

A full-page illustration of a woman in a sensual pose. She is wearing a pink and black lace-trimmed bra, black fishnet stockings, and black high-heeled shoes. She is leaning against a light-colored, textured wall. The title "ALL SHE NEEDS" is overlaid in large, pink, stylized letters.

ALL SHE NEEDS

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The Wild Rose Press

www.thewildrosepress.com

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Publishing History

First Scarlet Rose Edition, 2007

Published in the United States of America

Welcome to the Legacy of the Celtic Brooch series. The authors of this series were handpicked by our editors at The Wild Rose Press, and asked to write a tale using an heirloom Celtic Brooch as the one constant in each story. Beginning in March, 2007 with English Tea Rose and Tarah Scott's *The Pendulum*, and ending sometime in early 2008 with Marly Mathews from the Faery Rose Line, we will follow this brooch on its mystical journey from Regency England to modern times.

It might show up as part of a dowry or be used to pay a ransom. It might be magical; it might simply be a piece of jewelry. Every author was asked to put her own spin on the brooch's appearance, and they have all done a beautiful job.

We welcome your comments on this series and hope that you will enjoy reading the stories as much as our authors enjoyed creating them for you.

Enjoy the journey!

RJ and Rhonda

Dedication

This one is for my girls: R.G. Alexander, Loribelle Hunt, Lillian Feisty, Dayna Hart, Karen Erickson, Jennifer Leeland, and Eden Bradley. And for my ever-patient and dedicated wunderkind editor, Diana Carlile. Thanks, y'all! You're the best.

All She Needs

"I don't want to see him again," Jennifer Campbell moaned. "Ever. *Why* did you have to marry his brother?"

She bobbed the phone against her ear as she danced in front of a full-length mirror in her bedroom. One dress after another got tucked under her chin, found lacking, and discarded. Too short, too frumpy, too ... blah. She couldn't do this. She couldn't see him again. He was loathsome, rude, gorgeous, commanding, sexy as hell. No, no, no. She hated him. He was an ass.

And God, he turned her inside out.

"Gee, Jen. I don't know. Perhaps because I was a little bit in love with him," her best friend, Emma, drawled sarcastically.

"Oh. That." Along with Jen, Emma and her husband, Paul, owned a law firm. Jen specialized in adoption cases. Which is why it had seemed intriguing that Paul and his brother Kevin had both been adopted. His business specialized in Celtic imports, and Jen's family was hip-deep in Scottish relatives. They had a lot in common, including a chemistry that could light the sheets on fire. She and Kevin had seemed perfectly matched.

Her body erupted in flames just thinking about him, his hands on her skin, his cock filling her slowly. Or quickly, depending on his mood. She shivered, her nipples peaking tight in the warm summer air that flowed through the open window. Shoving her long, dark hair over her shoulder, she

held another outfit in front of her. Yeah, this one would do. Kevin liked her in green. It shouldn't matter what Kevin liked anymore, and yet as she caught her reflection in the mirror, her dark brown eyes flashed with hot anticipation she couldn't contain.

Throwing the green dress on top of the others, she shook her head in self-disgust. This was a disaster. She could *not* do this. She could not see Kevin again. Not now, not ever.

Kevin. Just his name, just the thought of him was enough to shred her. The longing she felt for him was something painful. Anguish and bitter anger twisted like a live thing inside her. A year of her life had been wasted trying to break through the wall around his heart. She loved him too much not to try. For her, he'd been it. The One. Capital T, capital O.

But Kevin had scars. Physical and emotional. A lot of his resistance to getting in too deep with anyone was tied up in being put through the ringer in foster care before the Millers adopted him. He refused to talk about it with her. Refused to let her in.

Paul had found his birth parents and had a healthy relationship with them. She'd reasoned that if Kevin at least knew where he came from, he might be able to begin to deal with his past. And then he might be able to open up enough to let himself love her.

God, she'd been so stupid. Stupid, stupid, *stupid*. She couldn't fix him. He didn't want to be fixed. Perhaps he didn't *need* fixing. Perhaps he just ... didn't love her.

A sudden sob caught in her throat, and she pinched her eyes closed. God, it hurt. Six months later and it still hurt as bad as the day he left.

The memory of their last moment was branded in her mind. She'd used her law and social work contacts to track down information on his parents. She hadn't contacted them; she'd only gotten the information and given it to him, trying to prod him into some action that would help him start to heal. And he'd left her for it.

She'd apologized profusely, but it hadn't been enough. But then, when it came to Kevin ... she had never been enough.

Emma tsked softly. "Yes, I'm a horrible friend for not thinking of your needs when I decided who to marry."

A soft chuckle straggled out of her throat. Jen groped for a response that would make her friend laugh. Light conversation. Funny. Right. "I'll find a way for you to make it up to me."

Emma laughed, just as Jen had hoped. "It's just for Tim's baptism, or I wouldn't ask you to be in the same room together. But you're both the godparents, and well, you need to be present."

Stomping down the memories that washed over her in relentless waves, Jen forced herself to focus on the conversation. Baptism. Godmother. "Fine. But only because Tim is the cutest baby on the planet."

"He is, isn't he?" Motherly pride warmed her friend's voice, and Jen felt a stab of momentary jealousy. She wanted what Emma had so much. A husband who adored her. A family. Only she wanted it with Kevin.

