting her backward thrusts with his covered cock. “Show me what you want.” Deliciously, his fingers pinched her nipples.

“Gabe!”

He’d first focused on her breasts, but now he shifted his attention to her aching nipples, pulling and pinching them with exactly the right pressure, the perfect pain. Where her breasts were sensitive to the lightest caress, her nipples had always needed a firmer touch. Gabe

was the only lover she'd ever had who understood that. His mouth sucked hungry kisses along her neck and jaw, pausing only to giving her the edge of teeth she loved to feel.

"Fuck, honey. I've missed you."

She felt a spark of triumph at the ragged edge to his voice, evidence that calm, cool, in-control Gabe might not be as in control as he liked to be. Without warning, he let go of her nipples. She murmured a denial, then sank her teeth into her bottom lip to stop an excited cry when he roughly yanked her panties over her hips and pushed them down her legs. Justin was probably still sleeping. She could only imagine the pain that would fill his eyes if he walked in and saw her with Gabe. Again. She pushed the thought away and forced herself to concentrate on the lover she was with.

Briefly, Gabe knelt behind her, ordering, "Step out," when he'd pulled the scrap of pink cotton to her ankles. Eagerly, she obeyed. He flicked the panties away from her feet and rewarded her with a kiss on the curve of her buttocks. Then he was standing behind her again, this time one hand cupped between her thighs. Without hesitation, his fingers smoothed through her damp pubic hair until he found her clit. She was so slippery with juice his fingers slid around and around the tight nubbin unhindered, winding her nerves tighter with each pass.

"Oh, Gabe ..." The near-shout made her realize she'd been saying his name over and over, chanting it like a mantra. She leaned her head back against his shoulder and helplessly thrust against his hand. "Yes, oh, yes," she gasped. "Exactly like that, baby."

"No."

"No?" she echoed in broken disbelief when he deprived her of the magic of his hand and held her hips still. His fingers were wet and sticky on her skin.

Gabe pulled her around to face him. "No. Not yet."

She closed her eyes in relief. He wasn't going to leave her like this. His lips came down on hers, his tongue pressing firmly against the line of her joined lips, demanding entrance. For a dazed instant

she kept her mouth closed before sucking his tongue deep inside for a long, wet kiss of welcome. Oh, how she'd wanted this. Wanted it as soon as she'd seen Gabe at the airport. Gabe and Justin at the airport ... The memory gave her pause, but only for as long as it took Gabe to hoist her up onto the counter and make a place for himself between her thighs.

"Let's get rid of this." He eased her open shirt off her shoulders until it pooled behind her on the counter. "I'd rather not have anything obstructing my view."

"No, we wouldn't want that," she said faintly. She couldn't look away from his eyes, mesmerized by the passion that made them look like molten silver.

"I want you to do something for me, honey."

"Hmmm?"

He picked up her hands, brought them to his lips and, one by one, kissed her palms. Calm, cool Gabe was back again. He leaned down to her chest and gave each of her nipples a quick lap of his tongue that made her gasp. "I love these sweet, red berries. Remember the time I sprinkled them with sugar?" His eyes laughed into hers with wicked sensuality. "But you were sweeter than any sugar, Shelby girl."

She shivered with delight at the sound of the old endearment, then shivered again when he guided her hands to her breasts. His fingers over hers, he began to rub and stroke her breasts again. Her knees clenched his hips as the desire rekindled instantly, the motion of both their hands on her sensitive skin, she under his control, making it easy to pretend Gabe had four hands, not two.

"Since I'm going to be busy, I want you to pay attention to these beauties."

"Busy?" Her heart quickened. She thought she knew what he intended to do.

"Busy. So you keep doing this," he guided her palms softly down to cup her breasts, "and don't forget to do this," using her own fingers to deliver a hard pinch to her nipples. "All right?"

She gave a broken cry. “Yes, Gabe. I won’t.” To prove it, she pinched herself again, holding her nipples clamped between thumbs and fingers long enough that Gabe’s own breath hitched in a groan.

“Fuck, you’re good.”

