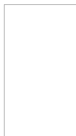


Kansas City Shuffle

Talya Bosco



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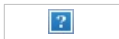
ISBN 978-1-59632-993-5

Available in PDF, HTML, Microsoft Reader, and Mobi

Editor: Venessa Giunta

Cover Artist: Natalie Winters

Printed in the United States of America



Published by

Loose Id LLC

870 Market St, Suite 1201

San Francisco CA 94102-2907

www.loose-id.com

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About this Title

Genre: Full-Figured Heroine/Shape-shifter Ménage
Paranormal

Larissa comes to Kansas City after winning a trip to see where her favorite series of books takes place. She expects to have a great time with her three scheduled fantasy dates and an all-expenses-paid shopping spree. When she meets two men at different points in her vacation, she is suddenly torn between them. Finding out they know each other, and are perfectly willing to share her, in and out of bed, is more than a dream come true. It's a fantasy.

Devon and Jared know that Larissa is their mate; they just have to convince her. And hope she doesn't freak when she finds out they are the werewolves she has been

reading about for the past six years. But they can't tell her until their pack has finished "testing her suitability" as an alpha female. All they can do is hope she will forgive them when she finds out the truth.

Yet, the real truth is something none of them suspects. And may be enough to drive them apart permanently.

Publisher's Note: *This book contains explicit sexual content, graphic language, and situations that some readers may find objectionable: Anal play/intercourse.*

Kansas City Shuffle: When everyone thinks one thing is happening, when in reality something entirely different is going on.

Chapter One

Larissa stopped a few feet from the door to the restaurant and took a deep breath. This was it. Her first fantasy date.

She still couldn't believe she was here at a five-star hotel for a week. All expenses paid. But there was no denying it. She was the winner of Canid Publishing's first-annual Summer Fantasy Vacation.

So here she was, in Kansas City about to meet a cover model for one of Michelle Harrington's werewolf books.

She had three dates as part of the vacation package. Each with a model from a different book. And she had high hopes. Oh, she didn't expect to go back to her hotel room with a sexy stud. Women her size and shape rarely had those kinds of encounters, but she hoped she'd at least enjoy herself. It would be nice to have someone to have an intelligent conversation with. It had been a while since she'd been on a date worth remembering.

Hell, who was she kidding? It had been a while since she'd been on a date, period. She was tired of her friends, and even worse, her mother, setting her up on those blind dates with safe, boring men. Men who tended to be mama's boys, or men on the lookout for a mother for their future children. Larissa was over thirty, and her biological clock was ticking, as her mother reminded her regularly, but that didn't mean she had to settle on a man just because he'd be a good father. Larissa wanted passion. Excitement. Love.

She knew all those emotions wouldn't last in a long-term relationship, but she wanted to at least start out with them. She deserved to be more than a baby factory for a lawyer or accountant, destined to live in an upper-class cookie-cutter neighborhood.

It wasn't a bad life by any means, but it wasn't the one she wanted. Larissa wanted more than that. But she knew the odds of finding it were close to nil. But she refused to settle. Too many of her friends had done so, and many of them were either miserable and married, or miserable and divorced. She would take being content and alone over the other options any day.

Shaking herself out of her morose thoughts, she reminded herself where she was. It was time to meet her first fantasy date.

It still didn't seem real to her. She was the kind of woman who won nothing more exciting than a handmade afghan at a charity raffle. This wasn't her speed. She was a boring plus-sized accountant from Philadelphia. A fantasy for her was doing a tax return that had no problems. Things like this didn't happen to her.

But apparently someone at Canid hadn't done their research and didn't know that about her. So here she was.

She glanced around the lobby area and forced herself to accept that yes, she was here, and yes, something like this was happening to her.

It was ridiculous, really, but she felt her life was about to change drastically and she had no choice in the matter. Something told her the moment she reached for that door handle, her life would go down a totally unexpected path. A path she might not be happy following.

“Stop it,” she told herself. She was not psychic; nothing was about to happen. There was nothing ominous about this vacation, nothing that was life altering. She was here for a good time, and that was it. In less than two weeks she would be back in her apartment, alone, thinking about getting a cat. The best thing she could do was just enjoy this time for what it was and then get on with her life.

Realizing she had procrastinated long enough, she took the last few steps and reached for the door, only to have her hand covered by another.

Instantly a shock ran through her body at the contact, heating her skin to a flush with just a touch on her hand. She looked up at the man responsible and sucked in her breath, suddenly unable to remember how to breathe.

Adonis stood in front of her. Or at least as close to Adonis

as any human male could ever hope to get. Tall, dark, and handsome. That was the only thought that ran through Larissa's mind. She'd finally met the epitome of a romantic hero, here on her Summer Fantasy Vacation.

Black hair that brushed his shoulders in a thick wave made her want to run her hands through it and feel it brush against her naked body. His deep brown eyes burned straight through to her soul and melted part of her heart.

Her body vibrated with his presence, screaming out for him without knowing anything about him. Her pussy grew damp, and her heart raced as she gazed at his dark chestnut brown face. Please, by all that was holy, let this man be her date.

"Mr. Jared! Welcome! So glad to see you again. Right this way to your table, please." The hostess's words barely penetrated Larissa's lust-fogged brain, all her attention still on the man who seemed to be staring back at her.

He stroked her hand with his thumb and whispered, "Later," before he followed the hostess into the restaurant.

Larissa shook her head. Had she really just met perfection on two feet? And had he really said "later" in that deep, husky tone? Or was it a fantasy her overworked and undersexed imagination had conjured up?

"Ms. Myles. Glad to see you. Your party is waiting for you. Let me escort you to your table," said a second hostess who was now standing at the podium. Larissa forced herself to concentrate on the words.

Susan, the publishing firm's liaison, had informed Larissa that the staff would know who she was and not to be surprised by the fact. Betran Hotel had less than fifty rooms, and they prided themselves on having personal service for each and every guest.

The staff were especially aware of Larissa as the winner of a high-profile contest, which was probably a good thing. Who knew what they would think after she met with three different men over a period of less than a week if they didn't know the truth? At least this way they wouldn't think she was a prostitute meeting a new customer every night. Although she was sure the kind of men who would pay for a woman of her generous curves wouldn't wine and dine their women in a five-star restaurant.