Jen sighed. "All right, I'll see you in the morning."

A baby's cry sounded in the background followed by the low rumble of a man's voice. Emma spoke quickly. "Okay. Love you, honey. I'll see you. Ten o'clock, St. Anne's Cathedral."

"I'll be there." She turned the phone off, and it rang in her hand before she could set it down. The caller ID said it was her batty Aunt Lillian. She grinned and pushed the button. "Hey, Aunt Lilli."

"Hello, yerself, lassie." Lillian's soft Scottish burr sounded through the phone. "How are you today? Or perhaps it's yesterday there. I can never remember."

"I'm just peachy. How was your checkup?" Anxiety settled like a lead ball in her stomach. Aunt Lilli was the only close family she had left since her mom died of a heart attack three years ago. And Lillian had had some problems lately that made Jen's blood run icy cold.

Her aunt heaved a long-suffering sigh. "The heart's as fine as ever, lass. Dinnae worry yerself."

"Me? Worry? You've got the wrong girl." She grinned into the phone. She missed Lilli so much. She was going to have to make a trip to Scotland soon to see her again.

Lillian laughed. "No, not you. Of course not. I can't talk long. I'm meeting a gentleman friend down at the pub, so I must run. I wanted to tell you I'm sending you a present to remind you of where you come from." Ah, yes. Lillian was obsessed with their Scottish ancestry. Another reason Jen had thought Kevin so fascinating the first time she met him. Aunt Lilli would love him. "Should arrive tomorrow. Ta, love!"

"Wait! What is it—"

The line went dead in her ear. She looked at the phone and shook her head. That was Aunt Lilli. Sweet and a bit crazy. What could she have sent? With Lillian, she couldn't even begin to guess. Finding out tomorrow morning would be fun.

Tomorrow.

Unease filled her at the thought of what else she had to do. Aunt Lilli's gift might just be the only pleasant thing that happened to her in the morning. She hoped it was good enough to make up for seeing Kevin again.

But she doubted it.

* * * *

Jen rushed down the stairs, hopping as she went to stuff her feet into her shoes. She was so late. *Crap, crap, crap.* Grabbing her purse off the side table, she jerked the door open to find herself face to fist with the UPS delivery man.

"Here you go ... and sign here, please." The man smiled and handed her a clipboard. She scrawled her name on the appropriate line, and he gave her a stack of large envelopes with a small, brown package on top. It looked decrepit and tattered.

She dropped the envelopes on her table, and one of the bigger ones slipped behind it to land with a soft thud on the floor. Damn. She didn't have time to get it now; she was already running so. Very. Late.

Turning the package over, the wrapping crumbled in her hands. "Yuck." She wrinkled her nose.

Her Aunt's gift had obviously sustained serious water damage, and the address was smeared to the point that she couldn't read it. She hoped whatever Aunt Lillian sent her could withstand water or this present wouldn't be in one piece.

So much for her one fun thing this morning.

The box itself sagged to one side. Tugging at one of the side flaps, she could only watch as the package fell apart in her hands. Brown paper and cardboard flaked all over the floor in her entryway.

"Aww ... *man*." Totally her luck. Now she had a serious mess to clean up when she got home. Wonderful.

In the center of her palm sat a bubble-wrapped *thing* she had to assume was her present. Turning it over, she pulled up the tape that held the wrapping in place to reveal ... a brooch? Why would Aunt Lilli send her a brooch? Then again, it was Aunt Lilli. There was no telling why she did anything.

It was beautiful. All polished silver and smooth curved lines with a large stone embedded in the metal. She couldn't help but notice that it matched her outfit perfectly. She shook her head and smiled. Only Aunt Lilli.

God, she needed some of Lilli's spunk today, a little bit of luck to help her meet Kevin again. Her heart turned over, and her fingers tightened on the metal that warmed in her palm.

A horn tooted outside. Her cab. Crap. She was so late, and Emma was going to kill her. Dusting her hands off hastily, she affixed the brooch to her blouse and rubbed the tips of her fingers over the stone. "Do your job, my lucky charm."

The horn sounded again, only longer and louder. Shoving her purse strap higher on her shoulder, she hustled for the door. Please, please let this day be over soon.

* * * *

"Okay, godparents ... *smile*." The photographer lifted his camera for the hundredth time to snap a picture. Jen's face felt frozen in a toothy grin. Her arm brushed Kevin's as they posed with Tim between them. Every time she touched Kevin, pleasure arced through her until she wanted to scream from the intensity. How could he get to her so fast? It shouldn't be this easy. He hadn't said so much as a word to her in the last three hours. She swallowed. It was excruciating, the excitement he elicited without doing anything, and the awkwardness of feeling this way when he obviously didn't reciprocate.

She huffed a bitter laugh. That was the story of their relationship, wasn't it?

The photographer twirled the strap on his camera around his wrist. "All right, godparents. Take five minutes, and we'll do the last set with you and the parents. Let's get the grandparents in here."

