



Loose Id

sweet dreams

EVANGELINE ANDERSON

SWEET DREAMS

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Published by
Loose Id LLC
870 Market St, Suite 1201
San Francisco CA 94102-2907
www.loose-id.com

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ISBN 978-1-59632-970-6
Available in Adobe PDF, HTML, MobiPocket, and MS Reader

Printed in the United States of America

Editor: Barbara Marshall
Cover Artist: April Martinez

Chapter One

"Girl, you are just nasty – trying to get with your own cousin."

Alisha Johnson blew out an exasperated breath and glared at her best friend. "How many times do I have to remind you that Clayton isn't actually my cousin? His dad was married to my aunt Linda for a minute – that's all."

"A minute, huh? Try fifteen years – you've been knowing that boy since you were seven and he was ten. You grew up together." Deelah tossed her long red and gold curls impatiently so that they glimmered in the dim overhead light of the Sin Shack, their favorite after-hours bar. Heads turned when she made the gesture, which was, of course, the idea.

At the moment, Alisha wanted to grab a handful of that gorgeous hair and yank it out by the roots. She could remember back to when she and Deelah were both nappy-headed little girls in grade school together, but since she'd gotten her fancy job at VELA Labs, Alisha's best friend had changed. Her new employer specialized in cosmetic genetic corrections, and Deelah had taken full advantage of her employee discount, getting gene therapy to fix her hair and grow her boobs from an A cup to a double D almost overnight. She had a new attitude to match her new look, and to Alisha's mounting frustration, it seemed like her IQ had dropped as her bra size grew. Still, it

was Deelah's new job that might finally give her a shot at Clayton—if her stubborn best friend would just cooperate and help her out, that was.

"I *know* we grew up together, and believe me, if his dad and my aunt were still married, I wouldn't even look at him," she said earnestly. "But since they're divorced now, he's fair game as far as I'm concerned." Of course, she was lying through her teeth. She'd wanted Clayton from the minute she'd first laid eyes on him. As far back as childhood, her heart had singled him out, and since there were no real blood ties between them, she felt no guilt about that. Her family, however, was likely to look at it a whole different way—the same way her best friend was viewing the situation, no doubt. But Alisha didn't want to think about that.

Deelah is just being stubborn, going on and on about the whole family business. Clay and I aren't really related—not by blood anyway. And it's not like we look anything alike either, she thought resentfully. It was true. Anyone looking at the two of them together would never guess they went to the same family reunions in a million years.

Clayton was six feet two with broad shoulders and muscular arms Alisha ached to feel wrapped around her. His father was white, but his biological mother had been part Sioux Indian, which showed in his sharp features and honey-colored skin that was a few shades lighter than her own *café au lait* tone. His name was a derivative of *Chaton*, which meant "hawk" or "bird of prey" in Sioux, and he looked the part with his blue-black hair and high cheekbones. But his most striking features, as far as Alisha was concerned, were his pale gold eyes. They were gorgeous and absolutely natural, unusual in the world of 2046 where gene modification was becoming as normal as getting your teeth whitened or your hair styled.

Alisha was all natural too. She was a delicate five-two with long, wavy black hair that felt to the small of her back. But just because she was petite didn't mean she wasn't built. There was no need for her to get gene therapy augmentation to be happy with her breasts and she had a booty you could make a sandwich on, as one of her old

boyfriends used to say. Her eyes were a changeable hazel that could be gray or green, depending on her mood. Right now they were probably blazing green because she was so pissed at Deelah. Unfortunately, her best friend was on her high horse and giving her the look right back.

"You're not fooling me one minute, girl—I see how you look at Clay. And why else would you beg him to let you room with him when you moved to the 'big, bad city'? It's not like Tampa is New York or L.A., you know—you could find yourself an affordable place in NoHo or Hyde Park and not have to worry about getting raped or killed when you came home at night. But *noooo*, you were all like, 'Oh, Clay, I don't know what I'll do if I have to come home to an empty house. I'll feel like every shadow is a burglar about to jump me.'" Deelah made her voice high and breathy and fluttered her hands, with their long, manicured fingernails, in the air, as if fanning her face to keep from fainting.

"All right, all right, I admit it—I didn't just want to live with him because I was afraid," Alisha growled in exasperation. "But I never actually asked to move in—he *offered* to let me room with him while I was doing nursing school, and I accepted."

"Okay, now we're getting somewhere." Deelah nodded in obvious satisfaction. "So you've had two years and you're done with nursing school. Now you've got your degree, you can get a nice paying job and afford a place of your own, someplace really nice, so your excuse for bunking with your cousin is about to run out."

"Don't remind me." Alisha sighed. "And *don't* call Clay my cousin—he's not anymore and hasn't been for the past two years since his dad and my aunt Linda got divorced."

"Mmm-hmm. Which means you've had two whole years to work on him, living under the same roof and with your family ties technically dissolved." Deelah put a hand on her hip and arched one eyebrow. "And you haven't gotten *anywhere*. Girl, what makes you think I can help you? I can give you some dating tips, but I can't work miracles, you know."

"I don't *need* dating advice," Alisha said through gritted teeth. "What I need has to do with your job."

"The lab?" Deelah brightened up at once. "Oh, I get it—you want to use my employee discount, don't you? Well, I think that's a great idea. I always thought you'd look better just a couple inches taller—I mean, you're so tiny it's almost like you're a midget. And that plain black hair you've got going is so boring. Get a few blonde and silver streaks working, and you'll have to beat the men off with a stick."

Alisha took a deep, calming breath and reminded herself that they were in a public place with witnesses. That meant using Deelah's long gold and red curls to strangle her was out even though she felt sure that no judge in the land would convict her of murder if they could hear the asinine things that came out of her friend's mouth sometimes.

"For the last time, I don't want to change my body in *any way*," she said. "What I want has to do with those drug trials you were telling me about—remember, the sleeping pill that's supposed to help the first wave of colonists get through hypersleep when they make the trip to the Mars colony?" Deelah had told her about it months ago—how VELA Labs was developing the new drug for free as a patriotic service to the government. The Mars colony was going to be the fifty-first state, and it was all ready to go, except for the people. Experts on Earth had built and terraformed it entirely by remote. In fact, Clayton had been a consultant in the process since he had a double degree in xenogeology and low-G ecology.

The problem with the colony was getting people there, along with all the raw materials they needed to live. The fuel alone to get out of Earth's atmosphere took up most of the weight capacity of the rocket transporting the colonists. This left little allowance for things like personal items and food. Even freeze-dried rations—the traditional cuisine of space travel—could take up plenty of space if enough of it was brought to feed every man, woman, and child who were colonizing the Red Planet for the one-point-six years it took to get to Mars. It simply wasn't feasible to send a shuttle

big enough to hold the colonists and all the food they would need to live for that amount of time. Accordingly, scientists had been working on hypersleep—a type of controlled hibernation that slowed the human metabolism down dramatically. A subject in hypersleep would age only a day for each year spent in the state of suspended animation—it was the perfect solution.

Perfect except for one thing. Scientists had found that subjects who endured long stretches of hypersleep woke with extreme mood disorders and emotional disturbances because they weren't having enough dreams to keep their brains healthy and active. The answer lay in the drug that VELA Labs was developing, a REM sleep enhancer that resulted in vivid and prolonged dreams. It was called *sweetdreams*, and they had been holding the final clinical trials for it at the time that Deelah had told Alisha about it. As soon as the drug was perfected, it would be used on the first wave of colonists who were set to ship out on the Fourth of July—just a few weeks away. Very patriotic—and a perfect fit for Alisha's plans. But Deelah was already frowning again.

"Those trials are over, girl. Sweetdreams is ready to go—the lab doesn't need any more test subjects."

"No, you don't get it." Alisha shook her head impatiently. "I don't actually want to participate in a trial—I just want Clayton to *think* I am. That's why I need your help."

"What?" Deelah looked at her like she'd gone crazy. "How is pretending to take part in a drug trial that's already over going to help you get your cousin—sorry—your *man* in the sack?"

Alisha sighed. She'd been working on this plan for ages, and if she could just get Deelah to help, she might actually have a shot with Clay. This was her last chance and she didn't want to blow it.

"Okay—remember how you told me that everyone who participated in the trial had to have someone else sign up with them—someone to watch them and be sure they didn't hurt themselves?" she asked. "Because it makes you act out your dreams if you're not actually in hypersleep—right?"

"Of course I remember. I told you about it." Deelah frowned. "But I still don't understand why you want to pretend you're taking the sweetdreams drug. How is that supposed to hook Clayton for you?"

Alisha gave her a small, secretive smile. "I promise I'll give you all the juicy details if it works. Now, will you help me or not?"

To her relief, Deelah actually grinned back. "Girl, you're too sly for me. I don't know what you're up to, but I can tell this means a lot to you."

"It does—it really does." Alisha took her best friend's hand and squeezed it.

Deelah squeezed back. "And you really think whatever you're planning will get Clayton to notice you?"

"He already notices me," Alisha said in a low voice. She thought of the hot, hungry way Clay looked at her when he thought she didn't notice, of the way his big hands lingered on her skin whenever they accidentally touched. Of the way he'd looked at her that night the week before when she'd spilled hot cocoa down her front and he'd helped her take off her shirt. She'd been so close then, and if the phone hadn't rung, giving them both a heart attack and Clay a bad case of family guilt...but there was no use thinking about that now. She had a foolproof plan, and if she could just get Deelah on board, it might actually work.

"You're sure you're not just imagining it because you want him so much?" Deelah asked skeptically.

"No—it's real. I can feel his eyes on me whenever we're home alone together," Alisha murmured, remembering those pale gold eyes trained on her body, when Clay watched her like the hawk he was named for. There was no way she was telling her friend about the other night after her cocoa spill, though. Some things were too private to share. "I think—I hope—he wants me as much as I want him, but he can't get past the whole family ties thing."

Deelah arched an eyebrow. "If you mean he still thinks of you as his younger cousin, you can hardly blame him for that, Alisha."

"I know, I know." Alisha traced a pattern on the wooden bar in front of her. "But the fact is we really *aren't* related anymore. And I know if I could just get him to break through that one barrier, he'd be willing to admit that he feels for me the same way I feel for him. He just needs a little poke in the right direction."

Deelah shook her head. "All right, just call me Cupid then, because I'm going to help you *poke* his ass with the arrow of love, girl." She grinned, and in her smile, Alisha could see the mischievous, nappy-headed girl who had been her friend long before the fancy job and gene therapy.

"Thank you!" She threw her arms around her friend's neck in a spontaneous hug. Deelah could be a pain sometimes, but she had her good points too.

"You're welcome." Deelah sighed and hugged her back. "I think we're getting Valentine's Day mixed up with the Fourth of July, but what can you do? I just wish I knew what you had in mind."

"You'll see," Alisha promised, her full lips quirking up into a naughty smile. "Now here's what I need you to do..."

Chapter Two

"Are you sure this drug testing is a good idea, cuz? Sorry, I mean Alisha." Clayton Daniels frowned at his cousin in concern. Well, she wasn't *really* his cousin anymore, as she was constantly pointing out, but he couldn't help still thinking of her that way.

After all, he'd taught her how to swim and ride a bike and roller skate, and he'd bought her ice cream when she fell down and skinned her knees and cried. He'd looked out for her and protected her from bullies when they went to the same school together and helped her with her homework when she needed it. Years later, they'd spent long, lazy summer afternoons floating in her pool together and talking prom dates and college plans. They called each other "cuz" and laughed and flirted gently in the way you do with someone who is completely safe because they're completely off-limits. And if he'd ever been tempted to think how good Alisha looked in her bikini with her full cocoa-colored breasts pressing against the thin hot-pink fabric and her nipples tight from the cool blue water of the pool, there was always a family member somewhere near to remind him that his younger cousin was forbidden territory – totally out of bounds no matter how much he wanted her.

So Clayton tried his damndest not to want her.

Oh, he still looked at her from time to time – they lived in the same house, after all, and he was only human. Plus, the little outfits Alisha wore around the house sometimes would try the patience of a saint. But he never acted on it. And he never would, not as long as he saw his stepmother Linda and his Aunt Tandy – Alisha's mom – at every family reunion. He still went to each and every one, even though his dad had been stupid enough to leave Linda two years before. Alisha's family had opened their arms to him when he was a heart-hungry boy searching for love and needing affection. There was no way he would repay their kindness by having what they would no doubt consider an unnatural relationship with the baby of the clan. Just thinking about it was enough to make Clay feel dirty inside – as guilty as if he'd actually seduced Alisha instead of just fantasized about it.

The guilt he felt for wanting his younger cousin was so intense that he hadn't laid a hand on her growing up. He'd even resisted his natural impulses for the past two years while they'd been living under the same roof, ever since she'd been accepted to the University of South Florida nursing school and moved to Tampa. And now that she was graduating and would be able to afford a place of her own, Alisha would be moving out. Clay had to admit that he had mixed feelings about that. Despite the guilt, he was genuinely fond of his cousin and he knew he would miss her quirky sense of humor and warm, infectious laughter. He'd dated a lot, but no other woman seemed to click with him quite the way Alisha did. Nobody else could finish his sentences or make him laugh when he was feeling down or find all the knots in his neck and massage them out after he'd had a hard day at the office.

On the other hand, it was probably a *good* thing she was leaving, Clay admitted to himself. His self-control had been stretched to the breaking point lately, and sometimes it was all he could do not to grab Alisha and pull her close for a long, hot, hungry kiss. He could just imagine holding her soft, curvy little body in his arms, making her moan for him, sucking those ripe nipples until she squirmed against him and begged him to lick lower, to taste her wet pussy... In fact, just the other night he'd almost lost control

completely, and only a phone call from his aunt, Alisha's mom, had kept him from making a terrible mistake.

It had been last Thursday—which was their movie night—and they'd been watching the latest cheesy 3-D horror flick on his plasma wall. Alisha had been wearing a baggy old T-shirt to start with, but then she'd jumped during a scary part and spilled hot cocoa down her front...

* * * * *

"Ow! Shit! Help me, Clay. Damn, that burns!" Alisha grabbed at the soaked cotton material, pulling it away from her chest. A chest that Clay had been trying not to look at all night since it was obvious she didn't have a bra on. Her hard little nipples poking at the thin shirt proved that—not that he was staring because he absolutely wasn't. But still...

"Here—what do you want me to do?" Grabbing the hem of the shirt, Clay looked at her for instructions. Surely she didn't want to take it off when she was bare underneath? But apparently Alisha didn't care about her state of undress.

"Off! Get it off!" she gasped, yanking at the shirt.

Clay helped her pull it over her head as quickly as he could, but despite his best efforts, it somehow got tangled around her arms, which gave him a full-frontal view of her round, beautiful breasts as she struggled to get the shirt all the way off. The delicious globes jiggled as she moved, and her nipples looked like ripe blackberries, the areolas tight and crinkly around the fully erect nubs as the cold air hit the sensitive area. He had a sudden, almost overwhelming urge to lean forward and suck one of them into his mouth.

Pushing the image of himself bent over his cousin's breasts away, Clay finished getting her out of the shirt and looked at her with concern. "You okay, cuz?" he asked softly, cupping her chin in one hand.

"Fine—just a little scalded." She tried to laugh, but her eyes were full of pain. It made him want to make things all better for her the way he always had.

"Let me get you a cool, wet washcloth for the burn." He jumped off the couch, trying not to notice how naked she looked now that the only thing she had on was a tiny pair of white lace boy-short panties. The pale fabric contrasted beautifully with her coffee-and-cream skin tone, making her look exotic and incredibly desirable.

"Thanks," Alisha murmured when he came back with a cool, damp cloth. But she made no move to take it from him.

Looking down, Clay could see the pinkish tinge to the cocoa skin between her breasts—the place where she'd been burned. Without thinking, he reached forward and laid the cloth gently on her chest, very aware as he did so that his fingers were grazing the inner mounds of her full breasts with only the thin cloth between his hand and her skin.

"Mmm, that feels much better. Thanks, Clay. You would have made a good nurse." Alisha smiled at him, apparently unashamed to have him looking at her breasts as he administered first aid. Clay wondered if she was just so comfortable with him that even being half naked in his presence didn't affect her, or if the pain of the scalding liquid down her front was still uppermost in her mind. He hoped she wouldn't be embarrassed later when she remembered the way he'd stroked the cloth over the valley between her breasts.

"Is this good?" he murmured, nodding down at the cloth. "Am I getting it all? I mean, everyplace you were burned?"

"Well, to be honest..." She bit her lip, her cheeks getting almost as pink as the area of skin that had been scalded.

"Tell me," Clay urged her. "I know this is a little, well, awkward. But if there's anything else I can do..."

"I think some of the cocoa spilled, you know, further out. Not just in the middle." She nodded down at his hand, and Clay realized she was talking about the area closer

to the center of her breasts—her nipples. Was she actually asking what he thought she was asking?

"What—here?" he murmured huskily, stroking the cloth over her sensitive skin, just grazing the taut peak of her right nipple. "Did you get burned here too, baby?"

"Uh-huh. The other one too." She looked up at him, her full lower lip caught between her white, even teeth. "You know, there's some first aid burn gel in the kitchen. Do you think you could...?"

"I'll be right back." Clay was up off the couch and into the kitchen before he could talk himself out of it. His brain was in overdrive, remembering the way she looked, sitting topless on the couch, her long black hair around her shoulders, wearing only the thin lace panties. Somewhere in the back of his brain, a little voice was screaming that this was wrong, that Alisha was his younger cousin and he couldn't possibly be doing this, but Clay did his best to ignore it. After all, he was only giving her first aid. Where could be the harm in that?

He had his answer when he got back to the living room. Alisha lifted her head and looked at him, her changeable hazel eyes blazing green, her full breasts pushed out invitingly as though she was waiting for his touch. Clay could feel himself getting incredibly hard inside his jeans. God, she was hot! He only hoped she didn't notice that her innocent beauty had gotten him into such a state.

"I got it," he said, unnecessarily, sitting back down beside her. "Do you want me to..." He let the sentence trail off, uncertain how to finish it. *Do you want me to rub it all over your breasts?* just sounded wrong, even inside his head.

Alisha looked at him with uncertainty in her beautiful eyes. "Would you mind? Sometimes it's easier to let someone else treat you when you're in pain. That cocoa was really *hot*."

Clay suddenly felt dirty for wanting her, for looking at her like a sex object when she was obviously hurting and in need of his help. God, you're such a perverted

asshole! he told himself angrily. Get a grip. Alisha needs help—not some sick bastard pawing all over her.

"I...I don't mind," he said, his mouth suddenly dry. "I'll try to be gentle."

"I know you will. Thank you, Clay. You're so sweet." Alisha gave him her beautiful smile. She could light up a room with that smile and still make him feel like it was all just for him.

Hoping his hands wouldn't start shaking, he squeezed a tiny amount of the slick, clear ointment onto his fingertips and started spreading it over her skin. He started with the sensitive area between her breasts, smoothing gel over the pink-tinged skin as carefully as though Alisha was made of porcelain and might break. But soon he couldn't resist going just a little farther out, and soon he was stroking the slippery balm over the outer slopes of her breasts on either side, getting closer and closer to her nipples.

"Oh, Clay," she murmured, and it made him even harder to hear the way she said his name. It fell from her full lips like a caress, like a prayer as he added more gel to his fingertips and began to circle her naked nipple.

"Does that feel better, baby?" he asked tenderly, as the tight little nub hardened under his hand.

"So much better," she breathed, thrusting forward just a little and offering him better access to her full breasts. "Do the other one now, Clay. It hurts too."

"Okay." He watched, mesmerized by his own hand and fingers spreading the cool, slippery ointment over the sensitive peak of her other nipple. Watched as Alisha nibbled her full bottom lip, her breathing coming fast as he stroked the intimate area. The sight of his tan hand on her warm brown skin was the most erotic thing he'd ever seen, and his cock felt like a bar of lead in his jeans—heavy and throbbing with the need to fuck. Forgetting that he was supposed to be performing first aid, he pinched the sensitive little nub gently, eliciting a soft cry from Alisha.

"God, Clay, you're so good at that!" She moaned throatily, her body undulating beneath his hand. "Feels incredible. I mean...so much better."

"That's what I want, baby. Just want to make you feel good," he murmured, tugging at the other taut peak as well. The burn gel was forgotten now, and all his attention was focused on bringing her pleasure and watching her beautiful face as he stroked and fondled her nipples.

He wondered if the cocoa had spilled any lower. Unbidden, the image of his hand traveling down the soft curve of her abdomen rose in his mind. He could almost see his fingers sliding into the lace hem of her panties and cupping her hot cunt mound. Alisha would cry out and spread her legs wider, opening her pussy for his seeking fingers. And Clay would stroke inside her, entering her with his fingers, pushing deep into her hot, wet, slick depths as she ground against him, moaning and begging for more, begging him to fuck her with his tongue, to fuck her for real...

Suddenly, a phone chiming impatiently shattered his fantasy. Who could be calling now, at this time of night? And could their timing possibly be worse? He was just inches away from having every wet dream he'd ever had about Alisha come true and now...

"Alisha? Clayton? Is anybody there? Pick up," his aunt Tandy demanded over the phone's autospeaker.

Both of them froze.

Neither of them moved to get the phone, which had finally stopped squawking, but the magic moment was clearly over. In front of him, Alisha sat bare breasted on the couch with a deer-in-the-headlights look on her face, and Clay suddenly realized what he was doing—he was feeling up his younger cousin. She'd hurt herself and come to him for help and what had he done? You turned a little first aid into a goddamned X-rated freak show, he told himself angrily. Alisha needs your help, not your sick desires. What the hell is wrong with you? He pulled his hands away from her breasts and capped the burn gel quickly.

"I guess we'd better —"

"It's getting really late so —"

They both spoke at the same time, and Clay noticed that Alisha was now clutching a throw pillow to her naked breasts. God, what must she think of him? Did she hate him for what he'd done?

"I'm sorry, Alisha," he said awkwardly. "Really. So damn sorry. I just got...got carried away."

"That's okay." She shrugged, obviously trying to look nonchalant. "You were just...just helping me. That's all. I appreciate it."

"You're welcome," he said, feeling even more awkward. "Well I guess...guess we should get to bed. Our own separate beds, I mean," he added quickly, feeling like an idiot.

"Of course," she murmured, nodding. Was there a look of disappointment in her beautiful eyes? They were gray now, like the sky before a storm. Was she that upset about what had happened between them? About what had nearly happened—what probably would have happened if the phone hadn't rung?

Clay mumbled another apology and ran off to his room, feeling like an asshole. But he was grateful for the phone call that had stopped things before they went too far. Alisha had such a sweet nature and loving heart—he could imagine her going along with whatever he wanted just because she loved him so much. Loved him as a friend. As a cousin. And he would have been taking advantage of that love if he'd laid her back on the couch and pulled off her panties to taste her naked pussy the way he'd wanted to so badly.