Larissa smiled and eagerly followed the hostess into the main section of the restaurant.

She looked around, trying to find the man who had sent her libido spinning into a pit of desire, but she couldn't see him. Maybe he was in one of the private rooms? If so, was he having an intimate dinner with another woman? The

thought brought her spirits down more than it had any right to. She didn't know him; she had no right to be worried about who he was with.

Instead of finding the man from outside, she found herself escorted to a table with two very good-looking men who stood up to greet her.

"Ms. Myles?" A tall brown-haired gentleman put out his hand. "My name is Jeffrey Kroger, and this is Tony Gill."

She shook their hands and then sat in the seat that the second man held out for her.

Jeffrey Kroger was about six feet tall with a nice face, but definitely not model material. Tony, on the other hand, was absolutely gorgeous. He had the face and build that most romance novelists would kill to have grace their front covers. In fact, she was pretty sure he had been on the cover of book two, *Ozark Encounter*, but she couldn't be sure.

She looked at both men, waiting for one of them to start the conversation. She didn't have to wait long.

"Ms. Myles, we have something to tell you," Jeffrey started, but Tony interrupted quickly.

"No, not we. I have something to say."

Jeffrey turned and faced the other man and frowned before continuing as though Tony had never spoken. "There have been some problems with a couple of your dates this week. Some unforeseen circumstances."

"What's wrong?" Larissa sat back and took a sip of her water. It was obvious the men weren't very comfortable, and because of that she was intrigued. If there was a problem, though, she didn't know why Susan hadn't contacted her either in her hotel room or on her cell.

What could these men have to tell her?

"Tony is your third date. You were to meet him on Thursday night."

Larissa turned to look at Tony. "Then why are you here tonight? Will tonight's date be here Thursday? And why are you here, Mr. Kroger?"

Kroger raised an eyebrow. "Couldn't I be your date for tonight?"

"You're cute, don't get me wrong, but something tells me you just aren't the model type." Larissa smiled to take the sting out of her words. "And although you look familiar, I know it wasn't on a book that I've seen you before."

He smiled. "Okay, well, we'll get to me in a minute. Right now we need to talk to you about Tony."

"It's my partner," Tony blurted out. All his poise and good-boy looks seemed to flee, and worry ran across his face.

Larissa sat forward, suddenly concerned. "What's wrong?" She somehow knew he didn't mean business partner.

Kroger explained, "Tony's mother-in-law had what they thought was a minor heart attack this morning. His lover has already left to go home to Vegas to be with her. Now they're saying she might not survive the week."

"Well, then, what the hell are you doing here?" Larissa turned and asked Tony.

"My contract says I have to be with you for dinner, that I'm to be your escort for the evening."

"But that's not till Thursday," Larissa said.

"Exactly."

"Fine, if anyone asks, we met for dinner, we talked about my plans here in Kansas City, we talked about family, and we parted. Now get the hell out of here and go be with the man you love. He doesn't need to be alone right now, trust me."

“But—”

“Tony, just go. I'm sure if the company wanted to be a bastard about this, they could be. As far as I am concerned, we had our date. You fulfilled your obligations. Now go.”

Tony looked at her and then to Jeffrey.

“She said go, Tony. I told you she'd understand. Do what the lady said and go help Frank.”

“Thank you, Ms. Myles. I thank you, and Frank thanks you.” Tony stood up and grabbed her hand.

“I hope they're wrong, Tony. I hope she has a long future ahead of her.”

Tony nodded, tears in his eyes, and headed out.

“That was a very nice thing you just did.”

Larissa shook her head. “No, it wasn't. It was the only thing I could have done. And I hate to think the company wouldn't have let him out of the contract for such a reason.”

Jeffrey shrugged. “They probably would have, but he was afraid of getting Susan in trouble.”

“How so?”

“She's in charge of this fantasy vacation. He was worried that it would reflect badly on her, especially since she was the one to pick him for one of your dates in the first place.”

“Ridiculous. She has as little control over this as she did the traffic jam we got stuck in yesterday on the way from the airport.” Something clicked in her head, and Jeffrey's familiarity snapped into place. “That's where I know you from! You were the driver yesterday.”

Jeffrey nodded.

It didn't take Larissa long to realize why Jeffrey was here tonight. She snickered. “Don't tell me. Tonight's date couldn't make it either.”

“You aren't mad?”

“Just tell me why he couldn't make it.”

“His girlfriend went into labor this afternoon.” He looked at his watch. “Just about two hours ago, in fact.”

Larissa's snicker turned into a chuckle and progressed straight into full-blown laughter. Things like this could only happen to her. Finally, after wiping her eyes with the napkin, she looked him in the eye.

“And you thought you'd try to cover it up so Susan didn't get in trouble? And you are her, what, brother?”

He held up his left hand. “Her husband.”

“And does she know about any of this?”

Jeffrey shook his head. “No. Right now she's attending a wedding shower for a friend from college. There are still enough places within a short drive that cell phones don't work, and I don't have the number of where she's at.”

“Which is how you got roped into all of this.”

Jeffrey nodded.

“Do you normally have this many family emergencies at once?”

“No, ma'am. This has to be a first.”

“So were you going to be up front about it all or pretend to be my date for the night to keep me from getting upset?”

“I wasn't sure what I was going to do; I thought I'd play it by ear. But honestly, after hearing you talk with Susan yesterday, and what she's told me about you, I wasn't worried at all. I just didn't want you to be disappointed.”

"Because that would mean Susan had failed?"

"Partly. But also because you seem nice. You don't deserve to have half of your vacation blow up in your face through no fault of your own."

"What about other models?"

"Canid Publishing tends to contract only for one cover at a time. This was a special assignment for each model. No one else was available. It's not like this is New York."

"And if you'd gone out of company, they'd find out."

"Exactly. Plenty of good-looking men around, but..."

Larissa nodded. "You know, to be honest, I thought it kind of silly to be granted three dates. It's not like I was gonna find the hunk of my dreams and have mad monkey sex all week." Larissa's hand flew to her mouth, and her eyes grew wide. "Oh shit, did I just say that out loud?"