The ceremony was over, thank God. Tim was officially baptized, and they'd all congregated for a huge party at Emma's parents' house. Or mansion, really. The Richards family had more money than Croesus, but they'd been estranged from Emma after her elopement with Paul for almost a year. It wasn't until she announced she was pregnant that her father finally came around. Jen rolled her

eyes. Typical Richards. How they had a daughter as normal as Emma, she'd never know.

She and Kevin stood off to the side, and she crossed her arms over her chest, shifting uncomfortably. Clearing her throat, she glanced at him. God, he was handsome. Tall, with broad shoulders that tapered into lean hips that his pinstriped suit showed off to perfection. His dark blond hair and deep blue eyes were what drew her. He had a charisma that made every woman stop and look.

His gaze dropped to latch onto her breasts, and her heart rate skyrocketed. Oh, God. She wanted his mouth there, his hands. Sucking her nipples, cupping her flesh. Her skin tingled at the memory of what he could do to her. Her nipples peaked tight and thrust against the lace of her bra. Six long months of abstinence reared its ugly head, and her hormones went wild. She shifted and brushed at her jacket. "Um ... is something wrong with my outfit?"

His gaze jerked up to meet hers before he looked away again. His shoulders drew in a tight line, and his mouth worked for a moment. "No ... uh ... you look fine."

"Fine." Gee, thanks. How lukewarm could he possibly be? And why did she care?

"Jen, I..." He stopped, his mouth opening and closing. "I wanted to say..."

"What? Say what?" He was driving her batty. He hated her, he didn't want to talk to her, he turned her on, he turned her down. She wanted to shake him for being so *him*. And then she wanted shake him all night long like that old 1980s

AC/DC song said. God, she was going nuts just standing this close to him.

"I wanted to say that..." His hand lifted and brushed her hair back. His eyes met hers, and for a second she thought she saw a glimmer of that old connection.

"Hey, you two. How are you doing?" Emma walked up and put her arm around Jen's waist for a brief hug before she drifted off again to stand beside the photographer.

Kevin groaned softly and scrubbed a hand through his hair. The single moment of warmth passed, and the distant Kevin she was used to took his place. And he was staring at her breasts again. He cleared his throat. "Um ... that's an interesting brooch you're wearing. Celtic, isn't it?"

Aunt Lilli's gift. Her body was screaming for his touch, and he wanted to talk about his business interests. As always, they were on different pages. They might even be in different books entirely. She sighed. So he wanted to talk to her about the brooch. Was he trying to buy it off her? That's what this was about, him talking to her, touching her?

Her spine straightened. No way in hell would she sell Lilli's gift. He could take a flying leap if he even offered.

And she'd been hoping he was hitting on her.

Jen, there was a memo about him not wanting you about six months back ... check your in-bin.

She rolled her eyes at her self-delusions. "I think so. My aunt sent it to me."

"Lillian?" A small smile curved his sensual lips, and he stepped closer, making the moment more intimate. There was nothing about him that didn't turn her on. It just wasn't

fair. It had been sheer torture to stand beside him this morning, smell his musky scent and not touch him, kiss him. "How is she?"

"Lilli's doing well." She ran a finger over the brooch. If she'd ever needed luck handling a situation, this was it. What would Lillian do? A soft grin tugged at her lips. Lilli wouldn't be in this situation; she'd never let a man get to her like this. She led them around by the nose, and then left them wanting more. Okay, she needed to at least act normal, even if she couldn't pull off her aunt's panache.

The cool metal of Lilli's gift warmed beneath her skin. "What can you tell me about it? This is your area of expertise, right?"

Her breath caught when he reached out to cup his fingers around the brooch. His knuckles brushed her breast. "Beautiful."

But he wasn't looking at the brooch. He stepped even closer, invading her space. Butterflies swarmed in her belly. His thumb moved to stroke over her nipple. This was so wrong, and so right. "If this is about you wanting the brooch ... it's not for sale."

His breath brushed her ear. "Did I *ask*? But you're right, there is something you have that I want. Badly."

Her eyes slid closed. What was he doing? The only way she could handle this whole thing was by knowing he didn't want her. He'd walked away. She was the one left wanting. She was the one with the broken heart. Lust and anger flashed through her, twisting into one hot rush of emotion.

"Okay." She jolted when the photographer spoke from beside her. "Just a few more, and we'll be done."

"Of course." Kevin's hand lingered on her breast for the briefest moment. Her pussy fisted tight. Every nerve ending in her body shrieked for him. Then he stepped back, leaving her body humming. Great. Just great.

Standing in an endless daze, she barely noticed when the photographer called an end to the madness. The party closed around her as she entered the large ballroom that spilled out into the rose garden. Someone pushed a flute of champagne into her hand.

She couldn't stop herself from glancing around for Kevin. He stood across the room next to Paul. If she didn't know they were both adopted, she would never have guessed they weren't related. Both were tall, blond and gorgeous. Both carried themselves with a quiet aura of ruthless power. Paul applied it in the courtroom, whereas Kevin wielded it to become successful in business. He'd worked hard and come a long way from the skinny, haunted little boy in the photo she'd seen at the Miller's house last Christmas. She'd always loved that about him, that he was willing to work to overcome the obstacles he'd had before him.

Past tense.

Loved.

No matter how hot he got her, she was still pissed. And hurt. The one thing he hadn't been willing to work to save was their relationship. Damn him.