His response reminded her of how gravelly his voice got whenever he was the most turned on. It had been years since she’d last heard it, but it could have been yesterday, it was that familiar. Her lips curved in her own wicked, sensual smile. “No. I’m bad.”

He laughed. “Same thing, Shelby girl. Now, time to get busy.”

He knelt with a lithe grace that reminded her of a sleek, muscled jungle cat, his thick, midnight-black hair curling over his forehead. He was tall enough that even on his knees, his face was level with the edge of the counter, level with her pussy. He growled deep in his throat, the primal sound reinforcing her whimsical thought of him as an untamed beast. He sucked in a breath through his nose, making her blush at his obvious enjoyment of the scent of her arousal. Then his eyes opened and he flicked a glance at her. “Shelby, you slacking off already?”

Laughing unsteadily, she began playing with her breasts, deliberately tugging on the nipples as he watched.

“Perfect,” he said, hooking her thighs over his shoulders in one smooth motion and sliding his arms around her ass to pull her closer to the counter’s edge. “Don’t forget to keep up your end, honey. I can’t be riding you – well, just yet, anyway. I’ve gotta concentrate here.”

Hooking his wrists over her thighs, he was able to part her labia, exposing her tight clit. Through slitted eyes, she watched as he leaned closer, so close she couldn’t see more than his own closed eyes and strong, broad forehead. But she felt that first slow stroke of his tongue as he licked from the rosebud of her anus all the way to the top of her clit. Then he did it again.

She lost count of the number of times his tongue slid over her clit, playing with her pussy, pausing to pay special attention to the firm

little muscles around her anus. Trust Gabe to remember how much she loved that dirty, naughty treat. Shelby's breaths came in pants that were almost cries, fast and hard. Caught up in the pleasure, she belatedly noticed he was watching her face, remembered she was supposed to be doing ... something. Half-heartedly, she moved her fingers over her breasts. But she couldn't concentrate on doing the massaging, cupping strokes the way he'd shown her. It was all she could do to simply pull and twist her nipples. That seemed to satisfy him, and he closed his eyes and resumed his teasing licks. Finally, blessedly, his teeth caught her clit and he suckled her. Hard.

"Oh, God. Fuck. Gabe. Oh, yes. Yes!" Shelby couldn't help herself. She stopped playing with her nipples and tunnelled her fingers through his hair until she cupped his head, yanked him closer and pressed his face into her pussy while she shook and quaked and keened her pleasure.

Gabe didn't seem to object. He crowded even closer and used his shoulders to spread her thighs wider as he sucked harder and harder, drawing her orgasm on for what seemed like forever. Shelby could barely breathe. Gasping harshly for oxygen, she curled forward as if hugging the pleasure inside her, until Gabe's soft curls pressed against her belly. Tendrils of her own hair tickled where they stuck to her sweat-streaked face and her arms started to shake as she braced herself against Gabe's shoulders.

"Shhh," he soothed, bringing her up with him as he stood. Her nipples tingled as they scraped against the rough cotton of his work shirt. Gabe dropped kisses over her eyes and down her cheeks, tongue darting out to taste the few real tears she hadn't noticed she'd shed. "It's okay, Shelby girl. I've got you, and I'm not letting go this time."

Before she could formulate a question, his mouth was on hers. The taste of her essence on his lips fired the embers in her belly. She was stunned to feel the passion rise so quickly after the body-shaking orgasm she'd just had, but was eager to let it loose. As soon as Gabe

felt her respond, his kiss turned ravenous, reminding her that although she'd come, he hadn't.

She fisted his shirt in her hands and started to yank it out of his waistband. It was only half out when she started on the buttons. Grunting with impatience, Gabe leaned back long enough to jerk it over his head, revealing a leanly muscled torso and an attractive dusting of black hair that trailed below his belt. She heard the ping as a button landed in the sink a few feet away and laughed. Gabe just grinned and snatched her off the counter. Whirling around, he kicked the chair out of the way and set her down facing the old, metal-edged Formica table tucked between the benches in the nook. She'd barely found her feet when she felt his hand on the nape of her neck, urging her down. She went willingly, all doubts about the wisdom of picking up where she'd left off with Gabe long gone. She hissed when her reddened nipples came in contact with the cold table top, but kept going.