Jeffrey covered his mouth with his fist and coughed. "I didn't hear a thing."

"Okay, then. Movin' right along. What about my third, no, second date? Bubonic plague? Facial herpes?"

Jeffrey's laughter was obvious, although he tried to keep it

in check. "No, as far as I know, that date is still on."

"Great. What can you tell me about him?"

Jeffrey motioned for the waiter to bring them menus. He'd obviously asked the staff to wait until he could ascertain how the night was going to go.

After they were done choosing and ordering their dinners, he answered her question.

"Honestly, nothing. I don't know anything at all about him, other than the fact he is the model on the newest book coming out later this summer."

"Age? Sexual orientation? Relationship status? Serial number?"

His smile brightened up the room. His wife was an awfully lucky woman. "Sorry. Nothing."

Larissa pursed her lips. She knew he had to know more, but he was just as tight-lipped as his wife was. Dammit. "You remind me of someone." Larissa tapped the table. "Give me a minute and I'll figure it out."

"I already said you were right. I was the driver yesterday."

"No. Something more. Not your looks, but the way you act,

your—I got it. You remind me of James from the first book.”

Jeffrey coughed. “Really? I’ll take that as a compliment, since I’ve never read the books. It *is* a compliment, isn’t it?”

“Yeah. James was a fixer. He’d take things into his own hands and deal with them, no matter if it was the best choice.”

“Okay, well, I’ll admit that maybe my choices this evening haven’t been the most appropriate. But they worked out for the best, right?”

Larissa smirked. “I don’t know, did they? I get one date with a married man who I can’t even flirt with because I know his wife and will spend the entire week with her. One date with a gay man that got canceled, and one date with a complete stranger you can’t tell me anything about.”

“So where’s the problem?”

Larissa laughed and shook her head. It was going to be an interesting vacation.

Chapter Two

Larissa looked at herself in the mirror. It was one o'clock in the afternoon, and here she was trying on cocktail dresses suitable for a fancy evening out. She really didn't know why she was doing it, but Susan had insisted she at least try on a couple today. So far, Susan had picked out three she was insisting that Larissa buy. This one, though, was by far the most risqué of them all.

The dress was bustier-style, leaving her shoulders and arms completely bare, while providing support for her breasts from the stiff, tight material of the bodice. She felt like she was practically spilling out of it, but she knew that was the way it was supposed to be worn.

The torso of the bustier helped shape her, giving her the illusion of a true hourglass figure. Something she'd given up on the day she'd discovered chocolate. Unlike traditional bustiers, this one closed with a zipper hidden on the side, a feature she was sure was invented so the wearer would be able to put it on and take it off without help, which came in handy, especially today with her long nail tips she'd had put on for vacation. She'd been able to step into it and zip it into place without any trouble at all.

It was two different shades of purple, her favorite color. The main part of the dress was lavender, and a darker tone started at the sides of her chest and then met in a knot under her breasts. The skirt was mostly the paler color,

interspersed with panels of the darker material. It ended right between her knees and ankles in an uneven hem, creating an added fullness to the overall effect.

Larissa had to admit it was her favorite. And if she were honest with herself, it looked good on her. It hid all the things she wasn't as fond of, like her stomach and wide thighs, while it accentuated what she considered her good points, like her arms and breasts. The cleavage alone would get some positive attention.

But she knew she had nowhere else to wear it after she got home, unless she counted the Christmas party her company had once a year.

Her dates usually required the equivalent of a nice business outfit, not a calf-length cocktail dress. At least not one this fancy.

But Susan had said Larissa deserved some new and sexy things, and she couldn't wear the same dress every night to dinner while she was here. Even if tonight's date was the last of her dates, given Thursday night was canceled. And since Canid Publishing was paying for it, Larissa didn't have much room to stand on when she tried to protest the purchases.

Even the shoes matched. Five-inch spike heels created a

firm, shapely look to her calves and made her feel sexy. Still, despite her personal assessment, she knew the rest of the world wouldn't share it. She could imagine some of the snide remarks she'd get from people at the hotel.

She looked down again. Screw them. She looked good. Maybe. She opened the doors, still admiring the heels, and asked Susan, "How do I look?"

"Exquisite."

The soft, warm voice sent shivers down her back, heating her skin as it rumbled through her body. She looked up into the brightest green eyes she had ever seen, and felt her heart skip a few beats before it kicked itself into overdrive.

Blood rushed to her head, overwhelming her and causing her to go weak in the knees. She reached out to regain her balance, and her hand was caught by the man in front of her.

Electricity shot from the contact straight to her pussy, and she got dizzy all over again. Dampness soaked through her panties, making her very glad she wasn't trying on pants as her body reacted to his touch.

"Ex-excuse me," she stammered and tugged at her hand, trying to remove it from his grasp. "I'm sorry. I was looking for someone else."

Instead of releasing her hand, however, he squeezed it tighter and pulled it, as well as her, toward him. "There's no need for apologies. I never mind helping a damsel in distress, and from the sound of your voice you were definitely distressed.

"That dress really is exquisite on you. I don't know why you doubt your appeal in it." His breath brushed across her bare upper chest, making goose bumps appear over the rest of her body. When he glanced down at her cleavage, which was now pressed against his hard, wide chest, she felt the heat rush through her as she blushed.

"Well, you know, it never hurts to get a second opinion." Although she intended it to be light and off the cuff, her voice came out breathy, huskier and sexier than normal. She needed to get away from him before she did something really stupid. Like throw her arms around him and grind her pussy against his cock and ask him to take her here and now.

She cleared her throat and pulled against his hold again. This time, he let her go.

Was that a sigh of disappointment? And did it escape her lips? Ridiculous.

"What do you mean, doubt my appeal?" His words finally

penetrated into her brain.

“The way you came out. You were looking down, as though unsure, and your voice had no confidence in it.”

“You could tell that from just a few words?”

“I’m an excellent judge of human emotions.”

“Really? And what am I feeling right now?” Besides annoyance that anyone could read that much about her so quickly. She hated being that transparent to a complete and total stranger.