Clay could just imagine her offering herself, opening her legs, and spreading her wet little cunt when he asked. Alisha would have accepted his fingers and tongue inside her without question. Hell, she probably would even have spread for his cock, let him slip his entire aching hard length deep in her wet pussy. She would have allowed him to fuck her and come in her if he'd asked. She would have done it even though it would have broken her heart with how wrong it was to give him what he so desperately wanted. What he craved...

* * * * *

"I told you why I have to do this, Clayton. I was hoping you'd understand and help me."

Alisha's sweet voice dragged him back from his reverie, and Clay realized with a surge of guilt that he'd been fantasizing about her again. His own younger cousin and he was imagining fucking her—how sick could he get? His only consolation was that Alisha was too innocent to know how he felt about her. Despite the awkwardness between them that night, she'd been treating him as if nothing had happened ever since. In fact, she'd even asked him to be her sponsor and caretaker during the drug trial she was determined to participate in. Which was why they were sitting outside VELA Labs right now, wasting time as his electric land rover idled quietly by the curb.

"Sorry." He shook his head, trying to get back in the conversation. "I just...I wish I knew why you're so set on testing a drug for a company you don't even like."

Alisha set her small jaw, her eyes going green. "It's what I can do to help out the colonization effort. By rights, I ought to be signing up to ship out to Mars myself—they need medical personnel, and I could be really useful out there as a nurse."

"So why don't you go then?" Clay tried to keep his voice light, but he couldn't help feeling the sudden stab of panic around his heart. He didn't even like to think of his cousin moving out of the house, let alone taking a one-point-six-year trip to a new world without him.

"Silly." Alisha smiled at him and reached across the seat to pat his cheek. "I couldn't go and leave all my family here. As selfish as it sounds, I'm not up for going where no man has gone before. But I *can* do this. I can help make sure the sweetdreams drug is perfected so other people, people who are braver and less selfish than I am, can go out and start fresh in a new place. Now, are you going to help me or not?"

"You make it sound so goddamned noble." Clay grinned at her. "How can I refuse?"

"Good, then let's go." Alisha reached for her door handle. "Deelah is waiting to explain the whole thing to us and give us the three-week supply."

"Three weeks?" Clay frowned as he got out of the rover and pressed the park button. The car purred off quietly to find a free spot for itself as they ascended the broad marble steps to VELA Labs. The hot Tampa sun beat down on his head like a golden hammer, and he was glad to get into the shade of the building when they reached the top step. "Why so long?"

"Because." Alisha tossed her head, shifting her heavy mane of long black hair from one bare brown shoulder to the other. "That's how long they have before the Fourth of July launch date, and it *has* to be ready by then because there's only one launch window every twenty-six months. The drug has passed all kinds of trials and been approved by the FDA, but they just want to do one more test to be sure. That's where we come in."

"But I don't see how —"

"Just come with me and hear what Deelah has to say." Alisha took his hand, entwined their fingers, and gave him that warm smile that always melted him. "Okay, cuz?"

"Sure, I guess." He sighed and smiled at her. "Anything for you, baby."

"That's what I like to hear." Alisha kissed his cheek, flooding his senses with the warm floral scent she always wore. By the time they walked into the cool, dim interior of VELA Labs, he was remembering the night on the couch again and trying not to look at the outlines of her full breasts under the turquoise blue sundress she was wearing.

Chapter Three

"Now it's very important that you follow the directions I'm going to give you to the letter." Deelah glared at them both importantly, obviously using every ounce of her clinical authority. With her long red and gold curls drawn up into a bun at the back of her neck and her huge new breasts covered by an immaculate white lab coat, she looked quite professional, Alisha thought approvingly. She had to hand it to Deelah; she might be stubborn as a mule, but now that she'd finally given in and decided to throw her support behind Alisha's plan, she was giving it her all.

"We will," she said earnestly, folding her hands on Deelah's desk. "Just tell us what we have to do."

Deelah smiled. "Just take the drug and track your results, really. But sweetdreams can have some very specific side effects which you need to know about."

Clay frowned and put an arm around Alisha protectively. "Side effects? I don't like the sound of that at all. What side effects?"

"Very vivid dreams, mostly. Nothing harmful as long as she has a reliable caretaker—someone to watch out for her while she's under the influence of the drug." Deelah raised an eyebrow at him. "Are you going to act in that capacity for Alisha?"

"That depends." Clay tapped his index finger on her desk. "I want to know exactly what this drug does—how it works and what the consequences might be."

"Very well." Deelah folded her hands on her desk, obviously going into lecture mode. "As you probably already know, *sweetdreams* is a REM sleep enhancer. Now, during normal REM sleep, the large voluntary muscles of the body are paralyzed by chemicals in the brain. But *sweetdreams* neutralizes those chemicals. Subjects under its influence are likely to get up and act out their dreams in minute detail.

"Now"—she cleared her throat—"this won't be a problem during hypersleep since the entire body is in a state of suspended animation. It *can*, however, pose difficulties to testing subjects who take it during a normal sleep cycle. Which is why each and every volunteer is required to have someone to watch over them at night and ensure they don't come to any harm while the drug is in effect."

"So the only real side effect is like sleepwalking, right?" Alisha asked, hoping to make it sound less threatening. The last thing she needed was for Deelah to oversell the danger aspect of the drug and have Clay refuse to act as her caretaker because he didn't want her taking it. Everything in her plan hinged on his cooperation.

Deelah nodded. "A *little* like sleepwalking. But more extreme. It won't actually harm you," she added when Alisha shot her a warning glance. "But you *could* harm yourself in that state. Especially if you decided to drive somewhere or do yard work with your sharpest pair of hedge clippers or, I don't know, something like that." She waved vaguely, apparently indicating that the list was endless.

Clay looked skeptical. "But could a person actually do all that while they were technically asleep? I mean, aren't their eyes closed?"

"Not necessarily." Deelah shook her head. "A *sweetdreams* subject may appear very lucid, may even have his or her eyes open, making you think he or she is actually awake. But at the same time, they may engage in unusual behavior as they act out whatever dream they're having. Now here's what you have to remember..." She leaned forward and tapped the desk for emphasis. "No matter how strange or bizarre Alisha's

dreams seem while she's under the influence of the drug, you must *not* attempt to wake her up because it could be very dangerous. In addition, you need to facilitate her dream and help it reach its conclusion, even if it doesn't seem logical to you."

"What? But I thought I was supposed to keep her from acting out dangerous things," Clay protested. "What if she *does* decide she wants to go for a drive or something weird like that?"

"Let her sit in the car and you drive her wherever she's talking about going," Deelah said promptly. "Once you get there, do whatever it is she's talking about doing. It's important that you help her act out her dreams in the minutest detail possible without allowing her to endanger herself. Ignoring her requests and urges could be dangerous to her mental health in the exposed state she'll be in."

"Wow, this is some serious shit." Clay looked at Alisha and raised an eyebrow. "Sure you really want to go through with this?"

Alisha felt a pang of guilt that she quickly pushed aside. This is my last chance, she reminded herself sternly. And after it's all said and done, I'll tell Clay the truth, and we'll have a good laugh about how far I went to bring us together. "Yes," she said firmly, smiling at him. "I really do. Will you help me?"

He sighed. "Okay, I'll babysit you while you go to la-la land. But it's going to be rough sitting outside your door every night for the next three weeks to make sure you don't get the urge to drive to Miami or take a walk on the roof or something."

"Actually, we recommend that you share a bed while Alisha is under the effects of sweetdreams," Deelah cut in. "It's much easier for you to keep tabs on her that way. And you don't have to worry about watching her every night for three weeks. We only ask that our test subjects take the drug once a week, on a night when they have plenty of time to get it out of their system the next day."

Alisha smiled. "Friday nights would work. We both have Saturdays off, right?"

"I guess so, yeah." Clay nodded reluctantly. "And that's all I have to do—just observe her and make sure she doesn't hurt herself?" he asked Deelah.

She nodded, looking very professional. "That's it, aside from discussing and recording her dreams and actions the next day – you'll be doing that together. We also ask that you document any really unusual behavior. If she should have an extremely intense nightmare for instance, or any physical symptoms like heart palpitations or shortness of breath."

"Is that likely to occur?" Clay demanded, suddenly in protective mode again.

"No, not at all," Deelah said promptly when Alisha gave her a warning look. "I'm just giving you examples. Things we'd liked noted down for our after-trial briefing."

"I'm sure we can manage that." Alisha nodded and smiled at him, making her see-it's-no-big-deal face. "Right, Clay?"

"All right." She could tell by the look on his sharp features that he still wasn't in love with the idea, but he was willing to go along with it just because she wanted it so badly. *What a sweet guy! Too bad I have to trick him like this.*

Alisha pushed aside her guilt once more and gave him a quick peck on the cheek. "Thanks, Clay."

"Welcome," he muttered, still looking somewhat concerned.

"Great, we at VELA and the US Board of Colonization thank you," Deelah said, smiling at both of them. "And here is a three-week supply of sweetdreams." Reaching into her desk drawer, she pulled out a tiny clear plastic baggie with three red, white, and blue capsules in it. "One for each week," she explained.

"Thanks." Alisha took the baggie with its patriotic pills and tucked it into the recesses of her purse. Of course, this wasn't the real sweetdreams drug. She hadn't wanted to take a chance that she might dream something stupid and completely unrelated to her goal of getting Clay into her life in a more than friendly or familial capacity. So instead of taking sweetdreams, she'd be taking a placebo that looked exactly like the real thing. Deelah had assured her they had tons of them left lying around from the multiple double-blind studies they'd already run, so it worked out beautifully.

"You're welcome." Deelah smiled warmly. "And thank *you* for being willing to help us reach the stars." She waited until Clay wasn't looking and gave Alisha a broad wink.

Alisha winked back, unable to help grinning. She was planning to see stars all right, but not the ones Deelah was talking about. Now to get home and put her plan into action.

* * * * *

When Friday night came, she was nearly giddy with nerves. Could her plan possibly work? Would Clay really go along with her "dream" in every detail as Deelah had instructed him? And don't forget the biggest question—am I a good enough actress to pull this off? Alisha thought to herself as she stared at the red, white, and blue capsule in the palm of her hand. She was glad she'd asked Deelah for three of the placebo pills so she could stretch out her little experiment and take things slowly. After what had almost happened between herself and Clay during the hot chocolate incident, she was sure he wanted this as much as she did. In fact, she was counting on it. But if things went terribly wrong during her first sweetdreams session, she could always call off the other two and admit she'd made a mistake. Oh, you mean like the little mistake of lying through your teeth to get Clay into bed? asked a spiteful little voice in her head.

Alisha lifted her chin. "I am not going to think about that," she said aloud. This was an all-or-nothing shot—a last-ditch effort—and she had to pour all her energy and creativity into it. Failure was *not* an option.

"Not going to think about what?" Clay asked, frowning at her across the table. They were finished with dinner, and she was taking the pill in front of him for his benefit—supposedly so he could start keeping an eye on her, but really to lend credibility to her act.

"Oh, uh..." Alisha shook her head. "It's nothing. I guess I'm just a little nervous about taking this." She jiggled the pill in the palm of her hand and gave him a rueful little smile. "I'm a big chicken, huh?"

"Of course you're not. And you don't have to do this if you don't want to, Alisha." Clay looked at her with concern in his pale gold eyes. "In fact if you'd rather call it off—"

"No, no." Alisha shook her head hurriedly. "No, I'm not really afraid—not when I know you'll be watching out for me." She smiled at him, popped the pill into her mouth, and swallowed it with a sip of water. "See?"

"Yeah, I see." Clay still looked dubious. "So now what?"

"Now we get ready for bed." Alisha nodded confidently, as though they went to bed together every night of the week.

"All right then. Whose bed are we sleeping in?" Clay's deep voice was soft, but there was a hungry light in his half-lidded eyes that made her feel like a flock of butterflies had suddenly taken flight inside her stomach.

"Uh..." Alisha swallowed, feeling suddenly shy. Sure, she'd been planning this for weeks, but it was still nerve racking to think of sleeping in the same bed with Clay. "Um, I hope you don't mind, but I thought since we're supposed to share a bed my room might be the better choice. That way, if I do get up in the middle of the night and start doing who knows what, at least I'll be in familiar territory."

"Sounds good to me." Clay nodded and stood from the table. "We can clear this up in the morning."

"Good idea." Alisha stood as well, still feeling nervous and a little bit dizzy. "Whoa, head rush," she muttered, putting one hand on the table to steady herself. God, what was wrong with her? She'd been planning this for ages—she *wanted* this. Wanted Clay. So why did she suddenly feel so fluttery inside?

"Hey, you okay, cuz?" Picking up on her mood, Clay came around the table to put an arm around her shoulders. Their height difference meant that her head rested

against his chest, and Alisha sighed and snuggled into his embrace, loving the way he surrounded her with his body. His muscular arms felt so good, so solid wrapped around her, and his warm, spicy, masculine scent brought back so many good memories. Just being close to him made her feel safe and loved. Was there any wonder she never wanted this feeling to end? That she wanted to take it to the next level?

"I'm fine," she murmured even though she still felt a little dizzy. *God, if I didn't know any better, I'd think I took the real thing instead of a placebo.*

Clay frowned. "You don't look fine—I thought you were about to keel over. You think it has something to do with the pill? I know it doesn't take effect until you go into REM sleep, but doesn't it enter your bloodstream almost immediately?"

Alisha shrugged off his concern. "Don't worry, Clay. Really, I'm good. I'm just, uh, thinking that it's funny we're going to be sharing a bed for the first time after all these years of knowing each other."

"It's not really the first time," he protested. "What about all those sleepovers in that old orange tent in your backyard?"

Alisha laughed. "Oh yeah, how could I forget those? You would always tell the scariest ghost stories and freak me out."

Clay grinned. "Only because I liked the way you cuddled up next to me when you were scared."

"So you did that on purpose, huh? You dog." She punched him playfully on the arm. "Come on, let's get ready for bed. And no ghost stories tonight—the last thing I need is a really vivid nightmare that's eight hours long."

He looked suddenly serious. "Especially since I'm not allowed to wake you up."

"That's right." Alisha shook a finger at him. "And don't forget—you have to observe, record, and facilitate whatever I dream about. Otherwise, Deelah says I could have some kind of mental meltdown."

"Well, we don't want that." Clay smiled and tilted her chin up so that their eyes met. "Don't worry, baby. I won't let anything happen to you."

Alisha felt a surge of gratitude. He really was a wonderful guy. No wonder she'd fallen in love with him. Now if only she could get him to return that emotion. "I know," she murmured, standing on tiptoe to give him a quick kiss on the cheek. "I'm always in good hands with you, Clay."

"I'm glad you feel that way." He held her close, looking down into her eyes, and for a moment Alisha had the strangest feeling that he was about to kiss her. Then the moment passed, and he let her go and stepped back. "Well, we'd better get to bed. Don't want the drug to kick in while you're still walking around."

"I...I guess you're right." Alisha smiled at him and turned toward her bedroom. "Let's go to bed." God, how she wished she could say that to him for real. Later, she told herself. Take things slowly, and maybe three weeks from now everything will be different.

She hoped.

Chapter Four

Observe, record, facilitate. And that's all, Clay reminded himself when Alisha came to bed in one of those tiny little outfits that always drove him crazy. He wondered sometimes if she had any idea of the effect she had on him when she dressed the way she did, but he always pushed the thought away. Alisha was just comfortable with him, that was all. She thought of him as a cousin or close friend, so she didn't expect him to look at her in a sexual way. Which was why she felt free to wear things like the little white silk babydoll nightie she had on tonight.

"Hope you don't mind," she said nonchalantly as she approached the bed. "I thought I might get hot, and getting overheated always gives me bad dreams."

"Uh, no problem." He hoped she didn't mind him staring because he honestly couldn't take his eyes off her. The virginal white silk clung to her curves and emphasized the warm tones of her coffee-and-cream skin in a way that made him ache to run his hands over her body. The nightie had spaghetti straps and a top that was made of thin, almost see-through white lace. Clay could plainly see her ripe blackberry nipples and the round curves of her areolas pressing against the insubstantial fabric. The front tied in a bow between her full breasts and then split down the middle, showing the rounded plane of her abdomen. Farther down, a pair of white lace panties

that matched the top was visible, and Clay swore he could see the shadow of her pussy lips through the material if he looked hard enough – which he was trying not to.

He was glad that he was already tucked in bed with the pale pink comforter over his legs. He was bare-chested and wearing only a pair of comfortable old pajama bottoms that had worn thin with many washings. If he hadn't been under the covers, he was sure his rampant hard-on would have been visible, pressing through the worn fabric.

"Well, good night." Apparently oblivious to the way she was affecting him, Alisha slipped between the cool, fresh-smelling sheets and sighed contentedly. "Would you dim the lights?"

"Sure. Oh – wait a minute." Clay sat up in bed. He'd been so absorbed in drinking in the sight of his sexy younger cousin that he'd almost forgotten he had a job to do. "Here." He grabbed the SeeAll recording device he'd gotten especially for this and clipped it carefully to the headboard of the bed where it could record anything that went on in the room.

"What are you doing?" Alisha looked mystified.

"My job. Recording everything, just like Deelah told us to."

For some reason, Alisha looked uncomfortable. "Uh, I think she meant you were supposed to write down what happened. Not actually film it."

Clay shrugged. "Well, a picture is worth a thousand words, right? And this way if she has any questions, she can consult the recording and draw her own conclusions."

Alisha looked ready to protest, but when she opened her mouth all that came out was a yawn. "I'm sorry," she murmured, resting her head on her pillow. "I guess it's okay. God, I'm so tired. Feels like...somebody tied weights...to my eyelids."

"Go to sleep then." Clay stroked a strand of silky black hair out of her eyes. Seeing her lying there looking so fragile and vulnerable aroused a powerful feeling of protectiveness inside him. "I'll keep an eye on you," he promised softly.

"Thanks, Clay. 'Night." Her lids fluttered once more and drifted closed, hiding the warm hazel of her eyes.

"Good night," Clay murmured. He dimmed the lights, settled back on his pillows, and waited to see what, if anything, would happen. He wasn't the least bit sleepy himself because he didn't know what to expect. Would she suddenly get up and demand that they take a road trip? Or maybe she'd want to clean the house – which she did sometimes when the spring cleaning mood hit her – and he'd have to help her use the vacuum so she didn't run into things. Clay just hoped she didn't decide she wanted a midnight snack. According to the rules, he had to assist her dreams, but if Alisha found out that he'd been helping her break her diet by eating junk food in the middle of the night, there would be hell to pay, sweetdreams pill or no sweetdreams pill.

Nothing happened for so long that Clay started to feel sleepy himself. He knew it took some time to reach REM sleep and that he had to be patient as Alisha drifted down through the different sleep stages. But he was afraid that if he waited while he was tucked in under the covers, he'd drop off himself. Being careful not to wake her, he slipped out of bed and, walking silently around her room, tried to wake himself up.

Alisha's room was feminine without being frilly and womanly without being weak – which pretty much described Alisha herself to a tee. It was one of the things Clay liked about her – his younger cousin was a strong woman, someone to be reckoned with, and when she wanted something, she went for it. Musingly, he picked up a picture of the two of them when they'd gone tubing down the Ichetucknee River during her last spring break from nursing school.

It was an old-fashioned still picture – not the kind that moved and spoke that the new 3-D time enhancement cameras took. Alisha always said the 3-D pics didn't capture the moment the way the old-fashioned cameras did, so Clay had hung on to his old digital camera just for her.

In the shot, he had his arm around her shoulders, and Alisha had a huge smile on her face even though her body was covered in goose bumps from the ice-cold water.

God, they'd had such a great time. And now, in just a few weeks' time, she was going to move out.

Clay didn't want her to go and had even hinted that she was welcome to stay as long as she liked, but she said she couldn't stay forever, and besides, she knew he needed his private life back. Unfortunately, he didn't want it back, didn't want to think of living in his big, empty South Tampa house without her. Without the sound of her voice and the soft touch of her small hand on his arm when she was trying to get his attention or her sweet feminine scent when he hugged her —

"Morning, cuz. Great day for the beach, isn't it?"

Alisha's voice startled him so much Clay almost dropped the heavy wooden picture frame. Setting it down carefully, he turned to see Alisha sitting up in bed and smiling at him. She looked normal except for the fact that her eyes were wide and a little unfocused, almost as if she was seeing something he couldn't.

"Uh, good morning," he ventured carefully. Deelah had made it clear that he could talk and interact with Alisha while she was under the influence of the sweetdreams drug as long as he didn't make sudden loud noises or shake her to try to wake her up.

"You said it would be rainy but just look—the sun's out and it's perfect beach weather. Aren't you glad we came?" Alisha stretched and lifted her face as though drinking in the rays of a sun only she could see. "Mmm, it's gorgeous out here today."

"It, uh, sure is," Clay said cautiously. Was she going to insist that he drive her to the beach now? But it seemed like she thought she was already there. "We should come more often," he added, watching her carefully to see if he was getting the dream right.

Alisha gave him a radiant smile. "Absolutely. I think I'll just go try the water." After sliding out of bed, she minced forward a few steps, moving like someone walking on hot sand. Then she pointed her toe and dipped it in the imaginary surf. "Mmm, perfect. You want to come in?" She waved an arm in the general direction of her closet, where she was apparently seeing an ocean in her dream.

Clay watched her in alarm. Uh-oh, was she going to try to run into the ocean and bang head first into the door instead? How could he stop her? "Why don't we go in later?" he asked, as an idea struck him. "I need to work on my tan. You know you're always saying I'm pasty white." He wasn't, of course. The Sioux blood in his genetic makeup ensured that. But it was a joke between them because Alisha's skin was a few shades darker than his own.

She pouted for a minute and then shrugged. "All right, I'll lay out with you, but only for a while. *You* might want to get darker, but I don't."

"It's a deal." Crossing quickly back to the bed, Clay then climbed on it and patted a spot beside him. "Come on, sit on the beach towel with me so you don't get sand in your suit."

"All right," she agreed and he breathed a sigh of relief when she was safely back on the bed beside him. Alisha's next words, however, seemed to suck all the relief right out of his body. "It's really hot out here—I'm going to take off my wrap." She was already fingering the drawstring tie of her nightie, obviously imagining it to be the terrycloth wrap she always draped around herself when they went to the beach or the pool. God, she was about to go topless right in front of him, and as much as he wanted to see those round, firm breasts again, Clay knew he couldn't let her.

"No—don't," he protested quickly. "You...you shouldn't do that. What if...I mean, I think maybe you forgot your top."

She laughed. "I didn't forget, silly. I left it off on purpose."

Clay didn't know what to say to that. "Well, see, that's why you should leave your nightie—uh, wrap—on. If you're not wearing your top, someone, uh, might see something."

Alisha gave him a look like he was crazy. "Don't be silly—it's getting hot out here with the sun beating down. And besides, this is a nude beach. I can take off as much as I want."

Clay did a double take. *Nude beach? What the hell is she talking about?* There were no nude beaches close to where they lived—with the large population of senior citizens around Florida, beaches were just a bit more conservative than Brazilian ones—or wherever the hell it was Alisha thought she was.