Her hormones didn't seem to want to listen to reason because they rioted the moment she saw him. Her sex

clenched and dampened to an embarrassing degree as she recalled what his hands felt like stroking her skin. What his hot lips felt like on her nipples. What his tongue felt like when it licked over her clitoris.

She slammed her eyes closed and shuddered. His touch this morning only made the memories sharper.

God help her.

When she opened her eyes again, she found herself staring into that hot blue gaze she knew so well. Her heart jolted. His eyebrow quirked upward in wicked invitation, and everything inside her screamed with the need to accept.

No. Going down that road again with him was a bad idea. One experience with having her heart shattered was more than enough. He hadn't changed, he would never let her in. He'd find a woman content to stand on the outside looking in. Her insides froze at the thought of him with another woman, and she forced herself to turn away and walk down the hall. Some privacy and fresh air were just what she needed.

She sighed as the noise of the crowd faded away. Turning down corridors at random, she wandered until she stood at the end of a long hallway that ended in a huge bay window overlooking one of the Richards' many gardens. She crossed her arms and leaned against the windowsill.

How did he get to her like that? He'd barely spoken a word to her. But he'd touched her, been near her, and apparently that was all it took. God, she was pathetic. She wanted him. Now. Still. Always.

"Jen." Her heart seized at Kevin's deep voice behind her. He'd followed her.

Heat flooded her body, pooling between her thighs and surging into her cheeks. She pulled in a deep, steadying breath before she turned to face him. "Yes?"

See? That almost sounded normal. Like I don't care.

And she didn't. Of course not.

Liar.

He said nothing, just reached for her with startling speed. She sucked in a shocked breath as his mouth slammed over hers. Her fingers clenched his shoulders. To push him away? To pull him closer? She didn't know. Her body shook with the sensations rocketing through her. She squeezed her thighs together to ease the ferocious ache that rose inside her.

His tongue slid in her mouth to tangle with hers. Fire exploded in her belly, and she wrapped her arms around him, arching her body against his. Yes.

Undeniable. Unstoppable. What she felt whenever he was near. Her nipples peaked to chafe against lace of her bra. His fingers brushed up her ribs to cup the underside of her breast. Her breath whooshed out when he made firm contact with her nipple. He pinched her through her blouse.

She threw her head back and panted. "Kevin, I—"

But what could she say? Her thoughts scattered, and she couldn't focus. She just wanted more. Wanted his hands on her naked skin, his thick cock sliding into her hot, wet pussy. Her sex clenched.

He slid his tongue up the column of her throat, and his breath cooled the moisture on her skin. She gasped and shuddered. Swallowing, she forced herself to pull away, but he yanked her back against him.

"This is a bad idea." She said it to remind herself as well as him.

His mouth closed over hers again, cutting her off, and she couldn't hold back a low moan. Liquid fire coursed through her veins as his tongue mated with hers. She shoved at his suit coat, pushing it off his broad shoulders. Naked. She wanted to touch him, all of him, right now.

He stepped back, unbuttoned the top of his shirt and jerked it over his head to drop it on the floor. His hot gaze swept over her body, pausing on her breasts and between her thighs. "Undress. Now."

"Anyone could see us." She tried one last time to make herself see reason. Even as she spoke, she knew it was a futile attempt. Kevin wouldn't stop, and she didn't want him to. They both knew it.

A wicked chuckle was his only response.

Her fingers fumbled with the buttons on her blouse, baring herself to him. Shedding her clothes, she stepped out of her shoes and then kicked her skirt away. She stood in just her pink silk and black lace bra and panties. He groaned and reached out to stroke his finger down the upper slope of her breast. His fingertip swirled around the puckered crest. She whimpered, closed her eyes and leaned into his touch.

"Please, Kevin. More."

"Gorgeous. So hot and sexy." He dipped down to suck her nipple into his mouth. The lace of her bra only increased the sensations. Her fingers lifted to bury themselves in his thick blond hair, the strands tickling her palms. Want twisted through her when he bit her lightly, dragging his teeth over

he sensitive tip. His knuckles brushed over the swell of her stomach. He dipped his fingers between her thighs to stroke her clit through her panties. Her hips arched into his touch, working herself on his fingers. He pushed further in, sliding over her slick folds. The heel of his hand rode her clit, and she sobbed on a ragged breath. Her eyes slid closed as she moved with him.

God, it was so good, so amazing. But she wanted his cock inside her. "I need—"

"I know. I'll give it to you, baby." His hands slid around her waist and lifted her against the wall beside the window. She wrapped her legs around his hips and arched into him.

"You're so beautiful, Jen." He rotated his hips and ground against her from another angle. She cried out, clinging to his shoulders.

Beautiful. Hot. Sex words, not love words. Not the words she craved. She shoved the thought away. *Just enjoy this moment with him.*

His hips jerked, the material of his slacks rubbing hard over her clit. With the sensation building, she stopped thinking, gave up the fight and just felt. There was no past, no future. Only here. Only now. With him. God, it felt good. Perfect.

"Too many clothes," he gritted out, tugging at her bra.

"Jen?" a familiar voice echoed through the open window.