“Curiosity, uncertainty, sexual excitement.” His voice went low and deep, forcing her to cross her arms over her chest to hide her nipples’ reaction.

“Awful sure of yourself, aren’t you?” Embarrassment rushed through her. She really needed to work on hiding her emotions better. Not to mention her physical reactions.

“Would you wear that dress for me?”

“Excuse me?” Larissa frowned, unsure she understood what he’d just asked.

“Would you wear that dress for me? Go out to dinner with me this evening and wear that dress?”

She definitely had not heard him say that either.

"I'm sorry, but I don't make a habit of dating strangers."

"Agree to go on a date, and we won't be strangers anymore."

Larissa shook her head, more regretful than she wanted to admit, even to herself. "Sorry, I already have a date for tonight."

"Will your date approve of the dress as much as I do?"

"I don't know. I've never met—" Larissa stopped. She'd just told this sexy hunk of a man she wouldn't date him because he was a stranger, and then admitted that was exactly what she was doing tonight. She looked down, at a loss for words.

His hand cupped her chin and urged her head up until his gaze met hers. "Tomorrow, then. Where shall I pick you up?"

Pick her up? Was he serious? Of course he was, why else would he say it? It wasn't like he was being put up for this. Or was he? She narrowed her eyes before asking him.

"Do you work for Canid?"

He shook his head. "I'm sorry. I don't know anyone by the name Canid."

"Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why do you want to go out with me?"

His gaze raked across her body, making her shiver in response once again. She felt her skin flush at the naked appraisal evident in his eyes.

"Because I think you are a beautiful woman and would like to get to know you."

Larissa wanted to scoff at his words. But the look in his eyes was enough to trust that he was telling the truth.

"Okay." Her response was low and husky.

"Where can I pick you up?"

Despite the fact something in her was urging her to trust this stranger, the sensible part of her was still telling her to be cautious. "Why don't I just meet you at the restaurant at the Betran Hotel."

He nodded. "Is eight o'clock acceptable to you?"

"It's fine."

"Until then."

He turned to leave, but she called him back.

"Wait! I don't even know your name."

"Devon Caldano. And you are?"

"Larissa Myles."

He picked up her hand and brought it to his lips. "Until tomorrow evening, then, lady Larissa." The feather brush of his soft lips against her knuckles had her going weak at the knees again. She closed her eyes. When she opened them, he was gone.

* * * * *

Take two.

Larissa stood outside the restaurant and took a deep breath. Well, it couldn't go as badly as last night, could it? Susan had assured her not an hour ago that her date was going to be here, that he really was a model, and that he was drop-dead gorgeous.

Of course, that had been after spending the morning

apologizing for what her husband had done and assuring Larissa that she would try to set up two more dates later this week.

Larissa had told her not to do anything of the sort. She'd enjoyed her time with Jeffrey and had told Susan as much. He'd been polite, fun, and a fount of local information. It had been a great introduction to her time in Kansas City, and she wouldn't trade it for anything. She didn't need two more dates to make her vacation fun. It was already that.

She'd been forced to tell her about the stranger in the dress shop as well. Susan had been full of questions. Questions Larissa didn't have the answers to. And things she wasn't about to tell Susan. Things like: she would much prefer to be meeting him tonight rather than this unknown model.

And that he was definitely the kind of man she would willingly let herself get into trouble with. Him, and maybe a brother. Or maybe the hunk from yesterday outside the restaurant.

She shook her head. Damn her overactive hormones. It had been one of Larissa's fantasies for years to be involved in a ménage à trois. Creating a full-on triad was something she'd never even dared dream about. After all, what were the odds she would find one man who would

take her forever, never mind two?

But between being here because of Michelle's stories, which all ended with established triads, and her meeting two of the sexiest men she'd ever seen, Larissa's mind was in the gutter and her libido was in high gear.

She'd taken a nap earlier this evening, and it had been filled with hot, wet dreams about a pair of sexy men making love to her all day. She'd woken up so excited and turned on, she'd masturbated without the help of a vibrator for the first time in years.

So now here she was. Hot, horny, and frustrated. Wearing yet another sexy little outfit that Susan had convinced her to buy earlier today.

It was an asymmetrical design, draping over one shoulder while leaving the other bare. The one sleeve stopped midway down her right biceps and fell in graceful ripples, mirrored by the handkerchief calf-length hem of the dress. Her shoes had four-inch spike heels, making her feel almost tall. The deep green of the dress reminded her of an expensive emerald. All in all, she felt pretty damn impressive tonight.

"Ms. Myles! Glad to see you again. Your date tonight is definitely yummy. I have to admit I'm jealous of you. What I

wouldn't give to have a date with a couple of cover models from romances. This one is a dream come true."

Larissa smiled in agreement. The hostess was right; it should be a dream come true. And despite the mix-ups with her dates, she was having a great time. Now if only this date was the man she saw yesterday evening, it would be perfect.

The young woman moved into the restaurant, and once again Larissa followed her, scanning the patrons and staff alike.

She saw many of the same staff from the night before, as well as guests who looked familiar. When her gaze found the only single man in the room, she knew he had to be her date. Both the hostess and Susan had definitely been right when they called this one gorgeous. Blond and well-built, he was obviously tall, even sitting down. He fit the physical description she had come to expect from Michelle in her books to a tee. But all similarity to the well-liked weres in her stories ended there.

This man had a cold, hard face and looked to be in a foul mood. Not possible. She couldn't have date karma that bad, could she?

When the hostess stopped at the table, Larissa's fears

skyrocketed at the new look on her date's face. His scathing glance of disapproval couldn't be mistaken for anything else.

"Ms. Myles." He nodded, not bothering to stand up.

"Yes, I am. And you would be?"

"Philip Prentiss." The man preened. He honest to God preened. This was going to be a long night.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Prentiss." Larissa plastered a smile on her face and told herself it might not be as bad as she thought. She pulled out her chair to sit, and before she was even seated, her date had called the waiter and started to order.