Still, maybe it was just an embellishment of her dream. Regular REM dreams didn't always make sense or follow reality—what made him think that sweetdreams enhanced dreams would? After all, he'd had a recurring dream when he was a kid that when he walked outside it was raining purple peanut M&Ms and his dog, Sparky, could talk. So maybe Alisha's thinking she was at a nude beach wasn't so weird after all.

While he was trying to think of another reason to stop her, she was untying the neck of her nightie. Clay caught his breath when she slipped it off her shoulders, her round, full cocoa breasts thrust out in front of her and her nipples hard. God, she was gorgeous!

"Do you like my suit?" she asked and giggled.

"Your suit?" Clay stared at her stupidly, wishing he could drag his eyes off her breasts.

"Yes, silly—my birthday suit." Alisha gave him a naughty grin and cupped the curve of her right breast, as though showing off an invisible bikini top. "You want to feel it?"

Clay's mouth went dry. "I, uh, better not. And I think you should cover up before you burn."

She frowned. "You know I never burn. In fact, I think I'll take off my bottoms too. It's *really* hot out here."

"No, don't—" was all Clay got out before she was wiggling out of the tiny white lace panties. Now completely nude, she lay back on the bed, closed her eyes, and sighed in contentment. She was the very picture of a beach bunny enjoying the warming rays of the sun—naked.

This is wrong! What the hell is going on and how can I stop it? Clay asked himself. But no solution came immediately to mind. Or maybe he was too distracted to think of one. Since Alisha was deep in her dream and had her eyes closed, Clay allowed himself a moment to drink her in. Her lovely, smooth, creamy brown skin, the gentle rise of her breasts capped with berry-dark nipples, the tiny patch of black curls at the apex of her pussy mound and the slit of her sex...every part of her was beautiful and desirable. But it was wrong to desire her, he reminded himself. Completely and utterly wrong.

"Clay?" she murmured, just as he was hoping she'd dropped into another phase of sleep and was done acting out for the night.

"Um, yeah, cuz. What's up?" he asked, hoping she wouldn't insist on driving down to the all night Flavor Freeze for a cone in the nude.

"Would you put some lotion on me?" Alisha sighed and put up one hand to shade her eyes, as though trying to see him despite the bright sunlight beating down on them. "It's in my beach bag – the side pocket. You know."

Actually, the funny thing was that Clay *did* know what she was talking about this time. Alisha kept a beach bag packed at all times in case she had a spare hour to get away and the suntan lotion was always in the side pocket, just as she was describing. In fact, the bag itself was in a chair beside her closet door right where he could see it. Without thinking about it, he went and got the dark brown bottle, the contents of which smelled faintly of cocoa butter, and brought it back to the bed.

Then he froze.

He knew he was supposed to be facilitating Alisha's dream, but there were limits – weren't there? Or would she actually be in danger if he didn't play along with whatever scenario her subconscious mind dreamed up? Did he dare take a chance that she wouldn't be hurt if he didn't play along?

"Hey." Alisha was squinting at him again from behind her hand, as though the sun was too bright to stare directly at him. "What's the hold up? It's not like you haven't lotioned me up before."

Clay tightened his grip on the brown bottle in indecision. Actually, that was true too. He often rubbed suntan lotion on Alisha's shoulders and the small of her back—basically wherever she couldn't reach—whenever they went to the beach. But no matter how skimpy and revealing her bikini might be when he did it, the fact remained that she was still dressed, not completely nude as she was now. What should he do?

"Clay?" Alisha was looking at him again, and this time there was fear in her unfocused eyes. "Are you all right? Is everything at the beach all right? We are at the beach, right?"

"Of course we are," Clay soothed her automatically. "We're lying on our towels on the sand, and the sun is really hot, and I'm about to rub suntan lotion all over your...uh, your shoulders."

"Oh good." Alisha flipped over onto her stomach and wiggled, as though trying to get comfortable. "Damn sand—always so lumpy," she muttered, and Clay had to bite back a laugh. She was lying on a plush pillow top mattress and bitching about the lumpy sand on a beach she was imagining. If the situation hadn't suddenly gotten so complicated, it would have been damn funny. Well, he was just going to have to rub her shoulders with the lotion and leave it at that.

Taking a deep breath, he squirted a dollop of the creamy white coconut smelling lotion into his palm. "Okay, here goes," he muttered under his breath and began to stroke her narrow shoulders.

"Mmm, feels good." Alisha undulated sensually under his touch, clearly enjoying herself. "I love the way your hands feel on my body, Clay. Don't know why I've never told you that before." She sounded dreamy and her eyes were still unfocused. Clay wondered how much of what she was saying was true and how much was just the dream talking. But didn't your true feelings and thoughts come out when you dreamed and your subconscious took over?

"I'm glad you enjoy it," he said neutrally, adding more lotion and sliding his hands down her back. The scent of the lotion and the feel of her smooth skin under his hands

were hypnotic. In fact, if he closed his eyes, he could almost imagine they really were at the beach, just the two of them enjoying the hot sun, the sound of the waves, the cry of the gulls...

"Don't forget my bottom," Alisha said, shattering the soothing picture that had been building in his mind.

"I'm sorry – what?" He couldn't keep the disbelief out of his voice. He might rub lotion on Alisha's shoulders and back, but he had never gone lower. It was taboo territory, and as much as he might want to cup the round, firm globes of her ass and stroke and massage and caress them, he never had.

But Alisha was looking back at him with mild annoyance on her face. "My bottom – don't forget to lotion my bottom like you always do." She frowned. "You do – don't you?"

Clay hastened to reassure her. "Uh, sure. Sure, I do." But inside his stomach was tied in knots. First the nude beach idea, and now she seemed to think it was normal for him to fondle her ass. Where would all this end? And what would he tell her the next day when they watched the SeeAll recording together and talked about the effects of the drug? But despite his misgivings, there didn't seem to be anything else he could do but squirt another dollop of white lotion into the palm of his hand and begin to massage it into her ass.

Alisha moaned and moved under his touch, lifting her round brown bottom up to meet his fingers and gasping in apparent pleasure. And despite his guilty conscience, Clay couldn't help enjoying it as well. How long had he wanted to touch his younger cousin this way, to stroke and knead her soft, supple flesh, to caress her smooth coffee-and-cream skin? She was gorgeous, lying naked on the bed, arching her back to lift her perfect ass up to his hands. And the soft, throaty sounds she was making were almost too much. Before he knew it, his fingers were moving lower, spreading the slippery lotion down to her inner thighs. Alisha obligingly parted her legs for him, and soon his fingertips were brushing the outer lips of her bare pussy as he touched her.

"Mmm, feels so good!" she moaned, spreading a little farther. Looking down, Clay realized that her pussy lips had parted so he could see her hot inner cunt. It was a deeper color than the rest of her skin, a smooth, creamy dark chocolate that seemed both intimate and inviting. His mouth watered, and he longed to lean down and press his face between her rounded curves so he could tongue her sweet wet pussy and taste the juices he could see making her inner folds shiny and slick.

But that would be wrong, Clay reminded himself sternly. Incredibly and inexcusably wrong. Even though there was no real blood tie between them, Alisha was related to him in so many ways. They'd grown up together, as close as two cousins could be. There was no way he should be fantasizing about spreading her plump pussy lips open so he could trace her ripe clit with his tongue and lap her cunt until she moaned and begged him to fuck her...

Suddenly Alisha flipped over. "I can't wait anymore," she moaned, arching her back so that her full, firm breasts stood out. "Do my front, Clay."

"I, uh...okay," he floundered. What else could he say? Alisha was deep in the dream now, and if he stopped acting the way she obviously expected him to act, he risked hurting her. Numbly, he squirted more lotion on his hands and started to stroke her shoulders and upper arms.

He was trying to avoid her full breasts, but she squirmed impatiently and frowned. "What are you doing?" she demanded, obviously displeased.

"Uh...I'm doing your front?" Clay was aware that his answer came out as a question, but he was so preoccupied with trying not to touch areas he knew he should stay away from—while his cock was hard as a rock and urging him to touch them anyway—that he couldn't think straight.

"Well, you're not doing a very good job of it," Alisha lectured. "You're completely ignoring my breasts—you know how sensitive I am there."

As a matter of fact, he did know. The memory of his younger cousin moaning with pleasure while he spread the burn gel over her smooth skin was still vivid in his

mind. Spreading lotion on her breasts won't be any worse than that, he told himself when his conscience stung him at the idea of massaging her so intimately. And she was awake then and didn't seem to mind. In fact, she'd seemed to enjoy it a lot, and the thought of seeing that warm glow of pleasure on her beautiful face as he touched her was enough to break down any resistance Clay might have had.

"All right," he told her. "I'll do your breasts too."

Alisha smiled. "And pay special attention to the nipples. I usually don't burn, but there's no need to take chances."

"Absolutely, no chances," Clay agreed with her while pouring another big dollop of the buttery lotion into the palm of his hand. God, he was never going to be able to smell sunblock again without getting hard, but he didn't even care. He just wanted to touch her the way she wanted to be touched. The way she *needed* to be touched.

Clay had had plenty of lovers, but he had to admit that cupping and massaging Alisha's firm, high breasts was the most erotic experience of his entire life. He knew it was wrong to feel that way about his younger cousin, but he couldn't seem to help it. The feel of her warm, smooth skin and the sight of his tan hands moving over her slender coffee-and-cream body was almost too much for him. But at least he wasn't the only one enjoying the taboo pleasure – Alisha was obviously enjoying herself as well. She was practically purring as she arched to meet his touch while moaning and gasping in obvious delight as he pinched and tugged at her hard nipples. Just watching her surrender herself completely to him was making Clay's cock so hard he was afraid it might break off in his pants.

He was enjoying the illicit pleasure so much that he was extremely disappointed when Alisha put her hands on his wrists to stop his massaging motion and smiled up at him. "I think that's enough, Clay," she murmured, giving him a warm, soft smile. "You did a wonderful job. There's no way I could get a burn on my top now."

Trying to hide his disappointment, Clay smiled at her and nodded. "Yeah, I tried to be, uh, thorough. Well, maybe it's time to pack up for the day. It looks like rain." He looked up at the bedroom ceiling as though scanning the sky for clouds.

Alisha pouted. "I don't want to go yet. And it doesn't look a bit like rain, Clay – you're crazy."

"Well, uh... What do you want to do?" His hands were still on her breasts, and he knew he should move them soon, but Alisha didn't seem to mind. In fact, she seemed very content to have him cupping her firm, round mounds as she lay naked in front of him.

She frowned at him. "What do you mean, what do I want to do? I want to lie here while you finish rubbing sunblock on my skin."

Clay swallowed hard. "Uh, finish? I thought... I mean, I guess I thought I *was* finished," he said, looking down at his hands pointedly.

Alisha shook her head. "How can you be finished when you haven't even done my bottom half yet? Come on, Clay, get with the program – you know you always do my thighs and hips last."

"I do?" Clay could scarcely get the words out. God, this was wrong, so wrong. And yet he was already reaching for the bottle of sunblock again.

"Of course you do, silly." Alisha smiled up at him and lay back on the bed, spreading her legs ever so slightly so that the dark-chocolate interior of her pussy was revealed again. "Are you getting lazy on me, only doing half the job?"

"No, absolutely not." Clay was already rubbing the dollop of coconut cream lotion between his palms. "I just wasn't sure if you wanted me to this time."

"Of course I want you to." Her voice was a low, throaty purr, and her eyes were pure green. "I always want your hands on me, Clay. Never forget that."

"How could I?" he murmured. Kneeling over her, he began to slick the white lotion over her rounded hips, trying not to see how wet and swollen her pussy looked

now. Had his touch made her that turned on? Even if she were having a particularly erotic dream, as she seemed to be, it was nice that the dream was about him and not some other guy. Clay thought it might have killed him to have to pretend to be someone else while he touched her—it would have driven him mad with jealousy. He never wanted another man's hands on her beautiful, creamy cocoa skin. Alisha was his, and that was how things ought to stay.

Stop thinking that way—it's wrong and you know it, his conscience nagged. Alisha's your cousin, not your lover. How is she going to feel when she wakes up and sees you touching her all over her nude body?

The thought was sobering, but it wasn't like he could stop what he was doing—even if he'd wanted to, which he most certainly didn't. The fact was that he *had* to play along with her dream in every detail. And even though the sexual aspects of it had thrown him at first, now he was extremely glad he'd agreed to help her out with this. The sweetdreams drug was giving him the opportunity to do things he'd only dreamed of—like running his hands up Alisha's inner thighs as he was right now.

She moaned as Clay stroked her right in the crease where her thigh met her body. His fingers were mere centimeters from her pussy, but she didn't seem to mind a bit. In fact, she was rolling her hips almost as if she *wanted* him to move in, to touch her higher. But Clay wasn't about to do that—it would be going too far. Way too far. But the temptation was so strong he couldn't help just brushing her outer lips with his fingers as he massaged her inner thighs. God, her pussy looked so hot and swollen with need. Her little cunt lips were puffy, parting on their own to show her slick interior. It was almost as if she *needed* his fingers inside her. But he couldn't—he absolutely couldn't, he reminded himself sternly. Alisha was his cousin in everything but blood, and her pussy was off-limits—forbidden territory.

Well, if you're not planning on touching it, you better get away from it, the little voice in his head pointed out. 'Cause you're getting closer and closer, and if you don't stop soon, you won't be able to stop at all.

It was true and Clay knew it. As much as he was trying not to touch his younger cousin's most intimate area, somehow his thumbs had found their way to the outer lips of her pussy, and with each massaging stroke he made, he was spreading her wider and wider, opening her so that he could see her slick dark-chocolate interior even though he knew it was wrong. He had to stop, and he had to stop now.

"Well," he said, forcing himself to withdraw his hands. "I think you're all good now, so maybe I'll go take a dip in the ocean to cool off." He didn't know how he was supposed to do that—go open her closet door and pretend to dive in? But whatever he did, he couldn't stay on the bed with her one minute longer without doing something he knew they'd both regret. He started to get off the bed, but her soft voice stopped him cold.

"Don't you think you're forgetting something, Clay?"

"What? Uh, what am I forgetting?" he asked, turning back around to face her even though he knew he shouldn't. But he simply couldn't resist. It was like he was an iron filing being drawn by a powerful magnet.

"I think you know what." She grinned at him and spread her legs, rolling her hips in a gesture that was both erotic and playful. But there was nothing funny about the look in her eyes. They were deep green and filled with need. And Clay wanted in the worst way to give her what she needed. But he couldn't—not until he was completely sure her dream was really taking them where he thought it was.

"Tell me," he said hoarsely, his voice catching on the words. His cock was aching in his pants but there was no way he was doing this without her express permission. "Tell me what I forgot, Alisha. Tell me what you need."

Her lids flickered and she bit her bottom lip. It was as though even in her dream it took some courage for her to breach the boundary between them, to overcome the taboo that had always kept them apart.

"I need...need you to touch me," she whispered, opening her legs a little more. "Need you to lotion my pussy, Clay."

Suddenly his throat was almost too dry to speak. "Are you sure, baby? Sure that's what you need me to do?" he asked softly.

She gave him a catlike smile. "Of course I'm sure. You don't want me to get too much sun there, now, do you? It's a very sensitive area, after all, and you ought to know – you always pay special attention to me there."

"I do, huh?" Against his will, Clay's eyes were drawn back to her swollen pussy lips and her slick inner cunt, which was clearly revealed between her spread legs. God, he wanted to touch her so badly – but it was so wrong! And yet in her dream, he'd been doing it for ages, at least according to Alisha. She was acting like her request was the most normal thing in the world. Did she think of them as lovers in her subconscious? Or was it just another quirk of the dream, just one more detail that confused him but made perfect sense to his sleeping cousin?

"Of course you do. You always say it's your favorite part so you save it for last." Alisha started to close her legs. "Unless you don't want to this time," she said uncertainly. "I mean I would never want you to do something you didn't –"

"Of course I want to." Clay's hands were already on her thighs, spreading her open again. "God, you don't know how much I want to. I'm just afraid...afraid you'll regret this later, baby."

She gave him a puzzled look. "Why would I? I never have before."

Clay wasn't sure if that meant she'd had this dream often or what, but he was through arguing. If Alisha wanted to feel his hands on her, then damn it, he wasn't going to deny her. What he *was* going to do was go slow. He wasn't doing anything she didn't ask for. That way when he showed her the SeeAll images tomorrow, she couldn't be *too* mad at him. At least, he hoped not.

"Just relax, baby," he murmured softly when he had her legs spread wide, her pussy opening like an exotic flower blooming just for him. "Just relax and let me lotion your sweet little pussy."

"Yes, Clay," she breathed, lifting her hips to his touch. The gesture of complete submission touched him to the core. To think that Alisha trusted him this much in the deepest part of her being was amazing. A powerful feeling of protectiveness came over him, and he promised himself that he would do his best not to hurt her. That he would try to keep her safe no matter where the dream took them. And that he would only do what she asked him to.

Gently, carefully, he put a little of the slippery lotion on his fingertips and began stroking it onto her swollen outer pussy lips. Alisha moaned, and her eyes fluttered closed as he touched her.

Clay was being careful not to go over the line. Unless she asked him, he wasn't going to go any further—on that point he was determined. Except...except her sweet inner cunt looked so inviting, so hot and wet and needy.

Before he knew it, Clay was tracing her inner folds with his fingertips. He circled the hard little bud of her clit, and Alisha gasped and cried out, rocking her hips toward him, trying to get more of his teasing touch on her skin.

"You like that, baby?" Clay growled. "You like it when I pet your sweet, wet pussy?"

"God, yes!" she moaned, thrusting up to meet his touch. "Touch me, Clay. Put the lotion all over me. And don't forget to put it inside me too."

"I'll give you as much as you can handle," he promised. On impulse, he lifted the bottle and squirted a big white creamy dollop right in the center of her naked, open cunt over her throbbing clit.

Alisha gasped again and then giggled with breathless delight. "That's cold!" she protested, not seeming bothered by it in the least. "You better rub it in quick, Clay. It's like having an ice cube on my pussy."

He would have been happy to oblige her, but he couldn't tear his eyes away from the forbidden, erotic sight of his little cousin's cunt spread wide and filled with cream.

The white lotion ran down her clit and collected in the slick opening of her pussy along with her natural juices.

That's what it would look like if I filled her with my cum, Clay couldn't help thinking. If I shoved my cock inside her tight little cunt and fucked her and filled her full of cream, that's what it would look like leaking out of her pussy when I pulled out of her.

The thought was so hot that he almost couldn't go on. But then Alisha moaned softly and lifted her hips again. "Clay," she whispered, in a voice filled with hot need. "Clay, please...inside me. Don't forget to put the lotion inside me."

If she hadn't been dripping with coconut-scented cream, he would have pushed his tongue deep into her tight little hole, but as it was, he had to satisfy himself with shoving two long, thick fingers deep in her pussy instead.

Alisha's back bowed and she let out a nearly soundless yell of pleasure as he fucked roughly into her with his fingers. God, she was so tight, so close...he could tell. His world narrowed down to one goal and one goal only—he wanted to make Alisha come. He no longer cared that what he was doing was wrong, that all his illicit actions were being recorded to show her the next day. Hell, he didn't even care that she was his little cousin anymore. He just wanted to fuck her to orgasm any way he knew how and watch her beautiful face as she came for him, came on his fingers, and let herself get completely and utterly carried away in the moment.

"Come for me, baby," he growled, and it wasn't a request, it was a demand. "Come while I pump your sweet pussy. I want to feel you squeezing my fingers with that tight little cunt and know you're coming just for me."

"Oh, God, Clay! Yes—*yes*." Whether it was his dirty words or the deep finger fucking or a combination of the two, he would never know, but Alisha was suddenly coming, just as he had ordered. Clay growled again, wishing it was his tongue or his cock she was riding as the slick inner walls of her pussy trembled and squeezed around his fingers. And, God, was she beautiful when she let it all go. Alisha thrashed on the

bed, her legs spread as she opened herself wide for his fucking. Her long black hair was a cloud around her face, and her eyes were squeezed tightly shut, her small hands balled into fists as though she could barely stand the pleasure he was giving her. She looked like a fallen angel, losing herself in earthly pleasures for the first time, and yet Clay already knew he didn't want it to be her last.

"Beautiful," he whispered as he watched her tremble to a stop while the waves of orgasm slowed their sweeping rush over her slender body. "So goddamn fucking gorgeous when you come, baby." He was reluctant to withdraw his fingers, but her eyelids were fluttering, and he wasn't sure what she might see when she opened them. Would it still be a day at the beach? Or would she see her older cousin touching her in ways she'd never dreamed of before and be upset?

It turned out he didn't have to worry about either one. With a deep, satisfied sigh, Alisha rolled over on her side and pressed her head to the pillow. Then, without another word, she was asleep within minutes. Or maybe in another stage of sleep? One that didn't involve dreams? Clay had no idea, and he didn't care. He was just glad she hadn't gotten upset with him when it was all over.

It's not really over yet, though. Wait until tomorrow morning when she sees what just happened. Clay shook his head. Alisha was probably going to be upset with him. But then, what else could he have done? Given the orders that Deelah had dispensed with the sweetdreams pills, his hands had been tied. He just hoped that his younger cousin saw things that way too, or he was in for a world of hurt.

God, she's so beautiful. Why haven't I ever noticed how gorgeous she is before? Somewhat bemused, he sat and watched her for a long time before it occurred to him to pull the covers over her so she wouldn't get chilly that night. Then he turned out the lights and climbed in beside her. It seemed their adventure was over, at least for the first night.

He just hoped that when Alisha viewed the SeeAll recording she would still talk to him.

Chapter Five

Alisha woke up with the strangest feeling that there was something important she was supposed to remember. But whatever it was stayed just on the edge of her brain, teasing her. She couldn't remember until she felt a large, masculine body shift in the bed behind her.

Oh my God, Clay! She tensed when she felt his heavy arm wrapped around her waist and then nearly panicked when she realized the thick, hot lump she felt rubbing between her ass cheeks was his cock nudging her through the thin pajama bottoms he wore. God, he was dry humping her in his sleep, and even worse, she was *naked*.

What did we do? She felt sticky everywhere and there was a pervasive smell of coconut body lotion coming from her skin and yet for a minute she couldn't remember what had happened. Then slowly, piece by piece, it began to come back.

A beach. I dreamed I was on the beach. No – I pretended to dream I was on the beach. But it was a nude beach, wasn't it? How could it be, though – there aren't any nude beaches near here. And anyway, why would I go to one in the middle of the night?

Her thoughts were muddled, and the whole idea of going to the beach was strange, but she had the sense that the night before everything had made perfect sense. Vaguely she remembered drifting off to sleep and then waking up later to play out her

little charade with her cousin. Except...had it really been a charade? The blue sky above and the golden sand under her feet were such vivid memories, almost as vivid as the feel of Clay's big hands caressing and exploding her body. Was it possible that she'd really been half asleep as she egged him on, daring and teasing him until he couldn't resist her anymore, until he fingered her to a shattering climax?