Jen froze. Emma was outside looking for her. Jen lowered her legs and scooted from between Kevin and the wall, her cheeks flooding with fiery heat. What was she *doing*? Was she insane? She must be. One touch and she was right back

where she'd left off six month ago. Stooping down, she picked her clothes up off the floor and stuffed herself back into them. She could hear the soft rustle behind her as he straightened his clothing. A few more minutes and they'd have been wearing nothing. It shamed her how much she wanted that, his hot, hard body pressed naked to hers.

"Jen, I—"

"Don't. Don't bother. We both knew where we stood before ... *this*." A soft, bitter laugh spilled from her mouth. "I wish ... I could settle for what you're willing to offer, but I can't. Nothing has changed. I want everything."

Working her feet into her high heels, she tried to pat down her hair. Oh, Jesus. She had sex hair. Everyone at the party was going to think she'd been fucking Kevin in one of the guest bedrooms. Only they hadn't moved to the bedroom. They'd almost done it right here in the middle of the hall. And she'd liked it, had gotten turned on by the danger of possible discovery. Her body still burned with unrequited lust from just standing near him.

She swallowed hard. It changed nothing between them. After this, she could never see him again. Emma would just have to accept the fact that Kevin couldn't even be at the same party with Jen.

He pulled in a deep breath. "What we had ... what we *have* is good, Jen. Before we—I was going to tell you—"

A small sob lodged in her throat. Her fingers curled into fists, and her nails bit into her palms. "I wish I had never met you."

She spun in the direction of the party, wanting nothing more than to escape, but his fingers wrapped around her bicep and brought her up short. His voice was a low growl of frustration. "Don't run from this, Jen."

Incredulity rippled through her, and she arched a brow. "What? Like you did six months ago?"

He winced and opened his mouth, but she just shook her head, turned and walked away from the only man she could ever love.

* * * *

When Jen got home, she put on pajamas and threw the clothes that still smelled of Kevin on the laundry pile. A small *thunk* sounded when they slid off the pile and hit the wooden floor. The brooch Lilli sent.

She plucked it from her clothing and cradled it in her palm. Turning, she walked down the stairs to pick up her cordless phone. She stepped around the mess from the brooch's package. Cleaning up could wait. Right now, she needed to hear the comforting burr of Lilli's voice.

Her aunt picked up on the first ring. "Hey, Aunt Lilli. I wanted to thank you for the brooch. It's beautiful."

She harrumphed. "Brooch? What's that you're going on about, lass?"

"The present you sent me? The Celtic brooch? You said it was supposed to remind me of where I came from." Had Lilli been drinking? Jen grinned. Maybe she'd just gotten back from her favorite pub.

"I didnae send a brooch. I sent an old picture of you and your mother when you visited me ... oh, fifteen years ago now. You're just a wee thing in the photograph."

Jen blinked for a moment before she remembered. The envelope that fell behind her side table. She hurried over to scoot the table forward. There it was. White with a thin layer of padding inside. She tugged open the flap, flipped the envelope over and caught the slim, framed photo of her with her mother. They looked so happy, both smiling hugely for the camera. Tears stung her eyes. Everything was so simple then. How had things gotten so twisted and confused? She felt jumbled up. Lost.

She cleared her throat to keep her voice from shaking with tears. "It's beautiful, Aunt Lilli. Thank you."

"You're welcome, luv. I knew you'd like to have it." She hummed in the back of her throat. "What was that you were saying about a brooch?"

"Oh. Nothing. It must have been misdirected." The doorbell rang, and her heart leapt in her throat. Kevin. "Someone's at my door, Aunt Lilli. I have to go. Thank you again for the picture. It's perfect."

"Call again soon, lass. I love you."

"I love you, too. Take care of yourself." She set the phone in the cradle and turned to answer the door.

Her heart slammed against her ribs when she saw Kevin standing on her doorstep. A tumble of emotion raced through her. Dread because she didn't want to see him again. She'd decided that this afternoon. Joy because, God help her, she loved him so much.

His gaze dropped to the brooch in her hand. Was he here to finish what they started before, or was he here because he wanted the brooch? Could he possibly be that mercenary? Her eyes narrowed to dangerous slits. Even if it wasn't from Lilli, she wasn't giving it to him. Her fingers clenched on the brooch. "Still not for sale."

"I don't want the damn brooch. That's not why I'm here." He shook his head and swallowed. Long moments passed before he spoke in a harsh rasp. "I ... I don't let people get close."

That was it? He came here to say that? After all they'd been through in the last eighteen months. After what happened at the party. Disgust and anger rolled through her. Disgust at herself for always wanting more than he was capable of giving. Anger at him for being everything she wanted and couldn't have ... and not leaving her to lick her wounds in peace.

"Tell me something I don't already know," she huffed and swung the door to shut it in his face.

He caught it with the palm of his hand. She glared at him when he used his superior strength to keep it open. "I love you."

"What?" Her breath seized in her throat. Nothing he could have said would have shocked her more. She rocked back on her heels, numb disbelief spreading through her limbs.

"It's something you don't already know. Because I was too much of an ass to tell you." A small smile lifted his lips and quickly fell flat again.

She shook her head, trying to clear her thoughts and make this make sense. "I ... don't understand."

"I love you, Jen. I can't lose you again. I can't. Another day without you is more than I can handle. And a whole lifetime?" He shrugged. "Why bother?"