Gabe slowed himself long enough to run his hands up and down her back in a rough caress that ended in a sharp slap on her right ass cheek, drawing a renewed rush of liquid between her thighs. "Like I said, honey, gotta love that view first thing in the morning."

The clink and jangle of his belt buckle releasing made her squirm with anticipation and she gripped the edge of the table in both hands to force herself to be still, to be patient, to wait for Gabe. The sound of his zipper lowering was a rip of noise over her eager breaths.

Gabe stroked his hand over her ass the way another man would steady a restless mare. "Easy, honey. Easy. I'm not going to keep you waiting."

She heard the double thud as he toed off his boots, then the more muffled sound as his jeans hit the floor. His lightly-haired thigh brushed the back of hers and she pictured the flex of his muscles as he kicked the pile of clothes out of the way. Then he nestled his cock into the V of her thighs, the bristle of his pubic hair tickling and tantalizing against the tender skin of her inner thighs. He slid a few

exploratory strokes along her labia before stopping at the entrance to her cunt.

“Dammit, Gabe, don’t stop! Fuck me! I want you inside. Now!”

His chuckle was dark and seductive as he obeyed and plunged into her. The edge of the table bit into Shelby’s fingers as she gripped it, struggling to hold steady, to push back and meet his rocking thrusts. The salt and pepper shakers rattled and danced with every motion as Gabe pounded his cock into her hungry cunt. Distantly, she noticed the little sliver-topped glass jars tip over and roll off the table. She didn’t hear a smash, so they must have landed on the bench seat, but she didn’t care.

One of Gabe’s hands slid from her hip to the crack of her ass and followed it down between their bodies. He angled his hips a fraction away, and she would have mourned the shallower jabs that motion forced if she hadn’t felt his thumb pressing against her back entrance. Gabe leaned down until she could hear his breath as a rasp in her ear.

“I can feel your pussy gripping my cock harder, Shelby girl. You love it when I touch this little button here, don’t you?” Despite the hard rhythm of his hips, his thumb was gentle as he pushed against her anus, teasing and testing until the tip slipped through the ring of muscles guarding her rear entrance. “You’re so tight, honey.”

Shelby bit her lip to keep from begging, but couldn’t resist reaching back to sink the fingers of one hand into his ass. She revelled in the feel of his flexing buttocks as the bite of her nails acted like a spur on a stallion and he plunged into her unchecked for one glorious instant. He found his control with a muttered curse and resumed teasing her with his thumb.

“You’re so tight, Shelby, I gotta think it’s been a while since you’ve had a man back here.”

When she didn’t say anything, he eased his thumb out of her clenching grip. Shelby panicked. “Yes, it’s been a while,” she admitted hurriedly. “A long while.”

Satisfied, Gabe eased his thumb back inside her, running it around and around the rim, stretching, readying. “A long while, huh? Tell me, Shelby girl, has anyone fucked this sweet ass but me?”

This time she answered without prompting. “No. No, Gabe. No one but you, baby, just you.”

“Good,” he said, the word dripping with satisfaction. “Then I’d say it’s about time, don’t you?”

* * * *

Justin followed the sound of murmuring voices down the hall to the kitchen. When he’d heard Shelby cry out, he’d taken the time to pull on a pair of jeans, but that was all. Having just rolled out of a warm bed, he knew he should be cold as he stalked barefoot along the hardwood floor. He wasn’t. The sounds that became increasingly distinctive as he neared the kitchen were enough to heat his blood and fire his imagination. His cock stiffened more with each step, making him glad his jeans were loose and, hopefully, soon to be gone.

The sight that met him when he reached the doorway made him stop and take a deep breath. Shelby was bent over the kitchen table, face turned in his direction, her expression one of eager anticipation as her closed lashes veiled her beautiful green eyes. Gabe, just as naked, stood poised behind her, his erect cock shining wetly as its deep-red bulb nudged just a little too high to be seeking Shelby’s pussy.

“You’ve got me so slicked up, Shelby girl, I think we can manage without the lube,” Gabe said.