"God," Alisha muttered to herself in disgust. "Don't tell me I slept through the greatest orgasm of my life." But from her extremely vague memories of what had happened, it seemed like she might have done exactly that. How else could she explain the fuzzy half memory of their erotic encounter? It made her disgusted with herself. Why, she might as well have taken the real sweetdreams drug if she was going to let herself go to sleep and not enjoy the conquest of her cousin to the absolute fullest!

"Cuz, you okay?" Clay's sleepy voice in her ear and his warm breath at the nape of her neck made her stiffen at first. Had he heard what she said? But when Alisha turned to face him there was no suspicion in his pale gold eyes, just worry and concern.

"I think so." She shook her head and ran a hand through her hair. "I'm just a little disoriented. I was, uh, trying to understand why I'm naked and covered in some kind of tanning lotion."

Clay's look of concern deepened and became an expression of guilt as well. "I can tell you all about that, but I think it might be easier to show you on the SeeAll instead."

"Oh, that's right—you recorded everything, didn't you?" Alisha tried to keep her voice light, but she couldn't help feeling curious to see the recording. After her unnaturally heavy sleep, a lot of the details were still fuzzy in her mind. She welcomed the chance to watch what had actually happened instead of just hearing about it. But Clay looked uncomfortable about it, so she thought she might try to put him at ease. "Do you want to get some breakfast first?" she asked uncertainly.

He shook his head. "No, according to Deelah, we have to do this first thing after we wake up. And besides, you need to see this so you can decide if you ever want to have breakfast with me again. Or any other meal for that matter," he added grimly.

"Clay, what are you talking about?" Alisha protested. "Why wouldn't I ever want to eat with you again?"

"Eat with me...talk with me...come within a hundred miles of me." He broke off, shaking his head, his mouth set in a thin line. "I'll set it up." He turned and unclipped the tiny SeeAll from the headboard of the bed. "Uh, maybe you should get dressed before we watch this," he murmured, keeping his eyes pointedly averted.

Alisha realized that she was sitting up in bed, displaying her breasts as though it was no big deal. It wasn't the first or even the second time Clay had seen them, but it still *was* a big deal to her cousin, she realized. A very big deal because he didn't want to offend her sense of modesty. Hurriedly, she found the discarded white silk nightie she'd had on when she fell asleep the night before and put it back on. The panties, however, seemed to be a lost cause. She couldn't find them anywhere so she pressed her thighs together tightly instead and pulled her knees up to one side, effectively hiding her sex. Then she waited for the show.

The SeeAll came with a fourteen-by-sixteen-inch light screen onto which it projected the images it had recorded. Clay sat it up in the middle of the bed so that they could both watch it easily. He didn't seem inclined to talk so Alisha kept her questions to herself and her eyes on the projected screen as the night before unfolded.

Clay fast forwarded through the part when she was sleeping and he was wandering around her room, and it didn't take long to get to her "dream." Only, it really *did* seem like a dream as Alisha watched it. She couldn't remember consciously coming up with the idea of pretending to be at the beach, although it seemed like a pretty good idea in retrospect. And she didn't remember being quite so brazen. She'd practically been throwing herself at Clay, and it made her wonder what he thought of her now that he knew her innermost desires — well, some of them, anyway.

But soon enough her concerns about what her ex-cousin thought of her melted away in the heat of the scene playing out before them. Clay had stroked and caressed her naked body as gently as any lover, and the lust in his eyes was obvious, even

viewed in the light projections of the SeeAll. Alisha herself was positively wanton, and she felt hot blood rushing to her cheeks when they came to the part where she was writhing and gasping as Clay finger fucked her to orgasm. God, she'd had no idea she could be that uninhibited, that free and sexual. It was amazing she'd been able to let herself go so completely. She just hoped Clay didn't despise her now for the things she'd done—and the things she'd asked him to do.

The recording ended with her sleeping quietly, and then Clay flicked off the tiny device and turned to face her. "Alisha," he said in a hoarse voice. "I am so sorry...so goddamned sorry about what happened. I swear I never would have done it, but I was afraid not to play along with your dream. Of course, that's no excuse. I should have found a way to play along without...without touching you so much."

Alisha felt an instant surge of remorse. *Oh no – poor Clay! He thinks this is all his fault, and he's hating on himself for it. And worse, he thinks I hate him too.*

"Clay, no, please." Alisha put a hand on his shoulder and tried to pull him toward her, but his muscles seemed to be made of immovable iron.

"I shouldn't have," he repeated. "It was wrong...unnatural. You're my little cousin, and the way I touched you..." He shook his head. "I just shouldn't have done it."

Alisha knew instinctively there was no sense in pointing out, once again, that they weren't really related anymore. Right now she had to do damage control and convince her ex-cousin that she didn't hate him.

"Clay, please listen to me," she begged softly, her hand still on his broad shoulder. "I don't blame you for this and I don't hate you. In fact...in fact, I want to thank you."

A bitter, incredulous laugh escaped him, and he turned to face her at last. "Thank me? For what—for molesting you in your sleep?"

"You were only following the dream," Alisha reminded him. "And I know it was hard for you, considering what our family ties used to be. But you did it—and you did it gently and in a gentlemanly manner. You didn't...didn't take advantage of me. You just did what you had to do and I really appreciate that."

He frowned and scanned her face as though looking for the truth. "So that's it—you're really not mad at me?"

Alisha shrugged and tried to laugh. "I'm, uh, more embarrassed than anything. I guess I should have warned you that I have, um, erotic dreams sometimes. But it just didn't occur to me to think I might have one while you were watching me for the sweetdreams trials."

He snorted. "Better I should watch you here at home than some weird lab tech like your friend Deelah watching you in a sleep lab at VELA I guess."

"Much better," Alisha agreed fervently. "Especially since I'm sure Deelah would have slapped my face for some of the suggestions I made to you last night."

They both laughed, and the tension between them was broken.

Clay put an arm around her shoulders and pulled her in for a hug. "I'm glad you're not upset, cuz," he murmured in her ear. "I'd never hurt you on purpose—I hope you know that."

"I know." Alisha snuggled into the hug and relished the feel of his broad, bare chest pressed against her full breasts. There was nothing but his worn pajama bottoms and her ultrathin white silk nightie between them, and she could feel her nipples getting hard as he rubbed against her. God, if only last night had been for real and not just some dream she'd faked. Although when she thought of it, it still seemed strangely real.

He pulled away after a moment and looked at her curiously. "You know, you really surprised me last night. I mean, your *dream* surprised me. I didn't know you thought of me like that."

There was no need to fake her reaction—Alisha could feel herself blushing. *God, what must he think of me after the way I acted?* "Well, you know," she said, playing with the string tie in the center of her nightie, "dreams are crazy. You really can't control what you think or do in them. They just...happen."

Clay frowned. "So you *don't* think of me like that?"

Alisha bit her lip, trying to think what to say. If she gave away the fact that she'd been lusting after his luscious, muscular body ever since her hormones started hopping, he might get suspicious. But she didn't want him to think she didn't want him either because she *so* did.

"Mostly when I dream of you, I dream about things we did when we were kids," she said, trying to find a safe middle ground. "You know—the times we camped out together. The games we used to play."

He laughed. "Oh yeah—remember that time we were playing 'I'll show you mine if you show me yours' and your mom caught us?"

Alisha giggled. "Oh my God, she nearly tanned both our hides off. And that big long lecture she gave us about how just because we had different skin colors didn't mean we weren't related and cousins didn't do that kind of thing..." She trailed off, kicking herself mentally. Great, just great. Why had she reminded him of that when she was trying to get him to overcome his ideas about them still being related?

But Clay was nodding solemnly. "I've never forgotten that. I think it's one reason I felt so, uh, bad about what happened last night."

"Clay, you don't have to feel bad." Alisha cupped his cheek and shook her head. "There was no blame last night. You were just helping me the only way you could. Believe me, I'm *grateful*." Aching to let him know how she felt, she leaned forward and let her lips brush his.

Her small action had a surprisingly big effect. With a low groan, Clay swept her forward into his lap. Before she knew what was happening, Alisha found herself straddling his lean hips with her arms around his shoulders and his mouth hungrily devouring hers.

She moaned as she felt the hard ridge of his cock nudge open her pussy lips and press against her swollen clit. God, was he really as huge as he felt rubbing against her? She ached to have him deep in her cunt, but the worn cotton of his pajama bottoms still

separated them, and she wasn't sure what he would do if she asked him to take them off.

"God, Alisha, you're so beautiful," he murmured against her lips as he stroked her shoulders and back with his big, warm hands. Somehow the string tie of her nightie had come loose, and the flimsy white silk material fell down around her shoulders, leaving her almost naked in his lap. Clay cupped her breasts and rolled the nipples between his thumbs and fingers, making her moan into his mouth as he kissed her.

God, he's going to do it. It's finally going to happen! Alisha's pussy was soaked, and this time, it didn't have anything to do with coconut tanning cream. She pressed herself down into his lap, riding the rigid cock she could feel pressing up, parting her pussy lips. In just a minute more, she was sure Clay would pin her to the bed, pull down his pants, and nail her to the mattress. And she would love every single minute of it. And afterward they could both admit that they had very un-cousinly feelings for each other and decide to spend the rest of their lives together and...

"No!" Clay pulled away from her and pushed her halfway off his lap at the same time. He was breathing hard, nearly panting, but the look in his eyes wasn't one of pleasure or need. It was guilt.

"Clay, what—"

"We can't do this." He sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose as though trying to push back a headache. "I can't do this—can't do this to you. It's wrong and I'm sorry, Alisha. Sorry for doing...what I just now did."

"But the dream—" she tried again.

"You said it yourself—there's no controlling dreams or what happens in them. But now that we're both awake I need to be careful not to take advantage of you." He shook his head. "I'm sorry. The way I touched you last night, well, it gave me the feeling that I should always be allowed to touch you that way. That I should be allowed to cup your breasts and stroke your nipples. And spread open your pussy lips and pet you between your legs, but that's wrong. And I... I'm sorry."

"It's okay, Clay. Don't worry about it." Alisha couldn't believe how frustrated she felt. She longed to tell him he could touch her any way he wanted to, but she knew he wouldn't take her up on the invitation. Instead, she pulled the ties of her nightie closed and redid the bow with trembling fingers.

God, she wanted him so badly! How was she possibly going to wait a whole week for their next sweetdreams encounter?

* * * * *

Clay spent the rest of the week in a constant haze of lust and guilt. He was seeing Alisha in a whole different light, and though he knew it was wrong, he couldn't seem to help himself.

Before when she'd worn hot little outfits around the house he'd noticed, of course, but with the eye of a man looking at a beautiful but unobtainable piece of fine art. But since the first sweetdreams night, Alisha suddenly seemed all too obtainable. Clay couldn't help remembering how she'd felt in his arms — the softness of her skin, the way she'd opened for him so willingly, her soft, breathy moans as he'd made her come... And every time he remembered, his cock got rock hard.

He even tried to consider the fact that she wasn't really his cousin anymore. But it was no good trying to salve his conscience that way. The fact that they were no longer related didn't erase the years they'd spent growing up together and his vision of her as a little girl tagging along after him at school. And even if he *had* been able to forget their past together, just the thought of what her mom and his own ex-stepmother would say was enough to give him a good old-fashioned case of the guilts. The memory of Alisha's mom lecturing them both about how they were related even though there were no real blood ties between them was still very real in his mind. He could just imagine the look on his Aunt Tandy's face if he suddenly announced to the family that he and Alisha had started dating. There would be hell to pay, and both he and his younger cousin would probably be kicked out of the family completely.

And that's assuming that Alisha even wants to be with you that way, he reminded himself as he mulled over the situation on Friday, the day of their next sweetdreams trial. *She was so disoriented by that damn drug she probably didn't know what she was doing. And she's too sweet and forgiving to make an issue about it now.*

It was true. He'd been watching her all week, trying to determine how she really felt about what they'd done, but Alisha had been as sweet and funny and uncomplicated as ever. In other words, while he was tearing himself up inside with guilt and lust, she was acting normal. Could it be that she really wasn't upset with him at all? Or was she holding her feelings inside to avoid hurting him? And what would happen if there was a repeat of the situation when she took the pill tonight?

He thought about it all through dinner, which was a chef salad that Alisha had picked up from Chowders, his favorite restaurant, on her way home. The salad was delicious, but he could barely pick at it he was so distracted by his forbidden thoughts. Should he ask Alisha to call off the trial? But she seemed to have her heart set on it, and she asked him for so little, he hated to deny her anything. And after all, what were the odds that she'd have another erotic dream while he was watching her? Surely the last time had been a one-time-only anomaly and there was no way it could happen again—could it?

"Clay? You all right?" Alisha's soft voice and her hand on his made him jump, and Clay realized he'd been staring down at his salad for the past five minutes without saying a word.

"Uh, fine." He tried to smile at her. "Just, you know, enjoying my salad."

She raised an eyebrow at him. "You haven't touched that salad since I put it down in front of you. Why don't you tell me what you're *really* thinking?"

"I don't know...about you taking that drug again tonight. The sweetdreams pill." Clay sighed and ran a hand through his hair. "I'm sorry, cuz. I guess I'm just a little worried that something might happen."

"Like what?" She gave him a level look, as though daring him to say it out loud.

"Like what happened last time," Clay blurted out. "I mean, what if you have another dream that's, you know..."

"Erotic?" Alisha finished for him.

"Exactly." Clay stood up and began pacing in front of the table. "I mean, what if that happens and we wind up doing...what we did before?"

"What if we do?" Alisha shrugged. "Is that a problem?"

"Hell yes, it's a problem," Clay shouted. "I shouldn't be touching you like that, Alisha, and you and I both know it. I know you're too sweet to say anything about it, but damn it, I just can't let you take that pill tonight without talking about the possibility that what happened before might happen again."

She looked down at her plate. "So you're upset because you don't want to touch me?"

Clay could have kicked himself. *Look what you did, you idiot! Now she thinks you don't want to help her because you're afraid of touching her.* "Alisha, baby, it's not like that," he said, striding around the table and sinking to his knees in front of her. "It's just...I know you were under the influence of the pill and everything, but what we did...it was just wrong." He took her hands in his. "It's not that I don't want to touch you," he said in a low voice. "I *do*. That's the problem."

"Are you asking me not to take the sweetdreams pill tonight? To give up on the trial?" she asked. "Just because you're afraid I might have a dream that makes you uncomfortable?"

"No... Hell, I don't know what I'm asking." Clay shook his head. God, why did everything have to be so complicated? Why couldn't he have met Alisha in college instead of at a family reunion when he was ten and his dad first married into her family? Why did the girl of his dreams also have to be his cousin?

"Clay, look." Alisha put out a hand and cupped his cheek. "I can tell you're upset, but I think we're making too much out of this. I mean, so you touched me, so what? It

was a dream, and aren't we both grown up enough to understand the difference between a dream and reality?"

"I thought I was." Clay looked at her, trying to ignore the way her soft touch on his cheek made his cock throb. "I just don't know anymore."

"Dreams are so random." Alisha spoke in a low tone, carding her fingers gently through his hair. "I doubt I'd have another dream like the one I had last Friday night, but even if I did, there's no reason either one of us should be upset about it. I mean, if you have to...to touch me to facilitate the dream, then you should just do it."

Clay frowned at her. "That's really what you want?"

She nodded as though it was the most natural thing in the world. "Of course. And you shouldn't feel bad about it, either. After all, it's not like you're trying to seduce me or doing something against my will—you're just playing along with the dream. Actually, you're *protecting* me. If you hadn't played along last Friday night, who knows what might have happened? I might have had a mental breakdown or something."

"I guess if you put it that way..." Clay shook his head uncertainly. He wanted to believe what she was saying was true, wanted to be able to touch her without shame or guilt. But he just wasn't sure that was possible.

"It's only for the trial," Alisha said soothingly. "We both know you wouldn't try anything otherwise. We just have to do what's necessary in order to get the data VELA needs to make sure the drug works the way it's supposed to."

"Well, I guess..."

"Look," she said, sounding the tiniest bit impatient. "It's not like you're some kind of sex-crazed maniac who can't control himself, Clay. I've been living with you now for two years, and you've never tried a single thing."

Clay cleared his throat. "Well, there was that time the other week when you spilled cocoa on yourself —"

"And you helped me then too," she cut him off. "I was hurting and you put cream on my burns. What's wrong with that?"

He frowned. "So then, you didn't think there was anything, uh, sexual about what we did?"

Alisha looked thoughtful. "*Sensual*, maybe. I won't deny your hands felt good on my skin. But I know you wouldn't have touched me that way if I hadn't needed you to. And it's the same with the sweetdreams dreams. If you have to touch me, I don't mind because I know you're only doing it to help me. You see?"

The more she talked, the more sense it made. She's right, Clay thought, a feeling of relief sweeping over him. I was just helping her. I can't be blamed for that—neither of us can. And so what if it felt good? Of course it felt good—she's a beautiful woman and I'm a red blooded guy, but that doesn't mean it has to mean anything or affect our relationship as cousins. He cleared his throat. "Well, if you're sure it doesn't upset you..."

She nodded firmly. "I'm sure. You do whatever you have to, Clay. I promise no matter what it is, I won't be upset."

"Even if we...if you have another dream like you did the other night?" he asked, wanting to be sure she was really giving him permission to touch her if he had to.

"Absolutely. Whatever you have to do. Even if you have to...to go farther than you did before, I won't mind. I know it feels wrong to you—to both of us—but remember, it's for the greater good. Sometimes we have to sacrifice some of our comfort in order to reap the rewards." Alisha looked at him from under her lashes, and for a minute he could have sworn he saw desire in her eyes. Could it be that she enjoyed his touch on her body as much as he enjoyed touching her? Or was she just putting on a brave face to hide her inner anxiety?

Clay sighed. There was no way to know without asking, and he wasn't about to do that. After all, he was her cousin—how could he ask if she wanted him sexually the way

he wanted her? "All right," he said at last. "Take the damn pill. I'll be here to watch over you."

Alisha smiled at him and pulled the red, white, and blue pill out of her jeans pocket. "Thanks, Clay. I knew I could count on you." She downed the pill with a sip of water. "Let's get ready for bed."

Chapter Six

Alisha felt terrible for manipulating the man she loved, but she didn't see any other way to get him to realize that he loved her too. Clay had such a tender conscience when it came to her that he would never lay a finger on her if there wasn't a good reason for it. She'd done the best she could to give him that reason, and still he felt guilty, as though he was taking advantage of her. She supposed she could see the reason for that. Growing up, Clay had always been her protector, the one who kept other people from hurting her. Naturally, it would upset him to think he was hurting her himself.

This would be so much easier if we could both just admit how we feel and tell the rest of the family to butt out. But there was no way that was going to happen, and she knew it. Clay was devoted to her family, especially his ex-stepmother and Alisha's own mom. Between the two of them, they had raised him to be the fine man he was today, and he probably felt like he was betraying their trust by touching Alisha in a less-than-appropriate way. If only he could get over that feeling! If only she could make him see that they belonged together. The chemistry between them was irresistible, and they would never truly be happy with other people. What more did he need to see that his little cousin was actually the love of his life?

Sex. He needs some hot, nasty, don't-stop, can't-let-go-of-you, no-holds-barred sex, she told herself, slipping into the bathroom to get dressed for bed. The question is, can I get him to have that kind of sex with me—or any kind of sex for that matter—while he's feeling so guilty?

Looking at the tiny little outfit she'd picked to "sleep" in that night, Alisha certainly hoped so. Otherwise, the exorbitant amount of money she'd been spending on lingerie lately would be completely wasted.

Tonight's outfit was a sleek pair of emerald green pajamas that she just knew would set off her eyes. But they were far from being the innocent, long-sleeved kind with matching baggy bottoms she'd worn as a little girl when it got cold.

Her top was short sleeved with a deep v-neck and single decorative pearl button to hold it together. The hem of it landed just under the bottom curves of her breasts, and if she lifted her arms, it rode up easily, revealing her nipples. The bottoms barely deserved the name at all. They were tiny, tight-fitting boy shorts that rode high in the back to show off the curves of her ass and dipped low in the front—almost low enough to show the top of her pussy slit. In case *that* didn't draw Clay's eye enough, there was also a seam running from the front of the shorts to the back that parted her cunt lips and divided her ass into two distinct, round globes.

It was a sexy outfit, and the emerald green looked great against her warm brown skin tones. Alisha especially liked the way the seam of the shorts kept rubbing against her clit. Every move she made was a delicious kind of torture, and it would be even better if she could get Clay to take them off.

Wearing something like the tiny satin pajamas might have made him suspicious of her true intentions if she hadn't made it a practice to wear skimpy outfits around him for ages. Showing a little skin had been her first strategy toward getting him to notice her in a more-than-cousinly way. But even after it became clear that being half naked around him didn't work, Alisha had continued the practice. She loved the feel of those

pale gold eyes on her body, loved the hot way Clay looked at her while she went about her business and pretended not to notice.

She was feeling the same slightly dizzy sensation she'd had the week before after taking the sweetdreams pill, but she attributed it to nerves. After all, she was walking a fine line, pretending she really didn't want Clay when actually she couldn't wait to feel his hands on her again. She wasn't sure quite what tonight's "dream" would be, but she had a feeling it would come to her the minute she put her head on the pillow and pretended to go to sleep.

Taking one last look in the bathroom mirror to be sure her long black hair was perfectly smooth, she took a deep breath. "All right, here goes," she murmured to her reflection. The girl in the mirror looked like sex on a stick and ready for anything. Alisha just hoped she really was.

When she walked into the dim bedroom and headed for the bed, she could feel Clay watching every move she made, but as always, she acted like she didn't notice him looking at her. She was still a little dizzy with nerves, but when she slid into bed with him, she could feel herself settling down. In fact, she even felt a little sleepy.

"You ready for bed?" she asked since Clay was still watching her without saying a word.

He nodded and then gave her a half smile. "You sure you won't freeze to death tonight in that outfit?"

"If I get cold, I'll just cuddle up to you and you can warm me up." Alisha gave him a mischievous grin before turning her back and snuggling under the blankets. Closing her eyes, she settled down to wait for a reasonable amount of time before she could pretend to have entered REM sleep.

She was determined not to have a repeat of the last time when she had actually fallen asleep, but as before, it suddenly felt like someone had tied lead weights to her eyelids. I'll just take a power nap, she told herself. There's no harm in catching a few Zs before I go into my act. And anyway, I'm too tired to try anything right now...

The next thing she knew she was waking up in their meadow.

It was a broad stretch of lush green grass surrounded by the verdant Florida growth that had been located in the woods behind her house as a child. Alisha hadn't been allowed there without someone to watch out for her, and whenever Clay had come over with her aunt, she and her older cousin had taken the opportunity to claim the meadow for their own.

Alisha frowned. *But how can I be here? It was torn up for condos four years ago. It's gone – isn't it? And why am I dressed like this?* She had on a fringed red leather vest and a pair of denim cutoff shorts that were ragged around the edges and faded and soft from too many trips through the washer. It had been her favorite outfit when she was younger because it was so comfortable and easy to move in. She'd climbed plenty of trees in this getup...as well as doing other adventurous things. The clothes were tighter now, worn on her grown-up body, and for some reason, she didn't have a shirt on under the vest, so that the bare curves of her breasts were pushing against the red leather. But despite that, the clothes still felt right. In fact, the whole situation felt right.