It was too easy, too fast. Her whole world had been turned inside out in the blink of an eye. Suddenly, he decided he would give her everything she wanted. Or was this just him using what he knew *she* wanted to get what *he* wanted? Her ... back in his bed. He'd never made any qualms about how much he enjoyed her body. Her head throbbed, and she closed her eyes. Could she really do it again? Go back to him and spend her life hoping he could follow through on the words he had just spoken?

"No." She answered the question out loud. Tears burned her lids and pushed forward to slip down her cheeks. "I don't believe you."

It killed her to even say it. She wanted to believe more than anything. But people like Kevin didn't change overnight. A year with him had twisted her into knots. Her heart couldn't survive the beating twice.

"Jen..."

She opened her eyes to see he'd gone ghostly pale under his tan. Her vision blurred from the tears she couldn't seem to stop. She tried to close the door and again he blocked her.

"Please go away."

She gave up struggling with the door and spun around. Nausea bubbled up in her throat. Oh, God. She might be sick. Rushing for the bathroom, she slammed the door behind her.

Her arms and legs shook, so she leaned over the counter to try and hold herself upright.

The distinct sound of her front door closing reached her ears. She shivered, goose bumps rising on her skin. He was gone. She turned the water on full blast, dropped the brooch on the counter and scooped up handfuls to splash on her face. Choking sobs ripped from her throat. Would it ever get easier? Would the pain of it ever stop? In the months they'd been apart, it hadn't. Every day had gotten worse.

"Don't cry." She froze and looked up into the mirror to see him reflected behind her. He held the doorknob in his big hand, his knuckles white on the metal. He swallowed, and his Adam's apple bobbed. "Please don't cry."

She shut off the water but didn't turn around. She wanted to throw herself into his arms and promise whatever scraps of his affection he was willing to give her was good enough. Wasn't it better than the nothing she had now? Another tear slid from her eye. No. She couldn't do it. It might be good in the short run, but she'd never be truly happy. And she would eventually hate him for being who he was, for not loving her the way she needed him to.

She sighed. "You shouldn't be here."

"I know." A wry smile pulled at his lips. He stepped forward to brace his hands on either side of her hips. She could feel the heat and length of his erection pressing against her ass. Her pussy clenched, warmth flooding her system. Every time. Every damn time he touched her, was near her, it was like this. One of his palms moved to lay over the lower curve of her belly. Her breath caught as he slid it down to cup

her sex through the thin material of her pajama bottoms. He bent forward, and his tongue laved the back of her neck and around to suck her earlobe into his mouth. "Tell me you don't want this. Tell me to leave."

She couldn't. What happened that afternoon had only whetted her need for him. Her throat locked closed. She couldn't say the words that would send him away. Not again. She wasn't strong enough. Her eyes closed in defeat. "Please don't do this to me, Kevin. Just ... go."

"I can't." His arms wrapped around her from behind, hugging her to him. He laid his forehead against her hair and breathed deep. "I tried to walk away, baby. Tried to forget you, but I ... can't. I love you."

"No." Tears pressed against her lids to slip down her cheeks.

"Don't cry, baby. I'm sorry. For everything. I'll make it up to you." He pulled her around to face him, lifting her onto the counter. His fingers slipped between her knees, parting her legs to make room for his big body. His head dipped, and he kissed her slowly, worshipfully.

She couldn't believe him. She clung to that. Her heart and body and soul belonged to him, and only him. But saying he loved her didn't mean he'd changed. Words were easy to say. She was a lawyer. She knew all about what words could do and how empty they could be. But she couldn't force herself to pull away. She'd be selfish and take this last time with him.

How many more times could she say goodbye before she shattered into a million pieces? It didn't matter. She couldn't

resist. She loved him too much, and she would pay whatever price her heart demanded for giving in to temptation now.

Her arms slid around his neck, and she opened herself to him. His tongue swept in to tangle with hers. His hand closed around her breast, tweaking her nipple through the thin fabric of her cotton pajamas. She moaned, fire flooding her veins. The orgasm she'd been denied earlier screamed through her system, pushed her on. She wanted this so much. Him. Now.

Madness. This was madness. And she wanted *more*. She pushed him back, slid off the counter, dropped to her knees before him and hooked her finger around his belt to pull him closer. Her mouth watered as she remembered how it felt to have his cock slide over her tongue. She jerked at his belt and unfastened his pants. His long, thick cock sprang into view. Kevin never wore underwear. Her thighs locked as she shuddered, cream gathering on the folds on her pussy and dampening her pajamas. Her fingers wrapped around the base of his cock and slipped into his slacks to cup his soft sacs. His breath hissed out, and she flicked a glance up at him. He loved when she sucked him, and she loved the sense of power she got from having him at her mercy. She loved the taste of him.

Her tongue flicked out to lick away the salty bead of moisture that gathered at the tip of his cock, then she moved her lips down to caress the length of his penis and back up again. She sucked the bulbous crest into her mouth. His fingers threaded through her hair, twisting in the long locks as he groaned loudly. He shoved his cock deeper, and she took him in as far as she could.