Justin’s balls tightened at the implication of his friend’s comment. He couldn’t take his eyes away as one of Gabe’s big hands parted Shelby’s ass cheeks and his other guided his cock exactly where he wanted it to go. Then his hips started a controlled roll. A drawn-out feminine groan and the grimace of pleasure that filled Gabe’s

expression told Justin the exact moment the other man's cock breached Shelby's anus.

Gabe was right. She really loves this.

Taken by the erotic sight of Gabe working his cock deeper into Shelby's ass, Justin grabbed the doorframe with one hand for support. The small motion drew Gabe's attention. He looked at Justin and grinned. He delivered a sharp slap to Shelby's ass that made her wriggle against him.

"See, honey? I told you Justin wouldn't mind."

Shelby's eyes flew open. "Justin!" Her voice was a strangled squeak. She let go of the edge of the table and pressed her palms flat against its top, evidently with the intention of levering herself up.

Gabe put a hand between her shoulder blades and held her down with little effort. "Shhh, Shelby." His voice was almost a croon. "Look at Justin, honey. If he was any harder, his dick would be bursting through his jeans to get to you."

A little of the panic faded from Shelby's eyes, but she still seemed uncertain as she stared at Justin.

"Buddy, tell her. You're cool with this, right?"

Justin suddenly realized his mouth was too dry to speak. He settled for a single, jerky nod. It must have reassured Shelby, because she relaxed enough that Gabe was able to sink the rest of his cock into her ass to the hilt. His head sagged back as he withdrew on a slow glide before plunging back into her hard enough to slap his lower belly against her ass, forcing a cry of pleasure from the woman submitting so sweetly to him. "Oh, fuck, Shelby. That is so good," he said.

This time, Shelby kept her eyes open, watching Justin as he watched his friend fuck the woman they loved in the ass. Instead of being repelled, he was fascinated by the way a gloss of sweat made Gabe's all-over tan gleam, and the way the sucking and slapping sounds of their mating mingled with Shelby's increasingly uncontrolled cries. The room was rich with the musk of sex. By now,

Justin was gripping the doorframe on either side, shuddering with the need to join them, but still a little uncertain himself.

Without warning, Gabe stopped moving. Looping one arm under Shelby's hips, he used the other to urge her up until she was pressed flat against his chest, his cock still firmly lodged in her ass. The nearby chair's legs scraped across the old linoleum as Gabe sat down, drawing Shelby down into his lap. He used his knees to spread her legs until they dangled on either side of his. Justin had a perfect view of Gabe's sack and the thick base of his cock. The rest of it thrust up out of sight into the haven of Shelby's ass. Justin's breath roared out of his lungs like a bellows.

"Justin, get in here," Gabe ordered.

His hold on the doorframe tightened at the authority in his friend's tone and the muscles in his arms shook from the increased tension. Now was the time to leave if he didn't want this. He looked from Gabe's confident expression to Shelby's, the dawning hope in hers evident. Who the fuck was he kidding? Hell, yes, he wanted this.

He let go of the doorframe and walked into the kitchen, stopping just a few feet from the couple on the chair.

Gabe lifted his hands to Shelby's breasts and began to play with them. "Strip." Justin didn't hesitate. He unbuttoned his jeans, jerked down the zipper and skinned them off his legs. His cock bobbed as he freed it, finally settling parallel to the floor. He could feel the pre-cum seeping out of the slit on its crown and almost moaned at the quick mental image of Shelby licking it off.

"Justin, where are your manners? Give our Shelby a proper good morning."

He didn't need to be told twice. His mouth crashed down on hers, his hands settling automatically on her slim waist as he leaned into her. Shelby's arms twined around his neck, urging him closer, and he laughed into her mouth as he almost lost his balance. He was very aware of Gabe's face just inches from his own, the other man sucking and biting Shelby's tender neck. Unequivocally playing for the hetero

team, Justin had never been this close to a naked man in his life, let alone an aroused naked man that he was going to share a woman with. Their woman. Sex had always been fun, but he'd never been much into kink. That was all about to change. Shelby's hands began exploring his chest, moving lower with each pass until she closed her fingers around his aching erection. He was reminded of the way she'd held him on the bench in the screened room.