Abruptly, Alisha decided that she didn't care that the meadow had been torn up and destroyed. It was here now, and so was she—she might as well enjoy its natural beauty to the fullest.

It was a quiet place, shadowed by a single huge oak tree that grew almost in the exact middle of the meadow in a little dip, like a natural bowl in the grass. Early on, she and Clay had discovered that if you stood in the dip with your back to the oak tree's trunk, nobody from the house could see you. They used the spot for secret meetings and private games.

Games like Stowaway, where Clay was the captain of a pirate ship and Alisha was the unfortunate sailor who'd been caught hiding aboard. She always had to endure plenty of punishment like being tied to the "mast," which was the trunk of the oak tree while Clay told her the awful things he'd done to the last stowaway. Sometimes he

would pinch her or tickle her while she was helpless to stop him. Alisha had found that there was something intriguing about being touched when she couldn't do any touching back—especially when the person touching her was her handsome older cousin.

There were other games too. Games that would have gotten them in a lot of trouble if either of their moms had found out about them. That was the kind of game Alisha wanted to play now. If only Clay was here, she could.

Alisha smiled to herself as she thought of her ex-cousin. It was a good thing they'd finally become lovers since she'd been living with him. She'd always wanted him, and even though they'd been together for over two years, she still desired him just as much as ever, still craved his hands and mouth on her body. And here in the meadow would be the perfect time to remind him of that. So where was he? Alisha scanned the meadow for her lover, a little frown playing around her mouth. If he was here, they could have some naughty fun together—

"Hi, Alisha."

She whirled around to see him standing right behind her. He was also wearing the clothes he'd worn back when they played in the meadow—faded jeans and a T-shirt with the name of his favorite band, Android's Electric Sheep, printed on it in dripping blue and red letters. The shirt was stretched tight across his muscular chest, and the sunlight filtering through the oak leaves made his tan skin golden and picked out red highlights in his thick black hair.

Alisha smiled at him. "I was just looking for you. Isn't this great?"

He frowned. "Isn't what great?"

"Our meadow." Alisha made a sweeping gesture to include the entire green and growing space. "I thought it had been dug up and ruined when they put in those condos four years ago, but here it is, as good as new. Isn't it gorgeous?"

Clay nodded slowly, his brow furrowed as though he was considering what to say carefully. "It's just as...as beautiful as ever," he said, smiling at her. "It's nice to be back here with you."

"I was just thinking the same thing." Smiling, Alisha took his hand and led him to the tree. "Come on, let's sit on the far side of the trunk so nobody can see us."

He smiled. "Just like we always used to do."

"Exactly." She settled herself beside him, the rough oak bark scratchy and somehow comforting against her back. "Mmm, perfect. Put your arm around me."

Clay put one muscular arm around her and drew her close. Alisha sighed contentedly and put her head on his shoulder. The warm, spicy scent of his skin seemed to mix with the wild green, growing smell of the meadow, and the feel of his big body so close to hers was making her heart race. It reminded her of the naughty thrill she'd felt during their childhood games, and suddenly Alisha wanted more than anything to play those games again.

"Clay," she said, idly tracing a pattern on his knee. "Remember the way we used to play here?"

"Uh...yes, I guess so." He sounded uncertain – which made Alisha want to jog his memory.

"You remember, don't you?" she asked, playfully. "Stowaway and Queen of Sheba and Arrested—I really liked that one. Especially when you 'handcuffed' my hands behind my back."

"Yeah, that was..." He cleared his throat. "That was a good one. I think I used creepers to wind around your wrists as handcuffs, didn't I?"

"Something like that." Alisha laughed softly. "Do you remember that time we were about to play a new game—didn't we call it Strip Search? One where I was a spy and you were trying to find the secrets I stole. And if I didn't tell you where they were you were going to torture me—remember?"

"Uh..." Clay coughed into his free hand. "I, uh, think so. But we didn't get very far because your mom came out and called us in for dinner."

"Yeah, she did." Alisha gave him a slow smile, looking up at him from under her lashes. "You know, I always wondered how that game would have gone. And there's nobody to call us in for dinner now."

Clay looked uncomfortable. "You know, we really shouldn't have been playing anything like that in the first place. We were just kids and besides, we're *cousins*."

"Not anymore," Alisha reminded him. "Come, on, Clay—let's finish that game." Standing, she put her hands behind her back and leaned against the rough trunk of the oak. "Here I am, the naughty spy. I stole the documents—I admit it. But I won't tell you where they are. Now what are you going to do about it?" She smiled at him, daring him to play.

He looked at her uneasily. "Alisha, we really shouldn't."

"Why not?" She frowned at him impatiently. "Come on, Clay, what's the problem? We've been together for over two years now, and we still can't keep our hands off each other. Why are you acting like this?"

"We've been together for two years? As in *together* together?" He stood and looked at her doubtfully.

Alisha felt her certainty start to crumble. "Yes...I *think* so. Didn't we...didn't we get together as soon as I moved in with you?" She frowned at him, a sinking sensation starting in her stomach. Was she somehow wrong? Were she and Clay not together? Her head began to hurt, and suddenly the meadow around them became fuzzy and indistinct.

"Alisha, are you all right?" Clay seemed to be giving her a worried look, but by now she could barely see his face. It was as blurred as their surroundings.

"I...don't know." She put a hand to her head. "I feel so *funny*. Everything's getting all blurry and strange."

"No, no, you're right. We're together, of course we're together." Clay put his arms around her, holding her tight in a panicky grip. "It's all right, baby. Come back to me," he murmured into her hair. "Come back and everything will be okay."

"What do you mean come back? I'm right here." But Alisha was relieved to see that his face was no longer blurry. As she watched, the meadow swam back into focus too. Clay's arms around her felt solid and warm and everything was somehow all right again. They were together. Of course they were together. How could she have ever doubted it?

"Are you okay now?" He was still looking at her anxiously.

"Fine. I'm fine." She smiled at him. "So where were we?"

"Right about here." Clay bent his head and kissed her softly on the lips. "Don't scare me like that, baby. You really had me worried."

"I'm sorry." Tilting her head upward, she kissed him back, savoring the warmth of his mouth on hers. "I don't know what came over me—I just felt dizzy all of a sudden. But it's all good now. And I *think* we were just about to play a game. Weren't we?"

"Mmm-hmm." He nuzzled her neck, his warm breath against her sensitive skin making her shiver. "I think you just admitted you stole those secret documents I've been looking for. But you weren't going to tell me where they are."

"Not unless you torture it out of me." Alisha laughed breathlessly and leaned against the rough bark of the oak tree, putting her hands behind her back again. "So what are you gonna do?"

Clay smiled down at her and fingered the red leather vest that was stretched tight against her bare breasts. Alisha could feel the heat of his large hand near her skin and it made her shiver again. "I guess the first thing I have to do is search you—to see if you're hiding them somewhere on your body," he murmured. "And if I don't find anything, I'll have to torture you until you talk."

Alisha lifted her chin, her nipples tightening in anticipation. "Go ahead and do your worst. I'm not afraid."

"You're not, hmm?" he growled. "Well, maybe you *should* be." His fingers flew over the buttons, and suddenly her vest was wide open, baring her breasts to his gaze. "What if I do this?" he asked, cupping both breasts in his large, warm hands. "Now are you ready to talk?"

"Not yet," Alisha breathed, smiling at him.

"What about now?" As he spoke, he twisted her nipples, sending sparks of deliciously painful pleasure coursing through her until Alisha moaned and writhed under his hands.

"No," she panted as he tugged her hard nipples. "Never."

"I can see I'm going to have to get rough with you," Clay murmured. Releasing her nipples, he slid his hands down her trembling abdomen to the ragged jean shorts she wore. Cupping her cunt through the worn denim, he rubbed hard at the seam that ran right between her pussy lips.

"God!" Alisha bucked against his hand, feeling the tender V between her legs flood with her juices.

"I thought that might convince you." He grinned at her as he continued to work her, his long fingers pressing the seam against her tender flesh, rubbing her swollen clit mercilessly.

Alisha moaned, spreading her legs wider for his assault and wishing he was using more than his fingers on her. As if in answer to her wish, Clay suddenly stopped rubbing her through the denim of her shorts and began fumbling with the waistband instead.

"Shouldn't be doing this," he muttered, so low Alisha could barely hear him. But before she could ask him what he was talking about, he was stripping the ragged jean shorts down to her knees and baring her pussy completely.

"What...what are you going to do to me now?" she asked breathlessly.

"Whatever I want to." Looking into her eyes, he reached down and cupped her bare cunt.

Alisha gasped at the sudden contact and then bit back a moan as she felt the heel of his hand rub against her swollen clit. She was so wet now she knew he would be able to tell how hot she was for him. Her cunt honey coated his palm as he thrust into her with two long, thick fingers, filling her.

"God, please!" she cried as he fingered her roughly, thrusting deep into her tight, slippery pussy.

Leaning down, Clay kissed her again. This time it was a hard, devouring kiss that took her breath away as he plundered her mouth with his tongue the same way he was filling her pussy with his fingers. "Ready to talk now, baby?" he growled when he finally pulled away to let her breathe.

"N-no," Alisha managed to gasp out. She lifted her chin and gave him a challenging look. "If you think shoving your fingers inside me is enough to break me, you're wrong."

He grinned, a hot sexual glint in his pale gold eyes. "Oh, that's not all I'm going to shove inside your hot little pussy, Alisha."

"What—" But before she could ask what he meant, he dropped to his knees in front of her and stripped away her shorts entirely.

"Spread your legs," he growled, and it wasn't a request—it was an order.

Helpless to disobey him, Alisha parted her legs wide, trying to make room for his big body between her thighs. But Clay couldn't wait. Pressing forward, he shouldered his way between her slim legs until she could feel his hot breath against her naked cunt.

"Gorgeous," he muttered hoarsely as he studied her intently. "I always knew you'd be beautiful down here, baby. Can't wait to put my tongue in that sweet pussy and feel you coming all over my face."

"Clay?" For some reason she suddenly felt afraid – almost as though they'd never done this before, which was ridiculous. She was sure they'd done everything two people could possibly do in the years since they'd finally gotten together. But still, the feeling of unease persisted.

Clay seemed to catch the fear in her tone because when he looked up, Alisha saw concern as well as lust in his eyes. "Just gonna eat you, baby," he murmured in that same hoarse voice. "Not gonna hurt you. Just need to spread you open and kiss your sweet pussy for a while. Can you let me do that, Alisha?"

The heat in his eyes and the tenderness of his words seemed to melt the apprehension that filled her like the sun melts an ice cube on a hot day. This was Clay, she reminded herself. Her man. He had always been her protector, and now he was her lover too. He would never hurt her, and she could trust him to keep her safe.

"Yes," she whispered, running her hands through his thick, black hair. "Yes, Clay, I can."

"Good." He pressed forward again and laid a gentle but hungry kiss on her inner thigh. "Then open up for me, baby. Let me spread you open and make you feel good."

"I'll try," Alisha told him. But she was still standing with her back to the tree and his shoulders were so broad it was difficult to let him in.

"Here." Gently but urgently, he lifted one of her legs and rested it across his muscular shoulder, spreading her wide. He was supporting half her weight now, and it was a good thing. When Alisha felt her pussy lips part as a result of her new, vulnerable position, her knees went weak, and she felt a shiver of anticipation shake her.

"Clay," she whispered, stroking her fingers through his hair. "Clay, you don't have to..."

"Don't have to?" He looked up at her, his gold eyes blazing. "Alisha, you have no idea how long I've wanted to do this. How long I've wanted to spread open your sweet little pussy and taste you. I want to suck your clit until you scream. Want to fuck you

with my tongue until I feel you trembling all around me and know you're coming just for me. Don't you want that too?"

Alisha nodded, almost unable to speak. "Yes," she whispered breathlessly. "God, yes."

He gave her a heated look. "Then get ready, baby. Because I'm gonna tongue fuck your hot little cunt until you come all over my face tonight."

"Tonight?" Alisha asked, frowning, but Clay didn't answer. He was already pressing his face to her core, lapping greedily at her wet folds as though he was dying of thirst for her.

Alisha moaned and buried her hands in his hair. She'd had other lovers but none she cared for like Clay, none she'd wanted since she was little. Having him down on his knees in front of her, lapping and sucking her open pussy was almost more than she could bear. And he wasn't doing it halfway either. There was a heated desperation to his movements, a hunger she'd never felt with anyone else when he sucked her clit and then thrust his tongue deep inside her. Alisha was sure her back would be scraped raw by the rough bark of the oak trunk behind her, but she didn't give a damn. All she cared about was the hot feeling of her ex-cousin lapping her open cunt as he worked to make her come.

The orgasm wasn't long in coming. The waves of pleasure built and built, and when they finally crashed down around her, Alisha felt like she'd been hit with a tsunami. She moaned and the one leg holding her up almost gave way, but Clay tightened his grip on her, keeping her in position for his lashing tongue. Alisha tightened her grip on his hair and pressed against him, riding his tongue shamelessly, giving herself completely in a way she'd never been able to do with anyone else. God, it felt so good, so right to spread herself for him, to let him do what he wanted. To give herself so completely this way. She only wished it was his cock instead of his tongue inside her, wished she could feel him riding her, fucking her, filling her to the limit and beyond.

She wished it could go on forever, but as soon as the orgasm crested and waned, she began to feel very tired. "Clay," she murmured, tugging gently at his hair. "Clay, I..."

He looked up at her, his lips and cheeks shiny with her juices, his eyes full of lust. "Had enough for now, baby?" he asked softly. "Or do you want some more? I swear I could eat your sweet pussy all night long and still not get enough."

Alisha smiled at him. "Come up here and kiss me," she whispered, urging him upward. "My mouth, I mean."

"Fine, but you come down to me." He pulled her down beside him on the grass and curled an arm around her shoulders protectively. "You taste delicious," he whispered, caressing her cheek. "Let me show you." Leaning over her, he captured her lips in a hot, hungry kiss that made her moan. His tongue invaded her mouth, giving her the taste of herself, flooding her with the scent and salty sweetness of her own essence.

Alisha put her arms around him and gave herself to the kiss completely, the same way she'd surrendered to him when he'd wanted to go down on her. This was where she belonged—here in his arms. She was so glad she and Clay had finally found their way to each other. So glad they were together after so many years of being kept apart.

And she was so incredibly tired.

"Clay," she murmured as they broke the kiss. "Thank you."

He looked suddenly grim. "I wonder if you'll thank me quite so much in the morning."

"What are you talking about?" she asked drowsily. "It's the middle of the day. Besides, you just gave me the best orgasm of my life. Why wouldn't I thank you?"

He opened his mouth as though to answer and then shook his head. "Never mind. You'll understand later."

"Don't...understand." Alisha could barely get the words out for yawning. "Sorry. So tired..."

Clay's eyes softened. "Rest then, baby. Just rest. I'll keep you safe."

"Know you will. Love you...Clay."

"Love you too, cuz," he whispered, using their old endearment. "Sleep now."

Alisha wanted to thank him again but her eyelids were already closing.

Chapter Seven

Clayton wasn't sure what Alisha would think when she watched the SeeAll recording. He'd really gone way too far — this time he was sure of it. It was one thing to touch her and make her come with his fingers. But it was something else entirely to push her up against the wall, part her legs, and go down on her until she came on his tongue. It had been wrong of him — undeniably wrong — and he wouldn't blame his little cousin a bit if she were upset.

God, it had been amazing though.

He snuggled closer to her slender, naked body and watched her as she slept. She'd been completely worn out by what they'd been through the night before and no wonder. He'd never had a lover as responsive, as completely sexual and sensual as Alisha. You've never had one more off-limits either, he reminded himself. And anyway, you're not really lovers. You're only doing what you're doing to facilitate her dreams. Which was a good thing because if he hadn't had the excuse of the sweetdreams drug, he might almost have believed that he was falling in love with her. Of course he wasn't, not really. Falling in love with your cousin was sick. Wasn't it?

Just then, she stirred, her long eyelashes fluttering open to reveal her warm hazel eyes. "Clay?" she murmured. "That you?"

"Yeah, it's me, baby." He stroked a strand of hair away from her face and smiled at her. It must be disorienting for her to wake up beside him since this wasn't their usual sleeping arrangement.

She yawned and stretched as sinuously as a cat. "I had such a vivid dream. We were back in our meadow – the one behind my mom's house. You remember?"

Clay smiled at her. "How could I forget? We played the best games there."

"We played one last night in my dream too." She sat up in bed and then looked down at herself, apparently realizing she was naked for the first time. "Hmm...looks like last night's dream had some basis in reality," she murmured, pulling the sheet up to her chin.

"I'm, uh, afraid so." Clay nodded.

"Did we, uh...?" Alisha seemed at a loss for words, but he understood her meaning.

"No. God, no, I swear." He pushed back the covers, glad he was still wearing his pajama pants. "But we did go a little further than last time. A lot further, actually."

Alisha nodded. "I remember. Well, I think I do. It's all kind of fuzzy. We were in the meadow, and you had me up against the old oak tree..."

"Actually you were up against the wall, standing on the bed. But I guess you thought it was the tree." Clay cleared his throat. "Do you want to see?"

"Of course I do." She nodded eagerly and he wondered if she would still be so eager after she'd watched the SeeAll recording of the night's activities.

"All right." Clay unclipped the SeeAll from the headboard and set it up, placing the light screen in the center of the bed so they could both see it. Taking a deep breath, he flipped it on.

Alisha watched in apparent fascination as the scene from the night before played out. There she was, walking and talking, obviously sure that she was back in the meadow she and Clay had played in as children. She watched without speaking as they

bantered and didn't say a word even at the part where he pressed her back against the wall and sank to his knees in front of her.

At the point where he stripped her of her clothes and pressed between her legs, Clay wished he could offer an explanation. Before he'd been able to say that he'd touched her erotically because her dream demanded it. But there was no excuse here. Alisha hadn't dreamed of him going down on her — that was purely his own invention. Purely his own desire. He just hoped she wouldn't hate him for it.

Finally, the recording was over. Clay snapped it off and cleared his throat. "Um, about that...that part where I, um, tasted you. I...I wasn't sure how you'd feel about it. I know I shouldn't have since you didn't really dream it but...well, how do you feel about it?"

She was silent for a long moment, and he was sure she was mad at him. Sure she would never talk to him again. He had finally gone too far. But finally she spoke.

"I guess...well, I guess I feel kind of...kind of..."

"Angry? Upset?" Clay guessed. "I understand. And I want you to know that I'm really sorry. I never should have —"

"No, Clay. Don't be sorry." Alisha looked up at him, her hazel eyes troubled. "I was going to say I feel kind of *cheated*. I mean, you and I shared a moment — something really special. And yet I hardly remember it at all. It's like it happened to someone else in a dream. A really vivid dream, but still..."

Clay laughed with relief. "It *was* a dream, cuz."

"I know, I know." She ran a hand through her hair in apparent frustration. "I just...I feel like I was there but I wasn't there at the same time. I missed it. It's like...like gaining ten pounds from eating ice cream without having the pleasure of actually eating the ice cream." She looked up at him. "Does that make sense?"

"Sure, I guess so." Her reaction surprised him. Far from being upset about what he'd done to her, she was mad that she couldn't remember it properly.

Alisha sighed. "I just...I guess I wish I could have really *been* there. I mean, what you just showed me on the SeeAll recording that...that was one of the most erotic things I've ever seen in my life. I mean, it seemed as though you really wanted to...to..." She looked down at her hands, letting the sentence trail off.

"To go down on you?" Clay finished for her quietly.

Silently, she nodded.

"I did, baby," he murmured, lifting her chin. "Look at me. Tasting your sweet little pussy was the single hottest sex I've ever had. I mean, I know I shouldn't say that, but it's true. It was amazing."

"Was it?" She lifted her eyes to him. "Was it really? Because I have the feeling I'd feel the same way...if I could really remember what happened. Watching this"—she gestured at the empty light screen—"is like seeing a stranger get to do things I've only imagined."

Clay stroked her cheek. "I can't believe I'm asking you this but...would you like me to show you?"

"You mean like...reenact what happened?" Alisha's hazel eyes were suddenly green, and there was a warm, sexual flush along her neck and high cheekbones that gave her coffee-and-cream skin ruddy undertones.

"Only if you want to," he murmured. "Do you want to, baby? Do you want me to show you how I tasted your pussy last night?"

"Clay, would you really do that for me? You wouldn't mind?"

He laughed softly. "You act like me going down on you was some hardship I had to endure." He gave her a serious look, holding her gaze with his own. "Alisha, I loved it. I didn't want to stop. I don't want to stop now."

"Then don't." Alisha climbed from beneath the covers and sat on the bedspread. "Should I, um, stand up again?" she asked, looking at him uncertainly.

Clay shook his head. "That was nice, but I think I could get to you better if you were lying down. Here..." He pulled her to the end of the bed so that her lower legs were hanging off the end and positioned himself on the floor in front of her. "Easier access this way," he explained when she looked down at him uncertainly. "And here." He reached up and grabbed one of the pillows, arranging it under her hips so that the tender V between her legs was exactly at the level of his mouth. "Perfect."

"You think so?" Alisha laughed, sounding self conscious. "I don't know about that, Clay. I feel kind of, uh, exposed here."

Her uncertainty pricked his conscience, and he suddenly realized what he was doing. He was about to taste his little cousin's pussy, and this time he had no excuse. No dream he had to help facilitate, no reason to spread her legs and go down on her the way he was about to do. No reason other than the fact that she wanted to know exactly what had happened the night before and he desperately wanted to taste her again. It was wrong, so incredibly wrong. And yet, he couldn't stop – he wanted her too badly.

"I tell you what," he said, stoking her inner thigh soothingly. "We'll take things slow. I'll just show you a little bit...just to give you an idea of what I did last night. And if you want me to stop, just say so and I will. Okay?"

Alisha looked relieved. "Okay," she murmured. "Just show me then."

"I will but you have to trust me. Have to spread for me, baby," he told her.

"I, uh, thought I was." She looked down at herself. Her thighs were open about six inches, revealing the slit of her pussy but not really giving enough room for him to get to her.

Clay smiled at her. "You need to be a lot more open than that for me to taste you. Here, let me show you." He raised her legs until her feet were planted firmly on the bed. Then he placed his palms against her inner thighs and spread her open, gently but firmly, until the soft folds of her pussy opened for him.

Alisha sucked in her breath. "God – are you sure I have to be quite so...so open?"

He nodded. "If you want to see what I'm doing, you do. God, you have the prettiest pussy." He couldn't take his eyes from her swollen cunt lips, from her inner folds which were already shiny from her juices. "Can't wait to taste you again," he murmured.

"Is it really...you like it that much?" Alisha looked at him uncertainly, and Clay smiled up at her from his position between her legs.

"I know it's hard to believe, but sometimes I'd rather do this than fuck."

"Really? Why? What do you like about it?"