"I will have a salad with a grilled chicken breast, dry, no dressing. Make sure the chicken is cooked through, but don't put it on the salad until it has cooled sufficiently, I want the greens to be fresh, not wilted from the heat of the meat. Sprinkle some fresh lemon juice on the chicken, and I mean fresh, none of that bottled crap. And only a sprinkle."

Larissa watched the man as he continued to make his demands, coming across as a bigger asshole than her last boyfriend was. And she'd thought that was impossible. The looks of disgust he gave her over his menu sent her pulse

racing. Her hands started to shake with the adrenaline that flooded her body as it prepared to run away or deal with the horrible night she knew was coming.

“And the lady will have the same.”

“No, the lady will not have the same.” Larissa turned to look at the waiter with a smile. “The lady will have the six-ounce petite sirloin with a baked potato—just butter, please. The dinner salad that comes with it is fine, and well, I guess you can put a diet French dressing on that if you have it; if not, then a red French will do. I’m not too picky.”

She remembered the waiter's name was Andy. He had been her waiter every night since she'd arrived, and she had been pleased with his service. His smile assured her that tonight would be no different. After all, unlike her date, she wasn't a difficult patron.

“Well, I can't say I'm surprised, but I hoped for better.” Larissa took a deep breath and fought the nausea that tried to work its way into her stomach. She'd learned to accept her size a long time ago, but people like Prentiss never made it easy.

She pursed her lips. “I'm sorry to disappoint you, but not every woman feels the need to starve herself just to fit into the accepted parameters of society.”

Prentiss sneered. "And you're happy with yourself like...like that?" He gestured to her body with his free hand.

What about some people made them feel as though they had the right, the obligation, it seemed, to criticize those who weren't in perfect physical form? So what if she was plus-sized? She was happy the way she was. It wasn't anyone's damn business, and if they didn't like it, then they had the option of not looking at her. She tried not to make value judgments based on appearances, and the times she had, she kept them to herself. Nothing gave this asshole the right to be her judge, jury, and executioner. And she was damned if she was going to let him get the better of her. "Actually, in fact, I am. I eat plenty of fruits and vegetables, I get the protein my body needs, and I get to eat some extras. I get enough exercise that I'm not going to die tomorrow, but I still live a healthy and full life."

"And you'll be alone the rest of your life. Is that what you want?"

Larissa couldn't help herself. She laughed. Not a nice polite little laugh, but a full-blown belly laugh that carried across the dining room. "Mr. Prentiss, you sound exactly like my mother. Thank you for that. Up until this moment I thought I'd have to sit through this dinner politely and chalk it up to experience. But now, I have no qualms in telling you what I am about to say.

“First of all, I know nothing about you, but I can already tell you're a pompous, arrogant ass. Anyone stupid enough to choose to spend time with you is either as self-centered as you are or dumb enough to get what they deserve.

“Now, as this is my vacation, I am going to set the rules for the night. You have two choices. Either get out of your seat and leave now before I'm forced to call Susan and tell her how rude and inconsiderate you are, or sit there and shut up. If I have to listen to one more word out of your mouth, I will make sure that Canid Publishing knows exactly how you treated me.”

Prentiss opened and shut his mouth like a fish as he debated her options. She hoped he'd pick the first option. Pretty though he may be, she was afraid if she was forced to eat dinner opposite him, she'd end up with indigestion.

“How dare you tell me I'm not entitled to my opinion.”

“Oh, you're entitled to it, but you are not entitled to blab it to the nearest person. And if you had even a modicum of manners, I am sure you would know that. Now why you thought I would sit here and take it, I have no idea. Perhaps someone mentioned I was an easygoing sort. And they would have been right. But I draw the line at rudeness. And in fact, I've changed my mind. If you don't leave, I will.”

Larissa grabbed the napkin that had been on her lap and folded it carefully, placing it on the table in front of her before pushing her chair away. "I am sorry for you, Mr. Prentiss. I hope someday you grow up."

She stood and turned to walk away. She expected her legs to be shaky, but she'd never felt more confident in her life as she left her "Dream Date Number Two" behind her. Less than halfway to the door, however, Andy intercepted her.

"Ms. Myles?"

"Yes?" She turned, smiling, actually in a good mood.

"I am sorry. I overheard some of that. Would you like us to ask the gentleman"—his face crinkled at the word—"to leave?"

"No. Don't worry about it. I can order dinner from my room. He can eat alone."

"Please, don't do that. Perhaps you would be willing to take a table on the balcony? It's quiet out there and, despite the weather report, absolutely beautiful."

Larissa thought about it for a moment before nodding. "Yes, thank you. Actually that sounds perfect."

The waiter escorted her out to an empty balcony and gave

her the choice of where to sit. She chose a seat in the shadows near the railing, where she could see the grounds and the nearly full moon.

The night was cool and crisp with a slight tang to the air, reminding her of an autumn night despite it being springtime. It made her almost wish for a shawl, but she was unwilling to move from her spot, finding it soothing and worth the slight chill.

“How can it be that you are sitting out here alone in the dark?”

The voice ran down her spine, his breath brushing across the back of her neck. Her nipples perked up in response. His lips were inches from her ear, and the heat of his body warmed hers thoroughly.

The voice was deeper, richer than that of her stranger from earlier in the day, but it was still familiar. Her body continued to heat as she forced herself to respond.

“Better to be alone than with distasteful company.” She couldn't bring herself to turn her head, to look at the man who had her body reacting with just a few words. Instead, she inhaled his scent. Masculine. That's all she could think of. Sandalwood, forests, wildness. He smelled absolutely wild and untamed. And absolutely delectable.

Turn around.

But her body wouldn't listen. The tingle of excitement, of not knowing, was stronger than the need to find out who was behind her turning her bones to mush and her nipples to pebbles.

"Tragic that such a beauty should be saddled with an unsatisfactory dinner companion. Perhaps I might act as a substitute?"

"I don't know. Would it be worth my while?" A thrill ran through her body as she realized what she was doing. She didn't normally flirt with people she knew, and here she was flirting with a complete stranger. One she hadn't even seen yet.

"I will strive to make the rest of your evening extremely enjoyable." His response turned her on more than those simple words had any right to. He had done nothing but whisper in her ear, and already her panties were soaked with desire. She gave a slow nod.