"God, Shelby," he gasped. "Don't do that. I'll come right now."

"I don't mind." She sounded as breathless as he did. "I want to be slippery with your cum. From both of you."

"Not yet, honey," Gabe said. Taking her wrists in a firm grip, he made her let go of Justin's cock and settled her hands in a new hold behind his own neck, the position exaggerating the jut of her breasts. "First, I want Justin to suck on your luscious tits. Justin." He cupped Shelby's breasts, pushing them together like an offering.

Justin latched onto one nipple like a starving man and sucked it deep into his mouth. Shelby's excited moan made him suck harder before he reluctantly released it and moved to the other breast. This one he laved around and around, tauntingly circling ever closer to her elongated nipple before finally curling his tongue around it.

"God, she loves what you're doing, Justin," Gabe said. "I feel her pussy clenching all the way in her ass. Help me out here, buddy. Push her over the edge."

Justin left Shelby's breasts to see Gabe had wrapped a thickly muscled arm around her waist and begun to thrust into her from below. He was torn between wanting to watch Gabe's cock screwing Shelby's ass and going back to her amazing breasts. *Why not do both?*

Shelby's pussy was hot and dripping when he pressed his hand against her. He could just feel Gabe's cock and balls with the tips of his fingers as the other man surged into her. Gabe noted the unfamiliar touch with an inventive epithet that Justin took as encouragement. Justin caught Shelby's clit between two fingers and began to masturbate her in skilful counterpoint to Gabe's motions. At

the same time, he caught one nipple between his teeth and flicked it with his tongue.

Shelby shivered and quaked, kiss-swollen lips babbling incoherent words interspersed with their names, punctuated by sharp cries she couldn't seem to control. Then she screamed. Gabe jolted against her, the pulses of his own release forcing grunts from between clenched teeth.

After long moments, man and woman relaxed as one, still panting, but replete and satisfied.

* * * *

Justin sat back on his haunches. Tension vibrated through him. Shelby's honey-blond hair was a tangled mess, strands sticking to both her and Gabe. Her skin was flushed with a rosy glow and he didn't think she'd ever looked sexier. Slowly, she opened her eyes and focused on him. Her gaze dropped to his cock, which was so hard it brushed his belly. She licked her lips.

"Lie down, Justin." The command was back in Gabe's voice, albeit as smoky as expensive whiskey. He pressed a soft kiss to Shelby's temple. "I want to watch you fuck him while you're still wet with my cum."

"Yes," she said, her eyes fixing on Justin's. "All right."

Obediently, Justin reclined back, propping his upper body with his elbows as he stretched out his legs. Gabe helped Shelby off his lap, holding her arm until she nodded to him to let go. She took the few steps to reach Justin's side and sank gracefully to her knees.

"Poor Justin." She stroked his throbbing cock with one fingertip. He bit the inside of his cheek to stop himself from telling her exactly what he needed. This was her show, and she was noticeably revelling in it. He loved seeing her like this, confident, uninhibited. Sure of what she wanted. "So patient. You deserve a reward."

Shelby leaned over him and replaced her finger with her tongue, giving him a long, voluptuous lick that set his cock twitching. Her cheeks hollowed as she sucked him into her mouth, one hand busy stroking what she couldn't fit inside, the other burrowing between his legs to play with his balls. Justin couldn't help cupping her face in one hand so he could feel the push of his dick against her cheek as she worked him with her tongue.

"That's it, Shelby," Gabe coached. "Suck him deep, all the way to your throat."

Not sure whether to be annoyed or amused, Justin flicked his eyes at the other man. Gabe was sprawled in the chair, absently stroking his still semi-erect shaft in one fist as he watched Shelby's head move over Justin's lap. Catching his friend's look, Gabe grinned and shrugged as if to say, "Sorry. Can't help it."

Justin decided he didn't care. Hell, he was pretty much certain Shelby could do whatever she wanted to him and it would still feel like heaven. But he was getting a little too close to that nirvana right now. As much as he'd love watching Shelby swallow his cum, right now he wanted to fuck her cunt more.