"Everything. I love the smell, the taste, the way it feels when a woman's coming apart under my tongue, shaking and gasping and begging while I get deeper and deeper into her. It's incredibly hot."

She smiled at him tentatively. "You're making me pretty hot just talking about it."

"It's hotter when I do it. When *we* do it," Clay corrected himself. "Don't be afraid to give me feedback, Alisha. I'll take things slow, but if you want more of something, don't hesitate to ask. Okay?"

"Okay," she whispered. "But you're just going to show me what you did last night, right?"

Damn, he kept forgetting that. "Right," he said, wishing he was allowed to do more, to tongue fuck her until she came again and again and then shove his cock deep in her willing cunt and fill her with his cream. But that would be going too far. Way too far. He would just show her a little bit. Would just kiss her pussy lips and maybe lap her clit, very, very gently, so she got the idea of what they had done. There was no need to go farther than that. "Just relax," he murmured. "Just lay back and let me show you, baby."

"All right." Some of the tension seemed to leave her body as Alisha did as he said, relaxing back against her pillows and sighing softly.

"Good girl." Clay rewarded her with a gentle, sucking kiss right where her inner thigh met her body. Then slowly, so as not to alarm her, he leaned forward and placed a soft, tender kiss right over her open pussy slit.

Alisha moaned and tensed under him, and he felt one of her small hands stroking his hair tentatively. Her reaction encouraged him to kiss her again. And again. He'd meant to just kiss her outer pussy lips, but with each successive kiss, they opened a little farther for him. Before he knew it, Clay was spreading her wide with his thumbs to kiss her sweet, slippery inner cunt.

"God, Clay!" Her fingers tightened in his hair, and her body went tight with erotic tension.

Hearing her moan his name while he kissed her open pussy was too much for Clay. He needed more, and he needed it *now*. Pressing forward, he sucked the ripe button of her clit into his mouth, lashing it with his tongue until she cried out and bucked up to meet him, chanting his name like a prayer.

All thought of right and wrong was swept from Clay's mind. He didn't care that he shouldn't be doing this, didn't care that it was his sweet little cousin who was spread open for him while he licked and sucked her tender pussy. All he cared about was making her come again, feeling her shiver and shake under him as he tongue fucked her cunt.

"Clay," she gasped. "Clay, *please!*"

It was a plea for more, and he knew it. With a low, possessive growl building in his throat, Clay scooped her hips up, bringing her pelvis even closer and tilting her up to give himself better access to her pussy. Then he thrust his tongue as deeply into her inner cunt as he could, penetrating her sweet body and claiming her as he had the night before.

Alisha went wild, moaning and gasping his name. Both hands were buried in his hair now, and she bucked against him, trying to get more of his tongue inside her, working toward the orgasm he was trying so hard to give her.

Clay's cock ached for release in his pajama bottoms. He couldn't get enough of her, of her hot, feminine scent, of the salty-sweet flavor of her cunt honey. His fingers clamped down on her thighs and he held her in place, sucking and licking and fucking mercilessly, needing so badly to make her come he couldn't think about anything else but that ultimate goal.

God, she was delicious. So hot, so wet, so sweet... At last he felt her tense under him, and then the inner walls of her cunt began to quiver around his invading tongue. "Clay!" she wailed as both of her small hands fisted in his hair. "Clay, oh God!"

Come for me, he wanted to say. *Come for me, baby. Let it go completely and just come.* But he couldn't speak a word with his face buried between her thighs. All he could do was lap at the fresh wetness and try to ride out the storm as her orgasm overtook her and her slender body shivered under his mouth.

Then it was over, and Alisha was dragging him up, urging him onto the bed with her, eager to feel him near. Clay came willingly enough and somehow found himself lying on top of her warm, trembling body.

"God, that was so good. Nobody's ever made me feel like that before." Alisha kissed him eagerly, lapping her juices from his lips, and Clay couldn't help kissing her back.

He could feel the ridge of his cock pressing hard against her open pussy and wondered if Alisha could feel it too, but if she did, it didn't seem to bother her a bit. It was a good thing he still had his pajama bottoms on or... Suddenly Clay realized that the waistband of the pants was down around his upper thighs. Somehow when Alisha had dragged him up onto the bed his bottoms had been pushed down, leaving him almost naked. No wonder he could feel her so well, could feel her slippery, hot cunt rubbing against the length of his cock. God, he was practically fucking her! Just one wrong move and he would be balls deep in his little cousin's open pussy.

"Alisha, wait. We have to be careful." He tried to pull away from her but only succeeded in doing a kind of push up and putting distance between their upper bodies.

"What's wrong?" Her eyes were pure green with hunger for him, and it was clear she didn't want to stop.

"What's wrong is my pants got pushed down somehow. Look." Clay nodded down at their lower bodies and felt a low groan come spilling out of his lips at the erotic sight.

Alisha's slender thighs were split wide to receive him, her pussy open for his entry. And nestled between her swollen pussy lips, inside her slippery, dark-chocolate folds, was his cock. The length of him was enveloped by her sex with only the head pointing up and out of her welcoming cunt slit.

"Look," Clay said again, his voice deep and hoarse. "We're almost...I'm almost inside you. I...I should move." Despite his words, he didn't make any motion to remove himself from his little cousin's sweet, wet pussy. Somehow he just couldn't. Couldn't bear to leave her warmth before he had to.

"Why should you move?" Alisha murmured in his ear. "What's the big deal? It's not like you're *inside* me, Clay. We're just rubbing against each other while we kiss, that's all. And I wasn't *nearly* done kissing you." She tried to tug him down so that their lips met again, but Clay resisted. He simply couldn't take his eyes off the way they were almost joined.

"I...we shouldn't. It's dangerous."

"Dangerous how?" Alisha was moving now, a subtle rocking motion that rubbed her wet inner cunt all along the length of his shaft, up and down, up and down until Clay felt he would burst from frustration. The contrast of his tan shaft against her deep brown pussy was an incredible turn on. Not to mention the delicious friction of her inner cunt rubbing against his throbbing cock.

"Because," he said roughly, trying to resist the urge to thrust against her and join the rhythm she'd created. "Because if I'm not careful, I could slide inside you. I don't think you realize what you do to me, Alisha. I don't think you realize how badly I want to fuck you right now."

"Then do it," she breathed, rolling her hips to grind them together. "Go ahead, Clay. Slide yourself deep in my pussy and *fuck* me. I know you want to."

"I can't!" Looking down, he could see drops of precum forming on the head of his cock as she rubbed against him, almost begging him to fuck her and come inside her. *Come inside her. If I fuck her I'll be coming inside my own little cousin, filling her pussy up with my cream.* The thought and the surge of guilt that came with it was enough to help him break free. "I'm sorry, Alisha, I can't!" he said again. "We can't do this."

With a swift motion, he jerked himself off her, pulled up his pajama bottoms, and left the room.

Chapter Eight

Things were quiet between them for the rest of the weekend and the beginning of the following week. Clay was obviously feeling guilty, and Alisha had never been so frustrated in her life. They had been *so close*. It made her crazy to think that she and Clay had been unable to seal the deal because of his conscience.

The other thing that bothered her was the fact that she seemed to have slept through her sex with Clay *again*. What had happened between them the next morning was crystal clear, but the memory of what they had done the night before was blurry and indistinct, like something that had happened to someone else. She began to wonder if there was something strange in the red, white, and blue placebo pills Deelah had given her. But when she called her friend, Deelah denied it completely.

"No way, girl. Those are just sugar pills—no active ingredients." She tossed her red and gold curls and shifted out of the range of her holo-phone for a moment so that the twelve inch miniature projection of her wavered alarmingly.

"Sit still. I can't talk to you when you're jumping all over the place," Alisha complained. Deelah was the worst about fidgeting on the phone.

"Sorry, I'm trying to pick a good color to go with this dress." Deelah gestured at the bright red strapless sheath that looked painted on over her large breasts. "What do you think of this one? Do a close-up and see."

Sighing, Alisha pointed her light stylus at Deelah's image and expanded the picture until a 3-D life-size hologram of her friend's hand appeared in front of her. "Hmm...I don't like the stripes," she said, studying the red-and-white candy-cane stripes that decorated Deelah's immaculately groomed fingernails. "Why not just go plain red?"

"Because it's *boring*. Solids are out. I need some kind of pattern to make this outfit pop," Deelah complained. "What if I did a red and black stripe instead of red and white?"

"What if you forget about your fingernails for two seconds and tell me what's going on with me and Clay?" Alisha asked, exasperated. "If there's nothing but sugar in those pills you gave me, why am I sleeping through the hottest sex of my life?"

"Oh, so you two actually did the deed?" Deelah looked up eagerly, finally losing interest in her two-tone nails. "What was it like?"

"Well, we haven't actually, you know, done it yet. But we came damn close last Friday. And even closer the morning after," Alisha admitted. "We were almost there. I really thought I'd broken through his boundaries, and you know once I get him over the idea that we're still related and the guilt—"

"He'll realize you two are soul mates and family ties don't matter. I know, I know." Deelah made an impatient motion with one hand. "So what happened? Why didn't you do the deed?"

"He got upset and left at the last minute," Alisha admitted. "And I do mean the very *last* minute."

"Mmm-mmm, girl. Do I detect some sexual frustration?" Deelah asked sympathetically.

"Of course you do! I was this close to having him." Alisha showed her thumb and forefinger barely an inch apart. "And he even admitted he wanted me too. He just feels too guilty to act on it."

Deelah blew out a breath. "Okay, so guilt is what's stopping him. He's probably afraid of what the rest of your family will do when they find out."

"Probably," Alisha conceded.

"So get them on your side, girl," Deelah said as though it was the most obvious thing in the world. "They know you're not related anymore. Tell your mom you have the hots for Clay and get her to back you up."

"Are you kidding me? You *have* met my mom, right?" Alisha stared at her incredulously.

"Yeah, well." Deelah sighed. "I guess she can be kind of strict."

"Strict? That's like saying the surface of the sun is kind of hot. She still thinks of Clay as her little nephew. If I tell her I want to get with him, she'll be disowning my ass before I can even get the words out of my mouth. There's no way she'll support a relationship between us."

Deelah looked skeptical. "So if your mom and the rest of your family are going to go ballistic and kick you out of the family if you two get together..."

"*When* we get together," Alisha emphasized.

"Sorry, *when* you two get together—is it really worth it?" Deelah asked. "I mean, your family is really tight. Is it really worth never being able to go to your mom's for Christmas again just to get some with your cousin?"

"He's not my cousin. And I don't just want to 'get some.'" Alisha ran her hands through her hair in frustration. "Clay and I *belong* together. I've known it since I first saw him. I've loved him for as long as I can remember. And if having him means I can't have the rest of my family, well, it's a tough decision, but he's worth it. *We're* worth it."

She shook her head. "Oh, why am I trying to explain this to you? Your idea of true love is a man with a genetically enhanced penis."

"That's not true," Deelah denied indignantly. "Although you should have seen this one guy I went out with last week. Hung like a —"

Alisha reached for the Off switch of her phone to end the call. "Just forget it. I have to go."

"No, wait." Deelah held up a hand. "Look, maybe all this has something to do with what's happening when you take the pills."

"How so?" Alisha's hand still hovered over the switch but she wasn't going to end the conversation when she'd finally gotten her best friend back on topic.

"Maybe it's a mental thing. A guilt thing." Deelah looked thoughtful. "I mean, you're close to your family, but I think from what you've told me that Clay is even closer."

"That might be true," Alisha admitted grudgingly. "He doesn't really have a family of his own. All the people on his dad's side are dead or living on the far side of the moon—too far away to get together much, you know? You can't have too many family reunions when it costs you two years' salary to get to where the rest of the family is."

"Uh-huh. So how do you think Clay is going to feel when you tank that important relationship for him?" Deelah asked. "Think he's going to thank you for it?"

"Well..." Alisha hesitated. She hadn't really thought of that before. "They'll get over it eventually," she said at last, knowing it was true. "They won't be happy with us for a while, but Clay's their boy. They'll forgive him, even if they don't completely forgive me."

"Even if you're right, it still isn't going to be an easy or pleasant process," Deelah pointed out. "And maybe subconsciously you feel guilty about that. Which is why you're *actually* going to sleep instead of just *pretending* to after you take a placebo pill. You're determined to get somewhere with your cousin—and you do—but your

subconscious won't let you completely enjoy it so it puts you in a dreamlike state while you're doing whatever nasty things it is you're doing to poor old Clay."

Alisha frowned. "That's the craziest thing I've ever heard."

"Well, that's all I got, girl." Deelah shrugged and then looked at her watch. "Oh—I have to go or I'm going to be late for my date."

"Going out with Mr. Big Dick again, are you?" Alisha asked. "You know, he probably had a tiny little Vienna sausage-looking thing between his thighs before the gene therapy."

"Oh, I know he did." Deelah looked smug. "I helped him pick out the new size. Even altered the shape a little. Now he's curved for *my* pleasure—hits the G-spot every time."

"Girl, you're too much." Alisha was torn between disgust and laughter. "Go on, get to your date."

"Talk to you later. And good luck with your last pill." Deelah blew her a kiss as the hologram of her flickered out.

"Thanks," Alisha muttered to herself as she turned off her own phone. "I have a feeling I'm going to need it."

* * * * *

Dinner Friday night was a silent affair. Clay had been swimming in guilt for an entire week and he was hoping that Alisha would be willing to call off taking the last pill. He didn't like to come out and ask her because he knew that the drug trial was important to her. But at the same time he couldn't help wondering what would happen if she *did* take the last sweetdreams pill. Who knew how far things might go, how out of hand they might get?

It didn't help that his memory kept showing him pictures of her naked and spread for him or that he wanted her like he'd never wanted any other women before. He had to keep reminding himself that having a relationship with her would break his

stepmom's and aunt's hearts. But at the same time, his cock was throbbing in his jeans while he watched Alisha take dainty sips of soup on the other side of the table.

She was dressed in a demure black dress that covered her arms to the wrists and came up to the hollow of her throat but she was still the loveliest, most desirable woman Clay had ever seen. And she was his little cousin. He opened his mouth a dozen times to ask about the pill, but every time he had to close it again. There was no way to broach the subject—not after what they had done together last time. What *he* had done to *her*.

"Do you want to call it off?" Alisha's soft voice broke the silence.

Clay felt a simultaneous rush of relief and disappointment. He cleared his throat and put down his spoon to look at her. "You'd do that? Just not take the last pill?"

"Oh, I'm going to take it. I can't stop now with only one to go." Alisha looked determined. "But I can tell how upset you are. So if it really bothers you that much to watch over me after I take the sweetdreams pill, maybe I can find someone else to help out. Jason might do it."

"Jason, the doctor you met during your last rotation at the hospital?" Clay felt a surge of jealousy. "The one you couldn't stop talking about?"

Alisha made a shooing gesture. "Oh please, he's a nice guy. And I didn't talk about him that much. I'm surprised you even recognized his name."

"Of course I recognized his name—he took you out twice." Clay frowned. "You know I make it my business to know who you're going out with so I can be sure they're treating you right."

"So overprotective." Alisha grinned. "He's just a friend. Honestly, Clay—those were friendly dinners. And besides, I think he might be gay."

"Uh-huh, sure." He frowned at her skeptically. "I saw the way he was eyeing your ass—like he wanted to take a bite out of it. And you expect me to trust him to protect you while you take that damn drug?"

"He's a *doctor*," Alisha emphasized. "A medical professional. I'm sure he wouldn't try to take advantage."

"Well, I'm *not* sure," Clay growled. "I don't trust anyone but *me* to take care of you. Hell—I don't even trust myself. Look what happened last time."

Alisha gave him a level look. "Last time you did a great job of getting me through my dream and keeping me safe with no problems."

Clay banged on the table with a fist, making the soup in their bowls jump. "No, last time I took advantage of you. I went down on you not once but twice—and the second time you weren't even under the influence of that damn drug."

"You did what you had to do," Alisha said soothingly. "What we both wanted you to do. I don't blame you, Clay, and you shouldn't blame yourself."

"Of course I blame myself. You're my *cousin*. We grew up together. I taught you how to roller skate, how to swim—"

"How to kiss," Alisha interrupted him. "Remember that? I was so nervous because I was going out with a boy for the first time, and I didn't know how to kiss. You taught me behind that old oak tree in our meadow."

"Yeah, I remember." Clay could feel his cheeks growing hot. Alisha had been sweet sixteen, and he'd been nearly eighteen. What had started as a kissing lesson had turned into a make-out session hotter than anything he'd ever experienced before. In fact, if she hadn't been a virgin at the time, he might have been tempted to teach her a whole lot more than how to French kiss. If either of their moms had caught them, there would have been hell to pay. And there's going to be hell to pay now if they find out what we've been doing, Clay reminded himself. But he couldn't stop thinking about those long-ago stolen kisses. God, have I really wanted her that long? he asked himself, staring across the table at his lovely little cousin. Have I always been this attracted to her but I just buried it until recently?

"You taught me how to kiss and last weekend you kissed me again." Alisha shrugged as though it was no big deal.

"There's a big difference between kissing your mouth and kissing your...where I kissed you last Friday and Saturday," Clay protested, but Alisha only smiled.

"God, you know what else I just remembered? The way, when you were supposed to be keeping an eye on me, you punished me yourself instead of telling my mom when I got in trouble."

Clay knew he was being pulled off track, but he couldn't resist a smile at that old memory. "Well, you always said you'd rather be whipped with a switch from the meadow than have your mom whale the tar out of you with the back of her hairbrush."

Alisha shuddered. "That woman's got a mean arm on her. Remember that time I shoplifted a pack of gum from the Save-A-Lot? And you caught me chewing it and demanded to know where I got it?"

"And I made you give it back and use your allowance to pay because you'd already chewed most of it," Clay added.

"And then you got a big, long switch. A skinny one because those hurt the most," Alisha remembered. "And made me lift up my skirt so you could whip me good." She laughed. "Damn, by the time you were done, I almost wished you'd told my mom instead."

"Yes, but once I whipped you, it was over," Clay pointed out. "If your mom had found out, you would have gotten a whipping, lost your dessert for a month, and been grounded for a year."

"That's true," Alisha conceded. "But I was pretty sore after you finished. I remember going to my room and pulling down my panties to look at my little bare ass after you finished with me. There were red marks all over, and they stung like fire!"

She laughed again, but Clay's answering laugh suddenly stuck in his throat. A vivid mental picture had suddenly formed—one of Alisha with her silky panties down around her ankles, examining her well-whipped bottom in a mirror. Not Alisha as a kid, as she had been when he whipped her though—he was imagining what she might look like now. He'd seen her naked so it wasn't too hard to picture her round apple ass,

the mocha skin glowing with flaming red undertones from a serious spanking... No, he had to get this kind of thinking under control! He had to stop fantasizing about her, about what they'd done. And most of all about what he *wanted* to do.

Alisha was still talking. "And after I complained to you about it you went to the store and used your allowance to buy me some ointment—remember? It smelled like some kind of flowers—lilacs, I think. And you rubbed it on me yourself, but the whole time you were lecturing me about how if I hadn't been bad in the first place you wouldn't have had to punish me like you did."

"I...I remember." Clay's mouth was almost too dry to answer. His imagination had kicked into overdrive, showing him a picture of him rubbing soothing ointment into his little cousin's bare skin after punishing her soundly. But again, he was thinking of the way it would be to touch Alisha as she was now, not then. God, why did the idea of spanking her and then soothing her turn him on so much?

She sighed and shook her head. "You always looked out for me. Even then. The same way you look out for me now." She leaned across the table and placed her hand over his. "Which is why I'm asking you to look out for me just one more time. There are other people I could ask, but none I trust like you, Clay. So please—will you do it?"

"God, Alisha, I don't know. What if...what if something else happens?" He put a hand over his eyes and tried to shut out the vivid mental images of her nude and spread out under him.

"What if it does?" Her musical voice was calm. "I told you, Clay, I don't care what happens as long as it happens with *you*. I don't want to ask someone else to watch out for me, but if I have to..." She let the sentence trail off suggestively.

Jealousy ripped through him at the idea of some other guy taking advantage of her while she was helpless in the grip of the drug. *Alisha's mine, damn it! Nobody else is going anywhere near her when she's got that stuff in her system.* He knew feeling so possessive of her was wrong, but he couldn't seem to help himself. Any more than he could help the words that came out of his mouth.

"Fine. I'll do it."

"Thank you, Clay!" Alisha gave him a radiant smile before popping the familiar red, white, and blue pill into her mouth. "Now let's go – it's bedtime."

Chapter Nine

Alisha's conscience was nagging at her as she changed into her nightie. Before, at least she'd gotten Clayton to agree that he was doing the right thing by watching over her after she took the bogus sweetdreams pill. But this time he'd been so certain he was doing wrong that she'd had to resort to guilt to get him to agree to help her.

It'll all be worth it when we make love and he finally realizes that we're meant to be together, she told herself uneasily. But it was no use. She couldn't escape the fact that she was lying to the man she loved. Lying and using his love for her to manipulate him into a situation he was uncomfortable with and unhappy about.

"Damn it!" She threw down the hairbrush she'd been using on her long, black hair and frowned at herself in the bathroom mirror. Apparently Clay wasn't the only one who felt guilty. *I shouldn't be letting this get to me. We're so close! Tonight could be the night he finally gives in.*

But as she looked in the mirror at her own unhappy face, Alisha knew she just couldn't do it. Even though it meant giving up on her carefully orchestrated plan and possibly ruining any chance she had of having a relationship with Clay that was more than cousinly, she just couldn't go through with tonight's charade.

"I should tell him," she whispered to herself, still staring in the mirror. But if she told him, he might never forgive her. Alisha knew it would be hard to only have Clay in her life as a friend and cousin for the rest of her existence. But it would be *horrible* not to have him at all. He had a fiery temper when aroused, and the thought of how angry he would be if he found out she'd been manipulating him made her shiver. Not only would he be mad enough to spit nails, he might also decide never to see her again after the way she'd lied to him.

No, it was better just to let things drop, she told herself. Better just to go out there and pretend to sleep without dreaming, and when they woke up in the morning it would all be over and they could go back to the way things used to be. Alisha's heart hurt at the idea, but she felt too bad to do anything else. She supposed there was always a chance that Clay might decide on his own that he loved her and wanted to be with her despite their family ties, but she kind of doubted it. Her family was too important to him, and his own sense of guilt was too strong for it to be likely that he would reach out to her when he felt it to be wrong. Without the excuse of the sweetdreams drug, he would probably just leave her alone.

I guess we'll just be friends forever, and that's it. Alisha swiped at a tear that was trickling down her cheek as she surveyed herself in the mirror. She thought for a minute of changing out of the sexy see-through black nightie she had on and putting on something long and flannel, but in the end she decided it didn't matter. Since she'd made up her mind not to tempt her ex-cousin anymore, what she was wearing was immaterial. Besides, he'd seen her buck naked—having one more look at her body through the sheer material of her thigh-high nightgown wasn't going to make any difference.

Sighing, she walked out of the bathroom.

"Hi, cuz. Are you okay?" Clay's deep voice was filled with concern, and Alisha realized that her decision to leave him alone must be showing all over her face. She tried to smile.