She felt him straighten and move into her line of sight. Once she saw who it was, she sucked in a breath in amazement. Adonis from yesterday. The man who had whispered "later" laden with such sexual energy that she'd practically been ready to chase after him.

"My name is Jared Morrison," he said as he sat down. He didn't extend a hand, but that was okay with Larissa; she didn't think she'd be able to shake it, given the condition she was in. If they actually touched, she might just jump over the table and ask him to spend the night fucking her brains out.

He was even more gorgeous than she remembered. He wore a dark suit that was tailored to his body and a white shirt that brought out the dark tone of his skin. In the dim light she couldn't see the color of his eyes, but she thought she remembered them as a deep brown and capable of staring straight through her.

"Larissa Myles."

"Well, Ms. Myles, would you care to share why your evening has been so unsatisfactory up until now?"

Larissa smiled. She couldn't help it. She wasn't sure if this man was normally this formal or if he was trying to be very good for her, but either way she found it absolutely irresistible. "No, not really. Let's just say that not everyone knows proper manners."

"Did someone insult you?" His face darkened.

"Let's just say my date was less than polite."

“Inexcusable.”

“I agree. Which is why I asked him to leave.”

“And I see he did.”

Larissa shook her head. “Actually, no. I left. I figured he wasn’t worth the effort of convincing him to forgo the date, so I left the table. Andy, the waiter, gave me this table out here. One that I prefer, to be honest.”

“Well, I have to say I’m pleased. It will make our time together much more private.”

“And will we need privacy to eat dinner?”

Despite the dim light, Larissa would have sworn she saw his eyes glitter with some unknown emotion.

“I guess that depends how much we enjoy ourselves.”

Chapter Three

Jared watched as Larissa pressed the number to her floor and stepped back, right into his arms. His hands went around her waist and pulled her into him. He couldn’t resist;

he buried his nose into her hair and inhaled her scent.

Devon was right. She was the one. There was no doubt about it in his mind, or in the way his body reacted to her. From the top of her head to the tips of her toes, she was the one meant for them.

Her hair wasn't ordinary brown. No, it was different shades mixed with some reds and even some blondes, giving her a unique appearance that he found endearing. Curls bounced all over the place, defying current trends in their wildness. All he could think of was what they would look like spread across his chest after a night of hard sex.

She was short. There was at least a foot difference, even with her heels, but it didn't matter to him. If he had to hunch for the rest of his life, then he was perfectly willing to.

And the only word to describe her body was voluptuous. He'd never understand society's obsession with stick-thin women. He wanted a woman with curves, one who looked and felt like a woman and not an anorexic boy.

In short, she was perfect for him. He didn't know how his mother had figured it out, but Larissa was his mate.

Now he had to convince her of that.

He knew he turned her on, that something in her

responded to him. She wouldn't be taking him up to her room if she weren't affected by him.

That was another bit of research his dear old mum did on her. Although she wasn't above a bit of fun, Larissa wasn't the kind of woman to have sex with just anyone. She was very particular.

This suited his mother just fine. Denise Morrison wanted a strong, independent woman for him and Devon. Just not one who was indiscriminate in her behavior. She was very particular about the kind of woman she placed in front of her son. And the pack.

Jared suppressed a groan. Just from their dinner conversation, he already knew enough about Larissa to know she was going to be pissed when she found out what was going on behind her back. His pack had no right to do what they were doing to her.

But if he told her, he would lose her. And that was the last thing in the world he wanted.

"Um, Jared?"

Her voice made his body go liquid, as he wanted to wrap himself around her and never let go.

"Jared, you're hurting me."

“Damn!” He immediately loosened his hold. He hadn't even realized how tightly he was holding on to her while he was thinking. “Larissa, I'm sorry. I didn't mean—”

“If you don't want to do this, I understand. Really, if you were just trying to make me feel—”

He turned her around to face him, breaking her words off in midsentence. “I want this more than you know. I want nothing more than to bury myself in your body and never leave. I want to make love to you until you pass out from pleasure and exhaustion, and I want to make this a night you will never forget.”

He pulled her tight against his erection. It hadn't gone down despite the trail his thoughts had taken. He didn't expect it ever to go down in her presence.

“If my words won't convince you, maybe this will. This isn't for any other woman. This is for you and only you.” He grabbed her hand and directed it between them. “I have thought of little else besides you since the other day.”

The elevator slid to a stop and the doors opened, prompting Jared to stop and guide Larissa out. He kept his hand on her back as she led the way to her suite and opened the door. Her body trembled and he could only hope it was in the same anticipation he felt.

As soon as they were inside, he pushed the door closed and backed her against the nearest wall. Their bodies pressed together from her chest to her groin, and he was sure she could once again feel his excited state.

“From the moment I saw you, I knew there was something about you. Something in you called to me, and it took almost everything I had within me to leave you there at the entrance to the dining room.”

“Things like that don't happen in real life, Jared. I'm not some sexy femme fatale that men fall in instant lust over.” Her voice was determined but sad, and it broke his heart just a little to hear that tone.

“I don't know about other men, Larissa, but I promise you it's true. I want you. No one else. Not the woman who practically threw herself at me downstairs. I want you.”

“But you noticed her.” She looked down, her voice too soft. He reached down and cupped her chin to pull her gaze back up to his.

“Hell yes, I noticed her. I noticed how different she was from you. How much classier you are, how much nicer you were to the waitstaff, and how much sexier you are in your dress that promises more than it delivers. A dress that makes me want to peel it off of you inch by inch to see what treasures

it hides.”

She shook her head. The confident woman from earlier in the night was gone completely, and in her place was a shy one, unsure of her beauty and ability to attract. His heart melted even more as she showed him her vulnerability. Something he was sure she didn't show many people very often.

He decided the time for words was over. It was time for action. And he did what he'd wanted to do since the moment he saw her. He kissed her.

The strawberry shortcake she'd had for dessert flavored her soft, sweet lips. He licked at her, savoring the sugar of the fruit and her taste beneath.

Her lips parted on a sigh, and he took that opportunity to delve in with his tongue and truly taste her.