"Shelby." When she didn't respond, he stroked her hair away from her face and cradled her jaw until emerald-green eyes peered at him through lowered lashes, pink lips tightly wrapped around his cock. Oh, God, what a vision that was. He steeled his resolve. "Sweetheart, you can suck me off another time. Come up here and ride me."

He saw the smile in her eyes as she let his cock slide out of her mouth with a faint popping sound. Licking her lips, she threw a leg over him to straddle his hips.

"Whatever you want, lover," she purred.

Shelby eased down on his erection with excruciating slowness. Justin's elbows gave out on him and he settled flat on his back, oblivious to the cool linoleum against his skin, captivated by the sight of Shelby as she began to ride him.

“Oh, that’s the way,” Gabe murmured.

At first, Justin was content to just watch her berry-tipped breasts bounce as she rode him with a grinding motion that almost made him roll his eyes back in ecstasy. Shelby’s eyes glittered when he lost the fight to remain docile and clasped those bouncing breasts in large, long-fingered hands. Setting his heels against the floor, he met her pounding rhythm with powerful thrusts of his own. Shelby’s hands slapped over his, pressing his palms against her diamond-hard nipples as she screamed, the strong contractions of her cunt pulling a gut-wrenching orgasm from his cock in hot jets until he felt like his head would come off with it. Shelby collapsed against his chest while the fading aftershocks still trembled through both of them.

It was some time before Justin became aware of Gabe stretched out beside them, head propped in one hand, the other gliding over Shelby’s back from nape to ass. Justin felt Shelby’s lips curve in a smile against his chest as Gabe moved close enough to nibble her earlobe.

“Well, I’m ready for bed,” Gabe whispered. “How about you two?”

Shelby gave a murmur of half-hearted protest when Justin’s laughter dislodged her from her warm perch on his chest, held in the arms of her lovers.

Chapter 6

Shelby would never have believed having only six inches of mattress to sleep on would be so comfortable. Of course, what made it so was the warm male body curled around her back and bottom and another male body pressed just as cosily to her front, his head cradled against her breasts as she held him close. Neither man seemed to mind that Gabe's arm was draped equally over her waist and Justin's. Though she was almost certain the contact was non-sexual on the part of her lovers — her lovers! — stranger things had happened.

An unexpected jolt of desire zapped through her clit as she imagined what it would be like if Gabe and Justin did develop their own relationship. A few days ago, she wouldn't have imagined them sharing her, never mind her loving it when they did. To go from that to this, her body heating as she stared at Gabe's hand splayed casually on Justin's bare hip ... talk about deeply hidden desires. Instinctively, she twisted sinuously in their arms, rubbing herself against Gabe behind her and Justin in front.

Gabe's voice rumbled in her ear. "Awake already? Shelby girl, you are insatiable. It'll take the two of us just to keep up with you."

Shelby's chuckle turned into a gasp as Gabe cupped her breast and Justin obligingly moved his head the fraction of an inch it took to suck her stiffening nipple into his hot mouth. Gabe's chin settled on Shelby's shoulder and she knew he was watching Justin's cheeks hollow and fill as he suckled, working her nipple with tongue and teeth. She couldn't help grinding her ass into his groin, excited at the way his shaft stretched longer as he watched his friend.

“Do you like that?” he asked, eyes still on Justin’s lips where they wrapped around her nipple, sucking her breast deeper into his mouth.

“I love it,” she said, her breath ragged. “You should try it. Justin’s tongue can do some wicked things.”

Both men stilled.

Her nipple slid out of Justin’s mouth as he tilted his head up to look at her. The men shared uncertain glances, but she thought she saw a glimmer of speculation in their eyes. Burying her face in Justin’s thick blond hair to hide a secret smile, Shelby distracted them with a creative twitch of her hips that she’d learned over the past few hours that both men liked very much. Gabe cursed under his breath and Justin muffled his moan in the valley between her breasts.