"I'm fine. You know, just tired. Thanks again for doing this, Clay."

"No problem," he said shortly, and she noticed he was trying not to look at her and failing. But even the hunger in his pale gold eyes as he surveyed her nearly nude body didn't boost her spirits. She wasn't going to initiate any kind of sexual scenario, and she was sure Clay wouldn't if she didn't. So looking was going to be the only thing going on between them tonight.

"Well, guess we'd better get to sleep, huh?" she mumbled, making her way to the bed. A wave of dizziness hit her, and she stumbled, nearly falling over.

"Hey – you sure you're all right?" Clay was out of bed like a shot. He was wearing his old pajama bottoms and nothing else, Alisha noticed dizzily. His muscular chest was warm against her cheek as he swooped her up and carried her to the bed.

"I'm just...just tired," Alisha protested. And suddenly she was. It was as though all the guilt and confusion she'd been going through had drained her, leaving only an empty shell. She sighed as Clay settled her gently on the bed beside him with her head still resting on his bare chest. "Thanks."

"You're welcome," he said. "But I really think you should –"

Alisha didn't catch whatever it was he thought she should do because sleep suddenly claimed her and dragged her down. The last thing she remembered was the sound of his heart beating and the warm, spicy, masculine scent of his skin.

And then, nothing.

Alisha looked so peaceful and innocent Clay could almost forget that her mostly naked body was pressed along the length of his own. Her nightgown tonight was both more demure and more provocative than her previous outfits. The cut of it was almost girlish with a rounded neck and cap sleeves and the hem went all the way down to mid thigh. But any attempts at modesty were ruined by the fact that the sheer black mesh it was made of was completely see-through. Even worse, he could see that she had on no bra or panties under the sheer little gown. Her nipples looked plump and ready to be

sucked, and her pussy lips were full and inviting, as though daring him to spread them and taste her ripe clit again.

But Clay had decided there was going to be none of that tonight. No matter what Alisha did, no matter what she dreamed, he was going to find a way to fulfill her nighttime fantasies nonsexually. He was determined not to take advantage of his little cousin again. It might not bother Alisha—or she might claim it didn't, anyway—but it sure as hell bothered him. He had to put on the brakes while he still could. They were on a slippery slope, and it would be much too easy to just let himself slide into a complete sexual relationship with her. He was sure the moment he let himself fuck her he was done for—he would never be able to let her go. He would need her under him every night, spread open and ready for his cock. And that was wrong—no matter how much he wanted her he just couldn't go that far.

"Have to let you go, baby," he murmured, brushing a strand of hair away from her lovely, sleeping face. "As hard as it is, I can't keep doing this." He knew it was true. Tonight he was just going to watch over her and be sure she didn't hurt herself. And then they would go back to the way they'd been before—just good friends who happened to be cousins.

Clay didn't know why the decision caused an ache around his heart, but he was so preoccupied by his own gloomy thoughts that Alisha surprised him when she sat up and looked around.

"Clay?" she asked, the familiar vacant expression in her hazel eyes. "Where are you?"

"Here I am." He sat up cautiously, wondering where her dreams had transported her tonight. Was she at the beach or on some distant mountaintop? Or was she back in the familiar meadow that was currently serving time as a condo parking lot?

"Oh, I'm so glad you're here. There's something I really need to tell you."

"There is?" Clay asked warily. "What is it, cuz?"

"Something bad, I'm afraid." Her voice broke on the last word, becoming higher and younger than it had before, and suddenly there were tears standing in her hazel-gray eyes.

"Bad? How bad can it be?" Clay gathered her to him and leaned back against the headboard of the bed, being careful not to dislodge the SeeAll.

"Bad. Really bad." Alisha was really crying now. "I did a bad thing, Clay. I did it to you."

Truly alarmed now, Clay rubbed her bare, trembling shoulder and kissed the top of her head. "Aw, baby, don't cry," he murmured into her silky hair. "Whatever it is, I forgive you."

But she was shaking her head, the sobs almost choking her. "I don't think you will. I don't think you can. You'll hate me forever when you know."

"Now that's just silly. Look at me, Alisha." When she wouldn't, he lifted her chin, forcing her to meet his eyes. "I could *never* hate you no matter what you did. Don't you know that?" he said softly. The tears in her eyes squeezed his heart like a fist. He hadn't seen her this upset since they were kids together and he'd had to punish her for shoplifting the pack of gum.

"I...I lied to you, Clay," she whispered through trembling lips. "I thought it would be all right, but it's not. It's not, and now you'll hate me."

Clay frowned, wondering what her subconscious was dredging up to torment her with. "Lied? What did you lie about, baby?"

"I can't tell you. You'll hate me even more if I do." She buried her face in his chest, the sobs shaking her slender shoulders as she wept inconsolably.

"It's all right. It's gonna be all right," Clay murmured, rocking her gently. Poor Alisha – after the last two erotic dreams she'd had, this kind of pain and sorrow was the last thing he'd expected. It was a relief not to have to worry about touching her inappropriately, but this was almost worse. Clay decided he would much rather deal with his own guilty conscience than see her sobbing her heart out over some imagined

wrong she'd done him. "Is there anything I can do to help you?" he asked softly when her sobs had slowed down a little. "I know you can't tell me what you lied about, but is there anything I can do to make you feel better?"

She started to shake her head and then stopped. "I...maybe there is." Tilting her chin, she looked up to meet his anxious gaze. "Clay, would you...could you punish me?"

Clay raised an eyebrow at her. "So you feel like a little pain here..." He stroked the rounded curve of her ass. "Would help you get over the pain in here?" He tapped her chest lightly, over her heart.

"Yes." Alisha nodded gratefully. "Exactly. You understand. I'm so glad you always understand. Will you do it?"

Looking down at her, her beautiful eyes wet with tears, Clay wasn't sure how he could find the motivation to hurt her, even if she wanted him to. "I don't think there are any switches around here," he said carefully, not sure of where she thought they were.

"That's okay. You can use your hand. Only don't be easy on me, okay?" Alisha looked at him seriously. "I have to pay for my lies or I'll never be able to feel comfortable around you again."

"Alisha, baby..." Clay caught her chin and looked into her eyes. "You don't have to do this for me," he murmured, hoping she would change her mind. The last thing he wanted to do was inflict pain on her — he would get out of it if he possibly could.

"I'm doing it for *me*, Clay," she whispered, and suddenly her eyes were brimming again. "Please...I need to pay. Please punish me."

There was no way he could resist her heartfelt pleading. Though it broke his heart to do it, he had to follow the dream, no matter where it led her. Nodding, he motioned to his lap. "All right, baby. I'll spank you if you think it'll make you feel better."

"I just know it will, Clay. So much better." Her eyes were bright now, hopeful that she could be absolved from whatever sin she thought she'd committed. Moving as

gracefully as a cat, she climbed over the covers and lay facedown on his lap with her ass in the air.

Clay's breath suddenly caught in his throat. God, but she was beautiful! And her submissive posture was innocent and provocative at the same time. The hem of her nightie had pulled up, baring the tops of her thighs, and under the translucent material he could see the round brown globes of her ass just waiting for the touch of his hand.

"Clay?" she murmured, wiggling slightly so that he could feel her soft pelvis pressing against the hard ridge of his cock. "Are you going to spank me soon?"

"Soon, baby." His voice sounded hoarse in his own ears as he tentatively cupped her ass through the see-through nightgown. "Soon."

Alisha craned her neck around to look at him. "You'd better pull up my nightie and spank me on my bare ass. It will hurt more that way and teach me a lesson."

Clay swallowed hard. "O-okay," he somehow managed to get out. Knowing he shouldn't do it but helpless to stop himself, he lifted the sheer hem of her nightie and pulled it up, exposing her round bare ass. Without thinking about it, his hand returned to her plump cheeks, caressing the satiny coffee-and-cream skin tenderly.

"Clay, please!" Alisha wiggled against him, thrusting her ass up into his hand. "Please, the suspense is killing me. Just do it and get it over with, okay?"

"Okay," Clay said again, raising his hand reluctantly.

"But first tell me how bad I've been and that I deserve it," Alisha requested. "I need a lecture—like the kind you always used to give me."

"Alisha, you know you've been very bad, don't you?" Clay did his best to make his voice low and stern.

"Yes, sir. I know." Alisha squirmed on his lap, brushing the length of his hard cock with each motion of her hips and thighs.

"So you know why I have to spank your bare ass—to teach you a lesson," Clay continued.

"Yes," Alisha whispered. "I...I know I've been bad, Clay. I know I deserve to have my ass spanked. I...I won't try to fight you." Lifting her hips, she thrust her ass up into his caressing hand. At the same time, her thighs parted, allowing Clay to catch a glimpse of her full, pouting pussy lips.

"That's right," he said, trying to concentrate on his speech. "Because if you fight me or struggle, your punishment will be that much worse."

"I understand." She arched her back like a cat. "Do whatever you need to. I promise I won't move."

"You'd better not," Clay warned. "I'm going to give you ten licks, Alisha. Five for lying to me in the first place, and five for being naughty and tempting me with your naked ass in the second place."

"Yes, sir," she murmured submissively.

As she spread her thighs even more, Clay could have sworn he saw the shine of cunt honey coating her inner folds. Was it possible this was turning her on? Was she actually getting off on the idea of him punishing her? He pushed the thought aside and got back to the business at hand — literally.

Raising his right hand, he brought it down with a loud *smack* on her bare behind. Alisha jumped and gasped, but as she'd promised, she didn't try to get away. Instead she raised her ass even higher, as though asking for more.

Clay was more than willing to give it to her. Raising his hand again, he gave her another spank. And another and another. With each loud *smack*, his little cousin moaned and writhed on his lap, her thighs spreading wider as she pushed up to meet his hand despite the pain.

By the time he'd reached the count of ten, her little ass had the rosy glow of a sunset, and yet Alisha still didn't seem satisfied. "Please, Clay," she moaned as he stroked her well-spanked ass cheeks. "Please, I need more. I still feel like a bad girl."

Clay frowned. "I don't know how much more I can give you, baby," he said, still stroking her ass. God, his cock was hard from touching her this way. "I don't want to

really hurt you or do you any permanent damage," he explained, hoping the dream would let her understand. "I think your little ass has had enough for one night."

"Maybe you should spank me lower then—between my thighs." Alisha spread her legs invitingly and Clay watched as her full, puffy cunt lips opened for him, revealing her slick inner folds and the tiny button of her clit.

"You want me to spank your pussy?" he asked, not sure he was getting her meaning. "Why, baby?"

"Because that's what got me into trouble in the first place," Alisha explained breathlessly. "Wanting to have you there—wanting to have you in me. If I hadn't wanted that so bad, I never would have lied the way I did. So maybe if you spank me there, I'll learn my lesson and never be bad again."

"Maybe." Clay looked at her tender pussy lips uncertainly. This was a much more delicate area than her ass, and he certainly didn't want to hurt her for good. His heart was pounding in his chest as he took in the meaning of her words. Was it just the dream talking, or did Alisha really want his cock buried to the hilt in her tight little pussy? Doesn't matter one way or another because it's not going to happen, he told himself firmly. Still, the dark-chocolate folds of her pussy and the sweet, feminine scent of her were almost more than he could take.

"Please, Clay," Alisha moaned, writhing against him as she begged and breaking his concentration. "Please spank my pussy. I've been such a bad girl, and I need you to make me good."

Clay took a deep breath, his cock throbbing in his worn pajama pants. "I'll give you three good licks," he decided at last. "Three good licks on your open pussy to teach you to be good. All right?"

"Yes, sir." She spread her legs even wider, opening herself for him, offering her body for his punishment.

Clay's cock surged again, snarling angrily for release, and it was all he could do not to flip her over and bury his face between her thighs instead of spanking her. But he

reminded himself again that sex was not an option. Raising his hand, he aimed a firm but much gentler blow than he'd used on her ass at her ripe pussy.

Smack! Alisha jumped and moaned as his hand made contact. Hoping he wasn't hurting her too much, Clay raised his hand and did it again. And again.

He meant to move his hand after the last blow fell, but somehow his finger stayed on her, cupping her open pussy, her plump outer lips now hot with his spanking and her inner cunt slippery against his palm. "There, baby," he murmured softly as Alisha moaned and writhed against him. "Is that what you needed? Do you feel better now?"

"I do...and I don't." Alisha turned her head to look at him, and he saw that there were tears in her wide hazel-green eyes again. "I feel like I learned my lesson. But, oh Clay! It really *stings*." She pressed back into his hand as though to illustrate her point, and he felt the hard little button of her clit rub against his hand.

"I know it stings, baby," he murmured soothingly, hoping he hadn't hurt her too much. "But it's the only way you could learn your lesson. If you would have been a good girl in the first place, I wouldn't have had to spank you."

"I know." Tears glittered like diamonds in the dark fringes of her lashes. "But Clay...couldn't you, you know, put some cream on me. To soothe it some?"

"I guess I could. Hang on and I'll go get some." Clay was all ready to get up and go look for some kind of topical ointment for her stinging ass, but Alisha stopped him.

"Not the kind of cream you find in a bottle or tube, silly," she murmured, her voice almost playful. "The special cream you always put on me after you spank me."

"Uh...what special cream?" Clay looked at her uncertainly. Obviously she was dreaming that they were together again and that this was something they did all the time. He knew from past experience that it was dangerous to try to convince her otherwise, so he had no other choice than to go along with her.

"You know...*your* cream. The cream you make just for me." Alisha reached between their bodies and caressed the aching ridge of his cock through the thin material of his pajama pants.

Clay felt like he was choking for a moment. "My...my cream?" he managed to say as her soft, cool fingers continued to drive him crazy.

"Of course, silly." Alisha smiled and rolled to one side so that she could push down his pajama pants. Before Clay could protest, she was stroking his naked cock, teasing little droplets of precum to the surface of his broad tip. "This cream," she murmured and leaned over to lap the pearly beads from the head of his cock casually, as though she did it every day. "You rub the head of your cock all over me, wherever you spanked and it always makes me feel better."

"I do...it does?" Clay asked hoarsely. He couldn't believe it had come to this. Did she really expect him to spread his precum all over her skin, wherever he'd spanked her?

Apparently she did because her next move was to get on her hands and knees, legs spread, ass high in the air. Looking over her shoulder, she gave him another inviting smile. "I'm ready, Clay. Please hurry – it really stings."

Can't believe I'm doing this. But he was already up on his knees behind her with his cock in one hand. With his other hand, he held her hips steady, keeping her in place for the unusual treatment she was demanding. Just gonna rub against her. Not going to do anything else, he promised himself grimly as he began to stroke over her reddened cheeks with the broad head of his cock. *And I'm only going to do her ass.*

But it was clear that just treating her round ass cheeks wasn't what Alisha had in mind. "Clay," she moaned as he rubbed himself against her. "Please...that isn't what hurts the most. You spanked my pussy so hard. Can't you rub your cream all over me there, too?"

Clay felt like he was going to explode. "Don't know if that's such a good idea, baby," he murmured in a strangled voice. "That's getting awfully close to putting myself inside you."

"Oh, I don't mind." Alisha looked back at him with eyes that were pure green now. "Besides, it's not like it would be the first time you put your cock inside me."

"It...it wouldn't?" Clay could scarcely believe her. What kind of crazy thing was she dreaming now and how much further would he have to go to facilitate the dream?

"Of course not, silly." Alisha wiggled against him suggestively. "Sometimes, when you really punish me hard and I'm hurting bad, you put your cock inside me and shoot your cream deep in my pussy. That always makes me feel better no matter how much it stings."

Shit, is she serious? Clay looked at his little cousin unbelievably. Was she really saying what he thought she was saying? "Alisha," he began in his sternest tone. "I don't think that's a very good idea. That would be fucking you, and you know I can't do that—it would be wrong."

"Oh, I know letting you fuck me would be wrong. But that's not what you do at all—you just slide your cock deep inside me and shoot your cream in my pussy." Alisha pouted. "And it always makes me feel so much better. Please, Clay?"

"I don't know...we'll see. For now, just hold still and let me spread my precum, uh cream, on the *outside* of your pussy," he said sternly. But his mind was racing. She seemed to really think that he did what she'd described on a regular basis. Worse, she was expecting him to do it again. But he couldn't—could he? He couldn't fuck his own little cousin and come in her pussy. It was wrong—so damn wrong he didn't know where to start.

Yes, but she doesn't consider it fucking, he reminded himself. And she didn't say anything about thrusting. She said I just slide inside her and come; just fill her with my cream. So that really wouldn't count as fucking—would it? He wasn't sure, but it seemed like a reasonable argument. As he watched his tan shaft stroke over her open chocolate pussy folds, the idea of sinking balls deep in his little cousin and pulsing her full of his cum didn't seem quite so bad. Not as bad as thrusting in and out of her, rutting against her like some kind of beast, anyway. No, what she was suggesting was almost...civilized. And if she felt like the only thing that would take away the sting of

his spanking was having her pussy filled with his cum, who was Clay to argue with her?

It was as though Alisha could read his thoughts and knew he was softening. "Clay...please?" she pleaded softly, pressing back against him so that just the head of his cock entered her slick pussy hole. "Please, I really need your cream inside me to feel better."

"Well..." Clay could feel himself wavering. He knew it was wrong to fuck his little cousin, but this didn't seem to be fucking. And besides, he knew Alisha got monthly hormone shots so he didn't have to worry about getting her pregnant. In fact, the only thing he *did* have to worry about was what she would say tomorrow morning when she saw what they had done on the SeeAll. But she'd reassured him again and again that she didn't mind, that whatever he had to do to facilitate the dream was all right with her. Clay didn't think she'd be upset, and he thought he could handle his own conscience, as long as he didn't actually fuck her.

"Please?" Alisha pressed back again, her inner pussy squeezing the head and first few inches of his cock like a tight, velvet fist. "Please, Clay?"

"All right," he said at last, gripping her hips with both hands to hold her in place. "But this is on my terms. I want you to submit and hold still while I do it. Understood?"

"Yes, sir." Alisha nodded. Dropping her head, she spread her thighs wider for him and tilted her pelvis to give him easier entry. "Do what you want to me, Clay," she whispered. "I swear I won't move."

"All right then." Assured of her submission, Clay tightened his grip on her hips and slid slowly into her tight depths. God, it was heaven! Her tight sheath was almost more than he could bear, and for a moment he thought he was going to come at once, even before he was all the way in her. But then the feeling passed, and he was able to thrust even deeper, until the head of his cock found the end of her channel and pressed hard.

"God!" Alisha moaned and arched her back, drawing him even deeper into her. "Come in me, Clay. Fill me up with your cream and make me feel better. Please!"

"Shhh, baby. Hold still," Clay commanded. Still gripping her hips, he got ready to release inside her, to fill her with the creamy cum she so desperately seemed to need.

But there was a problem.

As tight as Alisha's pussy was, there was no friction with the both of them holding perfectly still. His cock ached and throbbed, but unless he moved at least a little, he wasn't going to be able to come.

"Alisha," he said, hoping she would be understanding about what he was about to request. "I, uh, need to move some. I can't get to the point where I can come in you without some movement. Some friction."

"I understand, Clay." She threw him a luminous glance over her shoulder. "You can move all you want to."

"It shouldn't take much," he corrected her. "Just in and out once or maybe twice to get me to the edge so I can shoot."

"Of course," she said again, pressing back against him. "Move your cock in my pussy as much as you need to, Clay. Just as long as you fill me up with your cream at the end, I don't care."

He knew perfectly well she was giving him free license to fuck her, but he was determined not to do that. Just a few thrusts, he told himself sternly. Just enough to get there. No fucking around. Literally.

Being careful not to waste any motion, he pulled slowly out of her. Though he tried to keep his emotions under wraps, it was impossible not to be affected by the erotic sight of his tan cock slowly gliding out of her chocolate pussy. Her tight little hole was stretched to the limit by his girth, and she was moaning softly as he pushed back into her just as slowly.

Not fucking, he told himself as he continued the slow, deliberate movement. Just thrusting in and out once or twice to get to the edge. He was sure to make every thrust count, stroking himself into her pussy with a measured rhythm and hitting the end of her channel hard at the end of each stroke. At any moment he was expecting to be able to come. But somehow it just wasn't happening. Maybe because he still harbored some guilt for putting his cock in his little cousin's pussy in the first place, or maybe because the motions he was making were so slow they were ineffective for what he needed.

They didn't seem to be ineffective for Alisha, however. With each hard, slow stroke of his cock into her pussy, she moaned and gasped, pressing back against him as if trying to get more of his thick shaft inside her. Clearly she was closer to the edge than he was.

Suddenly Clay had an idea. *Maybe if I make her come she'll take me with her.* He could just imagine that tight, velvet fist squeezing his shaft, spasming around him, milking his cock so that he was able to shoot his load of cream deep in her welcoming pussy. It seemed like the perfect plan—except for the fact that he would probably have to speed up his tempo. The slow rhythm he had established, while excruciatingly pleasurable for both of them, didn't seem to be fast enough to push either one of them over the edge.

"Clay, please!" Alisha gasped as she backed against him, trying to get more. "Please, I know you think it's wrong to fuck me. But couldn't you do it? Couldn't you fuck me just a little bit? Please, I need to come."

"And I need to make you come, baby," he growled softly in her ear, stroking her hips and thighs as he pressed into her. "Need to feel your tight pussy trembling all around me in order to fill your sweet little cunt full of my cream."

"Then fuck me!" she moaned, throwing her head back so that her long black hair tossed like the mane of some wild animal. "Please, Clay, fuck me and come in me. I need you to, please!"

Her pleading, along with his own need to reach the peak was more than Clay could resist. With a possessive growl, he gripped her hips and pulled out only to

plunge back into her with a speed and fury that made his little cousin almost scream with pleasure.

"Is this what you need?" he demanded, reaching forward to cup her breasts and twist her nipples while he plowed into her. "Is this what you want? For me to fuck you? Want me to fuck your pussy and fill you up with my cum?"

"Yes, God, yes!" Alisha was moaning, backing to meet each thrust like a woman possessed. Clay's heart thundered in his chest as he fucked her, filling her tight cunt completely with his cock on each thrust. God, she was beautiful and this was wrong, so wrong, but he just couldn't stop. He could feel Alisha shuddering around him, her slick inner walls gripping his shaft, milking him as he'd hoped she would. And suddenly he could no longer hold back.

This is what I've always wanted, he realized as he pressed forward, reaching for her heart with his final thrust, filling her with himself as the spasms of pleasure rocketed through him from the base of his spine to the top of his head and the tip of his cock. I've always wanted her. Even though this is wrong. Even though I'm sick to want it. I've always wanted Alisha like this — not as a cousin. As a lover.

The thought filled him with desolation even as he pumped spurt after spurt of cum deep in his little cousin's pussy. He'd crossed the line — pushed the limit to the breaking point. He loved Alisha and hated himself for it. But there was no going back now. It was too late.

As he pulled her down beside him on the bed, his cock still buried to the hilt in her tight, warm wetness, he felt a black cloud of despair overtake him. He'd done the one unforgivable thing and had damned himself in the eyes of his family.