Divine.

That's all he could think as he inhaled her scent, experienced her taste, and felt her body against his. He was in heaven.

She responded eagerly to his kisses, meeting his tongue thrust for thrust, tasting him as he tasted her. Groans from both filled the hallway as his hands grasped her shoulders

and held her tight against the wall.

He knew he needed to move her to the bedroom. To make love to her properly, but he was too excited, too driven. And he needed to take that hurt look out of her eyes and show her how much he wanted her.

He pulled away from her lips and trailed kisses down her jaw to the left side of her neck, where he nipped at her gently. Her gasp told him she liked it, so he did it again. He was beginning to like this dress even more as he flicked his tongue out to taste her bare skin.

He trailed his left hand down her right arm to stroke her skin beneath the silk of the dress while his other hand found hers. Their fingers linked together easily.

Slowly he moved their entwined hands behind her, until her hand was locked between her back and the wall. Wanting more control, he grasped her other hand and placed it in the same position. He pushed against her body, trapping her in place.

“Don't move.” His voice was raspy with desire, eager for her to obey.

He saw rebellion flare in her eyes before she nodded sharply.

Returning to her neck, he kissed and nipped his way down to her shoulder and on to her collarbone, feeling her shiver against his body with each lick and bite. He ran his tongue over the curve of her breast, burying his face in her cleavage as he inhaled her scent once again.

Jasmine. She smelled of her own unique scent mixed with a light touch of jasmine, and it sent his need into overdrive. He pulled at the material covering her partially bared breast. It wouldn't budge. A frustrated growl rumbled from his throat.

"The clasp." Her words were more an exhalation of air than anything else.

He had to tamp his desire down enough to understand her words. He closed his eyes, afraid she would see the change in them, and concentrated on what she said.

"The clasp. It's on my shoulder. The material hooks under the clasp."

He opened his eyes and zeroed in on the offensive clasp on her right shoulder. His fingers moved faster than even he was used to as he eagerly undid the hooks. He stepped back to watch the material slide down her body and reveal her to his gaze.

All hopes of seeing her in her naked glory were dashed,

only to be replaced by a surge of pleasure at seeing her in matching green lace bra and undies.

The bra was mostly lace and covered very little of her skin. It pushed her full breasts up, letting them spill over the top.

“Okay, I've changed my mind. I don't like your dress. It hid way too much of your body from view.”

Larissa moved her hands from her waist and brought them forward, hiding her body from his view. He growled, and she jumped, quickly putting her hands back where they were.

“Don't even think of covering up. I want to look, and I am going to look.”

He felt an instant of guilt, as this time he saw what looked like fear run through her eyes and then quickly darken to something different. Excitement. Desire. Her chest rose and fell with her gasps, and her white skin flushed a gorgeous light pink.

She liked him taking charge. It was something he was going to have to experiment with later. But not now.

He reached out to one of her breasts and ran his thumb over the point where the lace ended and her skin began. “So soft. Beautiful.”

He debated what to do next for all of a millisecond, but he knew what he wanted. When he cupped her breast, it filled even his large hand, and his cock jumped at the thought of sliding between the two of them.

Eventually. Soon.

Instead, he dropped to his knees and buried his head against her waist.

She was such a petite, short little thing, and he wanted to fold her in his arms and protect her for the rest of her life. Oh, she wasn't tiny, but he liked that about her. He liked a woman he could grab hold of and not worry that he was going to break her. Even her height, or lack of, brought out his protective instincts in a way he'd never experienced before.

He pulled her against him and held her tight for a moment. He never wanted to let her go. Fear that he wouldn't be able to share her when the time came ran through him, making him hold her even tighter.

"Jared? Are you okay?" Larissa wrapped her hands in his hair and pulled at his head.

He took a deep breath and looked up at her. "I know you'll find this hard to accept, probably think it's just a line, but I

feel as though I am the luckiest man in the world right now. You honor me with your trust.”

Confusion ran through her eyes, and he realized he was going to ruin the moment if he wasn't careful. Not only wasn't she ready for what he wanted to tell her, she wouldn't believe it.

“You are an exquisite woman, Larissa.”

“You are insane.” But the confusion was replaced with amusement.

He bent his head to her once again and inhaled her scent. He could feel her pulse and hear the rapid beat of her heart. Her arousal was obvious to his enhanced senses, driving him even closer to the edge. He couldn't wait to devour her.

He buried his face into her pussy and blew. Her shiver and moan told him she liked what he was doing. Wrapping his hands around her ass, he pressed her closer to him and sucked at her cloth-covered skin.

When her hands were tight enough to rip the hair from his skull, he pulled back and tugged at her undies, pulling them down her legs.

Tight brown curls, sprinkled with her moisture, lay there for

his pleasure. And he couldn't wait any longer.

He reached a hand to separate her lips and gave her one long lick.

Larissa's legs nearly gave out when Jared licked her. If he hadn't been practically pinning her against the wall, she would have fallen. Shivers ran up and down her body as he tasted her, and all she could think was, More!

He licked slowly and then fast, a finger stroking her, teasing her entry until finally he inserted it into her pussy. Her body hugged his finger, sucking it in as though desperate for the penetration. He wiggled his finger against her walls while he ate at her as though he was starving and she was his only sustenance.

Every lick and suck drove her excitement to a higher pitch, her body tightening with each movement. When he nipped at her clit with his teeth, she couldn't help the shout that escaped from her lips. She thrust herself at him, her hands tightening in his hair and pulling him against her harder.

Her knees grew weak as she felt her orgasm begin to grow. Tingles in the back of her head running down her shoulders and arms warned her to lock her knees.

She exploded in pleasure. She couldn't have held it back if she tried, and she didn't want to try. She came on his finger and his face as he nibbled, licked, and thrust inside her.

When he inserted two more fingers and concentrated his mouth on her clit, she lost it again, bucking against him and moaning her pleasure.

"Oh my God!" she yelled, beyond any ability to be more coherent than that. Her head felt like it was cracking open and her body falling into a million pieces. She pushed at his head, trying to move him off her to give herself a break. She couldn't breathe, never mind think.