They surprised her when, working almost as one, Gabe hitched up her leg and Justin guided it over his own hip, holding her in place with a firm grip on her knee. Gabe’s cock prodded her clit with a teasing stroke, then another, the length of him sliding easily through her wet folds. Justin’s dick was a thick rod against her soft belly, the tip dripping cum against her skin. When Gabe finally breached the entrance of her pussy and sank into her, she didn’t bother to bite back her cry of anticipation. Without hesitation, he powered into her with sharp jerks of his hips, the force of his fucking making her belly ride up and down Justin’s cock until he shouted hoarsely and she felt the hot pulses of his cum soaking both their stomachs. Gabe’s hand snaked up Shelby’s body to her breast, capturing one nipple between fingers and thumb. At the instant she felt him jetting into her pussy, he gave it a sharp, calculated twist. Shelby screamed in ecstasy.

* * * *

Shelby was awakened by the sound of Gabe and Justin talking softly. As she lay on her back, Justin’s fingers traced intricate patterns over her breasts, his touch so light it was almost soothing. On her other side, Gabe simply held her hand.

Justin glanced down at her face and smiled. “Hi. Did we wake you?”

Shelby stretched, glad that Gabe’s bed was big enough for the three of them, but didn’t let go of his hand. They’d long since kicked the tangled sheets off the bed, yet sheltered as she was between the two big, warm men, Shelby didn’t feel the least bit cold. “Not really. I was ready to wake up. So how is this going to work?”

“This?” Gabe asked.

“You know,” Shelby said, waving her free hand between the three of them. “Us. A restaurant. Business partners.”

“Partners in all things,” Justin said.

“Exactly,” Gabe agreed. “We can start drawing up our plans for the restaurant whenever you’re ready. Me and Justin have some money saved to get us started. We can get loans for whatever else we need. What Justin can’t get done with the two of us, he can get contractors in for.”

Justin was nodding along as Gabe outlined a plan they had clearly mapped out in advance. “Not a problem.”

Shelby bit her lip. “And us? It’ll be kind of hard to keep our relationship quiet.”

Gabe looked blithely unconcerned. “Why should we? I’m not saying we flaunt it, but what we do in the privacy of our own home is no one’s business. The restaurant and business office will be on the main floor and we’ll convert the upper level to suit us. No one ever has to come up here.”

It was odd, how parallel their thoughts were. Shelby still thought Gabe’s solution sounded a little too pat, but if anyone could pull it off, calm, confident, cool-headed Gabe was the man for the job. She’d like to meet the person who could face down Gabe about anything. Or Justin, if it came to that. He might not be as intractable about some things as Gabe, but he could be as immovable as a mountain when he chose to be. With these men at her side, she couldn’t do any less than stand tall and stare down all comers.

When Shelby didn't say anything, Justin used his thumb to tilt her face towards him. "Shelby? What do you say, sweetheart?"

She looked from blue eyes to gray and let her heart speak. "Yes."

Epilogue

Shelby opened the belly drawer on the ancient desk that Gabe had claimed as his own, searching for the contractor's estimate on the stainless steel countertops for the restaurant's kitchen. The sound of hammering carried down the stairs from where Gabe and Justin were busy doing the framing for their apartment on the second level. Instead of the folder Gabe used to keep all the estimates in one place, her eyes went to the plain white envelope addressed to Gabe and Justin in a bold, familiar hand.

Shelby glanced around to make sure she was still alone. If Gabe didn't want her to see this, she reasoned, he would have put it somewhere else instead of sending her down to fetch some paperwork. With trembling fingers, she slid out the lone sheet of paper and unfolded it.

*Boys,
Here's your chance to make Shelby happy. Don't screw up.
Love, Mike.*

She folded the letter with care, put it back in the envelope and returned it to the drawer.

The hammering had stopped while she wasn't paying attention. She wasn't surprised when she looked up to see them waiting for her in the doorway. Justin wore a heavy tool belt low on his waist, the jut of his hipbones just visible in the narrow gap between the hem of his T-shirt and the denim waistband. Gabe had discarded his own shirt,

and his broad shoulders were sheened with perspiration from his efforts. Justin flashed her a wicked grin as his hand dropped to the buckle of the tool belt and Gabe's eyes gleamed with sensual promise.

“Come on, Shelby girl,” he said. “You saw what the man said.”

As she walked to join the men she loved with body, heart and soul, Shelby thought how very lucky she was.

Thank you, Uncle Mike.

THE END



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