He was totally and utterly lost, and there didn't seem to be any way back.

Chapter Ten

Alisha woke up feeling sore and sticky – but in a good way. She put a hand to her head, which ached slightly, and moaned. Behind her, Clay stirred.

"Alisha?" he murmured in her ear.

There was something about his tone that put her on instant alert. Ignoring her aches and pains, Alisha sat up and turned to look at him. "Clay, are you all right?"

He shook his head, the pain in his face clear to see. "Honestly? I don't think so."

A bolt of alarm raced through her. "Why? What's wrong? And what happened last night? I had the strangest dream..."

He laughed bitterly. "Yeah, cuz. I think I had the same dream." Sitting up in bed, he reached for the SeeAll and began activating its light screen.

Alisha was beginning to feel panicky. "Clay, what's this all about?"

He shook his head. "You'll see. Just watch."

She did. And with mounting horror, she saw that her dream hadn't been just a dream. Once more she'd been acting out what she was dreaming—even though she'd sworn to herself to leave her cousin alone. We actually made love last night, she realized uneasily, casting a sidelong glance at Clay as the erotic scene played out in front of them.

But something was wrong. Alisha had been so certain that the moment they consummated their feelings her ex-cousin would realize that they belonged together as a couple. Clay, however, didn't appear to be having any kind of romantic epiphany. He was staring moodily at the light screen, one corner of his full mouth pulled down and his hands clenched into fists in his lap. Definitely not the posture of a man who has just realized that the woman of his dreams is right under his nose.

Alisha felt her heart sink. So this was it. She'd fulfilled her plan even though she hadn't meant to, and the result was nothing. No, not nothing. If anything, it was negative. Clay looked like he wanted to punch someone—probably himself, knowing his overdeveloped sense of guilt.

I made a mistake, she thought, watching him watch the scene. I thought he'd realize he loved me. I thought he'd know we were right together, but look at him. He hates himself. And he probably hates me too.

When the SeeAll screen was blank, Clay turned to her. "So there you have it. We committed incest last night because of your damn sweetdreams pill. Are you happy now?"

"Of course I'm not happy—not if you're *unhappy*," Alisha protested. "But, Clay, be reasonable. You know there aren't any blood ties between us. And since your dad divorced Aunt Linda, there aren't even any marital ties."

He rounded on her. "You think that matters to me? What do you think my mom is going to say if she finds out about this? Hell—what do you think *your* mom is going to say?"

"They won't like it," Alisha said steadily, trying to keep her voice calm. "But they'll learn to deal with it." She put a hand on his knee, but he flinched away from her touch. Hurt, she drew back. "Just because we grew up together doesn't mean we can't love each other, Clay." Her voice was little more than a whisper, but the hope inside her was dying.

"Hate to break it to you, sweetheart, but that's exactly what it means," Clay snarled. "And I think you know it too. You seemed to be feeling awfully guilty last night, and even if it was only a dream, I have to wonder what your subconscious was dredging up that made you feel that way."

Alisha felt all the blood drain out of her face. "I-I—" she stammered, unable to form a coherent sentence. If Clay found out about the way she'd been manipulating him...

He frowned at her, his eyes narrowing. "You know, don't you? All that talk about lying to me—it wasn't just talk, was it? Spill it, cuz. What was that dream really about?"

"I...it was the drug. The sweetdreams pill," Alisha heard herself saying. She wanted to stop talking, but to her horror, the words kept spilling out. It was as though the hidden guilt inside her for what she'd done was rushing to the surface and forcing a confession.

"What about the pills?" Clay's voice was dangerously soft, his gold eyes blazing.

"I...they weren't really real. I mean—they didn't have any active ingredients in them," Alisha said, wishing she could stop. "They were just placebo pills left over from the regular drug trials. Deelah gave them to me and helped me set everything up."

His eyes widened, and he looked at her in disbelief. "You mean this has all been a big lie? You weren't even under the influence of any kind of drug when we did...all the things we did together?"

"No," Alisha said miserably. "No, I...I wasn't. But that's the thing, Clay," she rushed on, hoping to keep his anger in check. "I meant to...to fool you, to try and trick you into making love with me, but I never actually did."

He raised an eyebrow at her. "So last night was just a figment of my imagination?"

"No, no—that's not what I meant." Alisha shook her head, frustrated. "I meant that even though I had those intentions, I never really followed through with them consciously. I actually *did* fall asleep, and I actually *did* dream. I don't know why I acted out my dreams instead of just dreaming them since I didn't actually have the

sweetdreams drug in my system, but somehow that's what happened. I guess...I guess I just wanted you so badly that my subconscious took over once I went to sleep." She reached out to touch his arm, but he drew away from her again.

"And you actually expect me to believe that?" The look he gave her was a mixture of disgust and incredulity that made Alisha feel about three inches high.

"I hope you will," she said quietly. "Because it's the truth."

"How do I know that?" Clay demanded. "How do I know you're not still lying to me? Manipulating me? How can I ever trust anything you tell me again?"

"I love you, Clay." Hot tears were running down her cheeks now, and she was helpless to stop them. "That's why I did all this. You can trust that, I hope."

He shook his head. "If you really cared anything about me, you wouldn't have started this in the first place, Alisha. You know how I feel about the family and how goddamn guilty I feel about...doing what we did."

"I know, and I'm sorry." Alisha put a hand over her eyes. "I just...there's always been a spark between us. I thought if I could get you to acknowledge it, I could make you see..."

"See what?" he demanded harshly.

She shook her head. "Never mind. It doesn't matter now."

"No. I guess it doesn't." He sighed and got off the bed. "The damage is done."

"Clay." She looked up at him, pleading with her eyes. "Please, I'm sorry. So damn sorry for this whole mess. Can you ever...will you ever forgive me?"

He shook his head, his eyes cold and dark. "I don't know, Alisha. I'm sorry. I wish I could say otherwise, but right now... I just need time to think."

And with that, he was out of her room and probably out of her life forever. Not only had she lost him as a soul mate and a lover, Alisha knew she had lost him as a friend as well. The knowledge made her want to die.

No, I'm stronger than that. Tears streaming down her cheeks, she lifted her chin defiantly. There was no place for her here anymore, no reason to hang around. But she did know somewhere she would be wanted and needed. A place she could go and be sure she'd never see her ex-cousin and one-time lover again.

Taking a deep breath, Alisha dashed the tears from her eyes and forced herself to get off the bed. It was time to start packing.

Chapter Eleven

Clay felt like shit. It had been three days since he'd seen Alisha, and he missed her so much it felt like she'd taken his heart with her, wherever she'd gone. He'd left the house on Saturday morning to take a long walk and clear his head. And when he'd come back she was gone along with most of her clothes and personal items. All she'd left behind was a note.

Clay,

I'm so sorry. I'm going somewhere I can start fresh. I won't bother you again.

A.

That was all it said. Not even a hint of where she'd gone or what she was doing. And she wouldn't answer his calls. He was getting more and more worried about her. Hoping that she'd gone back home, he'd contacted both his aunt and his stepmom, but neither one of them had seen her. None of the rest of the family had either, and he didn't have the numbers of her friends—Alisha had taken them all with her in her phone.

Just as well I can't contact her, he thought, tracing a pattern on the arm of the couch with one finger. Don't know what the hell I'd say to her if I could.

On one hand, he was still angry. How dare she manipulate him the way she had? How could she lie so blatantly to his face? And on the other hand, he was hurt and confused. He kept thinking of the last night he'd spent with her. Had she been pretending to be asleep while she seduced him? Or was she really acting out her dreams for some reason? And was that even possible?

He missed her so much he ached inside, but he knew it wasn't right. Because it wasn't Alisha, his little cousin who he missed—it was Alisha, his lover. Alisha, the beautiful, vibrant woman who had wanted him so much she'd decided to do whatever it took to bring them together. Of course, what she'd done had been wrong—very wrong. But he couldn't help wishing he could see her again to try to straighten things out between them.

That was the frame of mind he was in when the house phone rang. Alisha! he thought at once, his heart beginning to pound. Was she finally returning one of his calls? Today was the Fourth of July, and their tradition had always been to go watch the fireworks together. No matter what either one of them was doing, they never missed. Maybe Alisha was calling to make up with him so they could keep their tradition.

"Show," he commanded as the soft chime of the house phone sounded again. He had it hooked up to his plasma wall, and immediately an unfamiliar number flashed on the screen. Clay frowned. If it was Alisha, why was she calling him from a number other than her own? He almost didn't answer, thinking it might be a solicitor. But the chance that it was his little cousin in trouble was too great. "Answer," he told the phone and was surprised when a life-size image of Deelah, Alisha's best friend, popped up on the wall.

"Deelah?" He frowned at her in confusion. "Why are you calling the house phone?"

"Because I can't raise Alisha on her holo." The image of Deelah strode back and forth, flickering wildly as she ran a hand through her long curls. "It's vitally important that I contact her—have you heard from her at all?"

Clay shook his head. "Sorry, no. I haven't even seen her in three days. Not since we..." He trailed off. "Sorry, that would be TMI."

Deelah gave him a shrewd look. "So you two finally got together, huh?"

Clay cleared his throat. "In a manner of speaking."

"And she cleared out afterward." Deelah shook her head. "Damn, I guess the sex wasn't very good."

"That's none of your fucking business," he growled. "And even if it were, I don't feel like talking about it right now."

She smirked. "I'd think you'd be dying to talk about it. Hell, you finally made love with the girl of your dreams."

"She's not the girl of my dreams!" Clay protested. "Or, well, she is. But she's also my cousin. That's the problem."

"Boyfriend, that problem is all in your head." Deelah sighed. "I told her she was fighting a losing battle. But she was too damn stubborn to listen. She wanted you *so* bad, and she was sure if you two could just hook up once you'd feel the same way."

"I *do* feel for her," Clay said in a low voice. "But you could say they're mixed feelings at best. How could she lie to me like that? And how could you help her?" He glared at the image on his plasma wall.

Deelah looked grim. "Actually, that's what I'm trying to get in contact with her about. I didn't help her—I actually might have hurt her."

"What are you talking about—aside from ruining her life and mine?" Clay demanded.

Deelah grimaced but ignored his accusation. "I'm talking about the fact that those pills I gave her weren't placebos at all. They were labeled wrong, and I just found out today."

"What?" Clay stood up, his heart racing. "What exactly did you give her?"

"An earlier form of the sweetdreams pill. It was scrapped because of its side effects."

"Side effects? What side effects?"

Deelah counted them off on her fingers. "Dizziness, disorientation, some short-term memory loss, and if the subject has had three or more doses, there may be lingering dream effects too."

"What? You mean Alisha might be acting out her dreams every night with no one to watch out for her? What if she tries to drive somewhere in her sleep? Or chop something up? Or operate a power tool? What if she's lost and can't find her way home?" Clay was pacing in front of the couch as he spoke—shouted rather—at the projection of Deelah. His whole body seemed to be flooded with adrenaline. Alisha was out there somewhere, her system pumped full of an unproven drug, with no one to watch out for her. God, what if she was hurt somewhere? What if she was dead? *No, can't think like that!* He pushed the thought away savagely and tried to calm himself. If something had happened to her, he would have heard—wouldn't he? After all, she always listed him as her emergency contact on everything.

Deelah took a deep breath and shook her head. "I'm afraid...that all those are possible scenarios. That's why I've been trying to get in touch with her—to tell her she needs to be careful, especially at night, until the drug leaves her system."

"How long will that take?" Clay asked acidly. "A day? Two days?"

She looked grim. "More like four to five years. The chemicals we were using in this batch store themselves in the excess adipose tissues of the body so every time a subject's weight fluctuates, it's almost like taking another dose of the medicine."

"Oh my God." Clay sank back on the sofa and put his head in his hands. "Alisha can never eat when she's upset. She's probably losing weight right now and releasing more and more of that fucking drug into her system." He looked up and glared at Deelah. "This is *your* fault. If something has happened to her, I swear to God you're going to pay."

Deelah's dark eyes flashed. "Oh no, boyfriend, you can't put this *all* off on me. I admit I made a mistake with the meds. But Alisha never would have had to resort to this kind of trick in the first place if you could've just gotten over yourself and admitted you love her."

Clay glared at her. "What are you talking about? We're cousins. I can't love her — not like that."

"But you do, though, don't you? It's written all over you. You're miserable without her." Deelah's image leaned over at the waist and looked him in the eyes. "But you're too afraid of what your stepmama and your aunt are going to say to realize that it's time to move on to a new part of your life. Too scared to admit that no matter what you say, you and Alisha aren't really related."

"I know that," Clay said, feeling put on the defensive. "But we grew up together, for God's sake. I looked out for her — helped her with her homework and taught her how to swim. I was more like her big brother than her cousin, if you want to know the truth."

"Mmm-hmm." Deelah crossed her arms over her enormous breasts and tapped her fingernails against her upper arms. "The only truth I'm interested in knowing about is the fact that you love her — and as a hell of a lot more than a cousin."

"I do," he admitted unwillingly. "But damn it, it just feels *wrong*."

"That's because you're letting your past rule your present and ruin your future," Deelah said. "You have to stop that shit, boyfriend — if you want any future with Alisha at all, that is."

"I *do*." Clay ran his hands through his hair. "I do want a future with her. But our family —"

"Will just have to understand," Deelah finished for him ruthlessly. "Let me ask you something, honey. What's more important to you — being able to go home for Christmas and Easter dinner or having the woman you love in your bed and in your life forever?"

"Alisha. She's more important," Clay admitted. "I know that. I just hate the idea of breaking my stepmom's heart."

"Alisha was pretty sure they'd get over it in time," Deelah informed him. "She said they'd probably stay mad longer at her than at you. But come on, Clayton, you two come from reasonable people. They know you and Alisha aren't really related, and if they want to keep you both in the family, they'll come to terms with your relationship."

"If we had a relationship." He sighed. "I don't know where she went or who she's with. Or if she'll forgive me for being so angry with her."

"You have a right to be angry — she lied to you," Deelah countered. "But you have to realize why she did it. It was because she loved you so much she was willing to try anything to get you to admit you two belonged together."

"She did say something like that." Clay groaned and put his head in his hands. "Oh, God, where did she go?" He looked up. "She didn't tell you anything at all?"

Deelah shook her head. "Haven't heard a thing from her. Did she say anything to you before she left?"

Clay shrugged hopelessly. "She left me a note. It said she was going someplace she could start fresh — whatever that means. She could be anywhere on Earth."

Deelah snapped her fingers. "Anywhere on Earth...or off it. Clay, what if she's decided to leave the planet entirely?"

"What are you talking about?" he asked irritably. "You know how much a ticket to the moon costs — there's no way she could afford that kind of relocation."

"Yes, but what if she took a trip she didn't have to pay for? Clay, think about it — what if she's decided to join the colonists going to Mars?"

"She wouldn't!" Clay objected. But then he remembered Alisha saying that the mission needed more medical personnel. As a registered nurse, she would be a real asset. Was it possible?

Deelah bit her lower lip. "She might. It would be like Alisha to make a dramatic gesture if she felt like there was no hope for you two. She wouldn't kill herself—she's too strong for that. But she might make a split second decision to relocate her whole life so she could start over. You can't get much more of a fresh start than a planet where nobody even freaking lives yet."

"You're right. But I thought the launch date was today."

She nodded. "It is."

Clay jumped up again. "Then I'd better find out if her name is on the colonist list. I have to stop her before it's too late."

"If her name *is* on the list then it's already too late." Deelah's voice was flat. "They make the volunteers sign an ironclad contract—once you're in, there's no backing out. It's worse than the Marines."

Clay felt like someone had just injected a gallon of liquid nitrogen into his bloodstream. "Then what am I supposed to do?" he asked through numb lips.

"I don't know. But whatever we do, one of us has to find her. She needs to know about the side effects of the drug she took," Deelah pointed out.

"You're right." Clay took a deep breath. "We have to find her."

"We will," Deelah assured him. Then her voice softened. "And if you find her first, tell her I'm sorry, all right? I had no idea I wasn't giving her sugar pills—I feel like shit."

"You're not the only one." Clay shook his head. "I've got some apologizing of my own to do."

He just hoped he could find Alisha in time to do it. If she was hurt somewhere or had already signed an irrevocable contract to go to Mars... Well, he didn't even want to imagine any of that. He just wanted her back in his life to stay. Forever.

Chapter Twelve

Alisha felt like she'd been asleep for a hundred years—but she knew it was closer to two. One year and almost eight months—the time it took to get from Earth to Mars on a fully loaded ship filled with colonists, equipment, and crew. The fuel alone to get the rocket launched and then get it all the way to Mars took up over half the weight of the gigantic craft, which meant that all passengers were strictly limited as to what they could bring with them. Her new life on the red planet was going to be extremely Spartan.

Doesn't matter, she told herself as she sat up in the open hypersleep pod. Nothing matters anymore now that he's gone.

Clay. She'd dreamed of him long and vividly on the trip, her body restrained in the hypersleep tube but her mind ranging free as the sweetdreams drug worked on her. It was ironic that after all the pretending she'd done she had finally gotten to take the real thing. Ironic and sad.

Stop thinking like that. You're starting fresh – remember? No more tears, you have to look to the future. Lifting her chin, she scanned the baseball stadium-sized room where most of the hypersleep pods were stored. Other people were waking up as well, stretching and yawning and looking for loved ones. Alisha wished she had someone to look for

too, but that idea just led her back down the path of loneliness and self pity and she couldn't afford to feel sorry for herself right now.

I have a new life now, she reminded herself. I'm going to be a nurse in the new Mars hospital. Starting her nursing career in an understaffed colony hospital wouldn't be easy but that was okay with Alisha. Maybe what she needed was some good hard work to make her forget the past. *As if I could ever forget Clay.* She sighed.

Speaking of her older cousin, there was a man in a pod not far from hers that looked a lot like him. Same thick black hair. Same broad, muscular shoulders. Same pale gold eyes... *Oh my God.* Alisha stared at him blankly. There was no way. It couldn't be—could it? Clay wouldn't have followed her all the way from Earth. Not after the way they'd parted. He hated her now and never wanted to see her again. So it was completely crazy to believe that he would leave everything behind and sign an ironclad contract to come to the Martian colony just to be with her.

Except here he was. Or if it wasn't him, it must be his identical twin.

As she watched, the man looked up and caught her eyes for the first time. A slow, hopeful smile spread over his handsome, familiar face, and she realized that it really was Clay.

"Alisha!" He climbed stiffly out of his hypersleep pod, dressed only in the standard issue gray sleep shorts and T-shirt that everyone was wearing. It was the dulllest clothing imaginable, but Alisha couldn't help thinking that he filled it out wonderfully. She wanted to run to him and throw herself into his arms but she couldn't. For one thing, she was extremely stiff herself. And for another she wasn't sure he'd welcome such an embrace. Not after the way they'd parted.

"Clay?" she asked uncertainly as he made his way through the milling crowd of colonists in the gigantic metal room. "Is that really you?"

"In the flesh." He grinned at her and lifted both hands before letting them drop to his sides. Alisha got the feeling that he wanted to hug her too but wasn't quite sure of his reception. "By the time I found out where you'd gotten to, you were already in

hypersleep and getting ready to launch. They didn't want to let me on, but I called a few contacts I had on the Terraform Committee and got them to pull some strings for me. And here I am."

"But...but what are you *doing* here?" she asked blankly.

"Looking for you." He started to reach for her again and then stopped. "On the day of the launch, Deelah called me and told me I had to find you. Apparently the pills she gave you to fool me with weren't placebos after all—they were an earlier form of the sweetdreams drug that gets stored in the body. You could have aftereffects from taking it for up to five years."

"So...you came all the way to Mars with me to tell me that?" Alisha crossed her arms over her chest and frowned at him. "Look, I appreciate the thought, but couldn't you have sent me the information on a subspace frequency? I mean, I know it's expensive, but it has to be cheaper than dropping your whole life to come to Mars. And how do you expect to get back?"

"I don't." His deep voice was quiet. "I didn't just come here to tell you that, Alisha. I came here for you. Because I want to be with you. Not as friends, and certainly not as cousins. As lovers or soul mates or husband and wife if you want to get married. In fact, I don't care how we do it—I just want to spend my life with you."

"Oh, Clay..." A lump had formed in her throat, making it difficult to get any words out. "I...I don't know what to say."

He took her hands in his and looked down at her earnestly. "Say you feel the same way. Say you forgive me for being such a stubborn jackass that I almost missed out on the love of my life."

She bit her lower lip. "I'm the one who ought to ask *you* to forgive *me*. I never should have tried to trick you like I did."

"If you hadn't, we wouldn't be here together now," Clay said quietly. "I'm not saying I want you to make a habit of it, but I think I can forget about it this once. If you can forget about the awful things I said to you the last time I saw you, that is."

"Of course I can. Already forgotten," Alisha promised him. "But, Clay, the family..."

"Has had almost two years to get used to the idea while you and I were in hypersleep," he finished for her. "I left them a letter and told Deelah to fill them in on the details. They might still be pretty upset, but there's not a lot they can do about it at this point. Unless our moms get together and build a rocket so they can come all the way to Mars and get after us with a bedroom slipper."

Alisha laughed. "Somehow I just don't see that happening." She shook her head. "I just...I can't believe you left everything to come be with me like this. It's incredible. I mean, you must have left so many loose ends."

"I love you," he said simply. "Nothing is more important than that. Let the loose ends take care of themselves."

"Oh Clay..." Her eyes filled with tears and she tried to blink them away. "I love you too. I just...after the last time we saw each other, I never thought..." She couldn't finish, but it was clear he understood.

Gathering her into his arms, he held her tight and buried his face in her hair. "God, baby, I've missed you so much. After Deelah told me about the possible side effects of those pills she gave you, I was out of my mind with worry that something might happen to you."

Alisha pulled away, frowning. "What kind of side effects are we talking about?"

"She said possibly dizziness and disorientation, but what worried me the most is that you might keep acting out your dreams for up to five years after taking them."

"Is that right?" Alisha thought about it for a moment and then gave him a naughty little smile. "Well, that isn't *all* bad. After all, have you known me to have a boring dream yet?"

Clay grinned. "Now that you mention it, you do seem to have some pretty interesting nighttime adventures."

"Exactly." She grinned back and stood on tiptoe to put her arms around his neck and kiss him. "So I don't mind the side effects as long as you're going to be with me."

"Every night for the rest of our lives," he promised, pulling her close and kissing her back.

Alisha sighed happily and snuggled in his arms. Her new life was about to begin, and with Clay in it as her lover as well as her friend, she knew she would always have sweet dreams.

 THE END 

Evangeline Anderson

Evangeline Anderson is a registered MRI tech who would rather be writing. And yes, she is nerdy enough to have a bumper sticker that reads "I'd rather be writing." Honk if you see her! She is thirty-something and lives in Florida with a husband, a son, and two cats. She had been writing erotic fiction for her own gratification for a number of years before it occurred to her to try and get paid for it. To her delight, she found that it was actually possible to get money for having a dirty mind and she has been writing paranormal and Sci-fi erotica steadily ever since.

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