His gaze clashed with hers, and his blue eyes burned as he watched his dick disappear into her mouth. She tightened her fingers around his cock and worked up and down his thick shaft with her hand. She grinned up at him before she flicked her tongue out to tease the head of his penis. Leaning forward, she sucked the length of him deep into her mouth until he nudged the back of her throat.

He pushed her away, his chest heaving. "Enough, Jen. Enough or I won't last much longer."

"But—"

"No." He pulled her to her feet. "I want you naked. *Now.*" He shoved his slacks all the way down, stepped out of them and moved back towards her.

She jerked her pajamas off, panting for breath. "Touch me."

"Yes." He turned her around and pushed her forward, bracing her hands on the counter on either side of the sink. His hand slid down to stroke over the globes of her ass, and her breath stopped as he dipped into her hot folds from behind. Heat arced across her nerves, and she pressed back against his erection. She wanted him, *needed* to feel him inside her again. She couldn't wait—she wanted to forget all the reasons she shouldn't do this with him.

Her eyes met his in the mirror, and she noted how his blond good looks contrasted with her darker features. "Hard and fast, Kevin. I need—"

"I've waited six months for this." He thrust in deep, seating himself to the hilt. His words jerked out with each push into her pussy. "Six. Fucking. Months."

The sensation of him stretching her pussy again made the world fade to nothing except this. Now. Need, hot and sweet, rushing through her. "*Kevin.*"

She shoved her hips back to force him deep inside her. His hips rotated, and she moaned at the drag of his flesh in hers. God, that was good. It was always good with Kevin. Always. And never enough. A sob caught in her chest, and she choked it back.

His hands closed over her breasts, fondling her curves. His nails raked over her nipples, and she cried out softly. The sound echoed in the small bathroom. The cool porcelain counter contrasted with the molten heat, flooding her system as he drove forward.

Her eyes slid closed, and she let the tingling heat wash over her. Her chest squeezed, and her heart bled at how much she loved him, how she'd never have more than this from him. God, save her. But nothing could. She was beyond saving.

Don't think about it, that was the key. Just forget everything but the sound of his flesh slapping against hers, the scent of her wetness, Kevin's cologne mixed with the musk of his skin. The hot press of his cock in her pussy as he thrust forward again and again and again. Fast, hard, deep. Just the way she liked it. Just what she'd asked for. Yes, forget everything else but *this*.

"Open your eyes, Jen. Look at me," he demanded.

She obeyed, and their gazes locked. They moved together in animalistic need, his hips slamming into her from behind to fill her to the limit. He was so big it was almost painful, which

just made it better. Hotter. And she watched all of it. Watched him move in her, on her.

Her knees shook as sensations rolled over her in relentless, never ending waves. Her orgasm hit her hard, pulling her under. Her pussy milked his length as she spasmed around it. Her orgasm went on forever. It ended too soon. She loved it. Craved it. Him. She threw her head back and sobbed, "Kevin."

"I'm here, baby. I'm with you." His hand pressed against the small of her back, arching her body to allow him deeper.

His hands cupped her ass, and his fingers slid inward to her cheeks to dip to the pucker of her ass. Her breath caught in shock as he pressed a long finger into her anus. Pleasure lashed her with merciless heat. Her back bowed, working herself on him harder, faster, deeper.

"Come for me, Jen." His deep voice was a command she couldn't deny.

Her sex fisted on his hard, thrusting cock. The world shattered around her again until there was nothing more than the ecstasy she found in his arms. Her pussy throbbed, and he worked his finger deeper into her ass, rubbing the head of his cock through the thin wall of flesh that separated them. It sent her spiraling higher, wider, further than she'd gone before. She screamed, twisting in his embrace.

He jerked back, sliding his cock and finger from her body. She moaned at the glide of his flesh in hers. He cupped her hips in his hands and pulled her back to press the blunt tip of his cock against her anus. Liquid fire rushed through her

veins. Oh, God. She loved it when he fucked her this way. She arched her back to spread herself further. "Kevin. Yes."

He groaned and pushed inside her with short, hard thrusts. She whimpered at the stretch, the burn as he filled her. He worked his cock in deep, thrusting slowly until her muscles relaxed. The drag of his cock inside her was amazing. She loved it, wanted more. Excitement raced over her skin, and she shivered. The slap of their hot, damp flesh as he thrust inside her again and again drove her wild, the musky scent of sex filling her nose. The sheer carnal pleasure of it was more than she could take, and it sent her skating to the very edge of her endurance.

"I'll going to come, Kevin," she sobbed out the words, her legs shaking from the power of it. He groaned, his body locking in a hard line before he jutted into her ass. Shuddering, he came, his heat flooding her body.

She screamed at the pleasure-pain of his thrusts, spiraling over into another orgasm as he came. It was too much, too fast. It overwhelmed her. Her eyes rolled back, and she collapsed in his arms.

* * * *

An hour later, they lay curled in her bed. She had no idea how long he'd stay. He'd never been one to snuggle after sex, but she wouldn't question it. She'd take tonight, enjoy it and not look back. It was foolish, she knew. It was the only thing she could do. Tomorrow was soon enough to kick herself in self-loathing.

Damn it.

Her fingers stroked up his forearm, and he tensed. She jerked her hand away as though she'd been burned. His scars. How could she forget? He'd never let her touch them. He caught her hand and brought it back to his arm, the marks formed unnaturally smooth, raised circles on his skin. "The scars are from one of my foster fathers. He used to put his cigarettes out on me."

Her mind recoiled in disgust, but she hugged him tighter. It felt like someone had punched her in the stomach. Tears clogged her throat at a small, helpless Kevin suffering through that. "You're amazing. To survive that and become who you are."

"They're ugly," he grunted.

"You're wonderful." She rubbed her toes down his calf. He chuckled, gliding his hand down her hair. That he was speaking about this at all stunned her. He *never* talked about his life before the Millers. She froze against his side, too afraid to even breathe in case it made him stop.

Leaning forward, he kissed her forehead gently. "I didn't really want to know who my biological parents are. I didn't want to know who would leave me to the kind of childhood I had. But I went ... because you wanted me to. I met my mother ... she was fifteen when she had me. A messed up kid with a messed up life who didn't know what she was doing. She didn't even know who my father was." He cuddled her closer, and she wrapped her arm tight around his lean waist. "You were right. I'm glad I went. I was afraid that if I met her, it would somehow cheapen what the Millers had done for

me. But it didn't. No matter what blood flows in my veins, they are my real parents."

She felt like all the oxygen had sucked out of the room as she came to one simple, undeniable conclusion. He had done it. Changed. The Kevin she had known would never have gone to see his mother. "Kevin, I—"

"Let me finish." His words came out in a quiet rush, as if he was afraid she'd refuse to listen. "I love you, Jen. And you were right. About all of it. I did need to come to grips with my past before I could move forward into my future. I want you to be a part of that future. If I ... hurt you too much, I understand. But I came here today to ask for a second chance." He lifted her palm to his lips and placed a soft kiss in the center. Shivers ran down her spine at even that simple touch. "I want us to get married. I want to have babies like Tim. I just—I *need* you in my life, Jen."

Joy exploded through her, and she finally believed. Truly, deeply believed that he could let her in. That he *had* let her in. That he could love her. Her heart squeezed at the wonder of it. "Kevin—"

"Don't say no. Just think about it. I'm willing to take this as slow as you need, but I wanted you to know what I want. You. Just you ... for as long as we both live." He pulled in a breath like he was going to continue arguing his point.

"I love you, too." She cupped his jaw in her palm and pulled him down to meet her lips in a slow, hot kiss. Their mouths moved together in a sensual play of lips and teeth and tongues. He groaned low in his throat, his hands curving over her ass to pull her closer to his rising erection. She

squirmed, lust exploding deep within her until her control slipped through her fingers.

"Say it again," he demanded.

"I love you, Kevin. I want to marry you. I've loved you from the moment we met."

His breath whooshed out, and his eyes squeezed closed for a moment. "When you left me standing in the hall earlier, I thought I'd lost you forever. Never walk away from me again. Never."

"I won't. You've got me for life." She smiled up at him. Her thighs parted to move closer to his hard cock.

"Thank God." He rolled her under him, and she lifted her knees to clamp on his hips. His cock thrust deep inside her, and they both moaned at the penetration. She arched in his arms, her heart twisting at the feelings he elicited. "I love you, Jen. I'll always love you."

All the emotions racing through her coalesced at that moment, and she exploded in his embrace. Tears slid unchecked down her cheeks. "I love you, too. Forever."

* * * *

Venice, Italy—Six months later

This was the most perfect honeymoon ever. The sun bathed Jen's face as she leaned back in her chair at the outdoor café. Kevin had gone inside to pay the tab, and then an afternoon of sightseeing awaited them. Perfect.

She reached into her purse for her sunglasses. Her fingers closed around something hard, cool and metallic. Frowning, she pulled it out. The mysterious brooch that *hadn't* been

Aunt Lilli's gift. They never did find out who it belonged to or where it came from. The smooth silver and big green stone winked in the sunlight. She smiled, running her thumb over the rounded lines of it. It had been her conversation starter with Kevin—a lucky charm.

She shifted to pin it to her lapel, but froze before she did. No. She shouldn't keep it. Something told her it wasn't hers to keep. It had a journey to complete, and she was just one step along its path. She laughed at the foolish notion, but she couldn't shake the feeling. Maybe the brooch needed to be a lucky charm for someone else. It had come to her by happy accident, so perhaps it needed to go to someone else the same way.

"Ready to go, Jen?" Kevin's deep voice caressed her ear as he leaned in behind her. Shivers ran down her back.

She turned in her seat, lifted her palm to his cheek and pressed her lips to his. He hummed low in his throat, and his tongue swept out to slide along her bottom lip.

"Let's go back to the hotel." His tone promised wicked things. She shuddered, her nipples peaking tight at the thought of what he might do to her. God, she loved him, loved the way he made her feel.

He pulled her to her feet, and she reached to pick up her purse, the brooch still cradled in her palm. She let it drop to the table, scooped up her bag and stepped toward Kevin. Her heart squeezed as she looked up at his handsome face. His features softened, and he dipped to kiss her again.

Love and excitement spun together inside her as she let him lead her away from the café, but she couldn't help a

quick glance back at the brooch left sitting there. It felt right to leave it. She couldn't explain why, but everything was just as it should be.

She didn't need any more lucky charms. She had all she needed. With Kevin.

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