When he pulled away, he looked up at her with such a gaze of satisfaction, she felt herself go weak with pleasure.

Jared stood up and scooped her into his arms to bring her to the bedroom. Before she could protest, they were standing beside the bed and he was slowly removing her bra. He once again lifted her, this time to lay her on the already turned-down sheets before taking a step back and looking at her.

Larissa had to fight her initial reaction to cover herself as his gaze ran over her. At the look in his eyes, however, she chose not to move. He really did find her sexy. His gaze didn't fly over certain parts of her body; it lingered

everywhere, as though he found it all attractive.

The flush of pleasure that ran through her and into her heart beat out any feeling she'd ever gotten from being with a man before. This one truly wanted her for her and appreciated all she was.

“Take off your clothes, please. I want to see you.”

Jared obeyed, but slowly. He stripped off his suit coat and then his tie, which he wrapped around his hand and looked at her with the devil in his eye. Her breath hitched at the thought of being tied to the bed.

“Later,” he whispered again, sending her pulse into overdrive at the implicit promise in his word.

Jared then reached for the buttons on his shirt and slowly unbuttoned each one.

Larissa lay on the bed eager to reach for him, but knowing that he wanted to do this for her, that he was enjoying her reaction as much as she was enjoying the show. So she lay there and stroked him with her gaze, eager for the revealing of every inch of his skin.

His wide shoulders and smooth, hairless chest took her breath away. He stripped his shirt off and tossed it somewhere behind him, and the muscles throughout his

chest rippled with the movement. Six-pack abs proved to her that he was no stranger to physical labor. When he reached for the buckle on his pants, she sucked in her breath sharply.

He stopped for a moment and grinned. She rubbed her legs together and gave a small mew of need, her gaze meeting his.

She didn't know how, but before she realized it, he was completely naked and lying on the bed beside her. His hand cupped her chin and pulled her face to his to meet his lips in a kiss that tore her world apart.

She'd known this man for less than four hours, and here she was in bed with him, already having experienced the two most incredible orgasms she'd ever had in her life. She felt more in tune with him than she'd ever felt with anyone else, and wanted nothing more than to stay with him as long as he would take her.

And his kiss. His kiss promised her the world. He kissed her as though she meant everything to him, and he would do anything to keep her at his side. As though he needed her taste for his very survival and nothing was going to tear them apart. By the time he released her lips, she was halfway in love with him and tears had popped into the corners of her eyes.

“How did you do that?” she asked, overwhelmed with sensations and feelings.

He shook his head. “I want you to know how I feel. It doesn't matter to me that we've only just met. I want you, desire you, need you, Larissa Myles. I only hope that I meet your expectations.”

Larissa nearly laughed at that thought, but he was so serious, her amusement died down instantly. She reached up to stroke his face. “Jared, you have already surpassed anything I would have ever expected, just being who and the way you are. Trust me, there is no way in this world that you could disappoint me.”

A cloud ran past his eyes but was gone before she could ask him what was wrong. Instead, he bowed his head and took a nipple into his mouth.

Instantly she forgot the shadow behind his eyes and instead concentrated on the sensations he caused in her body. He teased her with his tongue, circling the nipple, wetting it, and then blowing on it softly. The tip hardened, sending shafts of pleasure down her breast, and she arched, trying to get closer to Jared.

His gentle teasing of her breasts had her panting and silently begging for more. He continued playing with her

nipple, caressing her breast with one hand, his other hand sliding down between her legs to stroke her there. A shudder ran through her body at his touch. She was eager for more, but she knew she was too close to her previous orgasm, and if she let him play she'd come again, too soon. She wanted to feel, experience more before another orgasm overtook her.

Once again she wrapped her hands in his long, beautiful hair, holding tight, but this time pulling him away from her. "I want to taste you." The words that came out of her mouth were raspy, as though she had little breath left in her body.

He looked up at her and whispered, "Later," a twinkle in his eye revealing his knowledge of what that one word did to her.

Instead he continued his ministrations, stroking, caressing, kissing her all over until she was a bundle of nerves about ready to snap.

"Jared, please. Nightstand."

Jared looked up at her, confusion in his eyes, only for them to clear quickly. "Are you ready for me?"

Larissa groaned, "Please." She was more than ready. Hell, if it hadn't been for the fact she'd just met the man, she'd have been willing to forgo the damn condoms, she was so

ready. The Pill didn't protect her from everything, though.

He reached for the bed table drawer and took out the large box of condoms she had there. He raised an eyebrow. She blushed. "My mother. She threw them in the suitcase. She was hoping I'd get lucky. The valet put them in there when he unpacked."

Jared smiled. "Well, we'll see what we can do about putting a dent in the box tonight."

Larissa knew she couldn't keep the shock, and skepticism, from her face. It was a megapack. She hadn't known they made boxes that large until she'd found it in her case.

"Just kidding, Larissa. Even I don't have that much stamina."
"

Larissa felt the heat of her blush creep on her face as he opened the box.

"Can I put it on?" she asked him as he ripped open the condom package.

Jared glanced up and handed her the open wrapper before moving back to give her room.

He hadn't allowed her to touch much of his body while he'd been pleasuring her, so Larissa took advantage of her

opportunity and reached out to touch his beautiful chest.

It was hard sculpted, but his muscles flickered at her touch. Such a smooth chest didn't belong on a man, but it felt wonderful as she stroked it. She ran her empty hand up his pecs, over his shoulders, and down his arms to cup his hand.

Glancing quickly at him to see his reaction, she brought his hand up and gently kissed his palm, laying her cheek in it for a moment as she savored what they had done and were about to do.

Looking down again, she gently grabbed hold of his cock and stroked it up and down. He was smooth and soft. And uncut. She'd never had a lover before who hadn't been circumcised. His skin moved with a looseness she wasn't used to, but underneath was as hard as she needed. Wanting to take her time and explore him, she started to put the package on the bed.

He stopped her with his hand and a groan. "Rissa, honey, I promise you can explore later. But right now, if I don't get inside you, I am going to explode. Please."

Larissa opened her mouth in an O. She hadn't even thought about how long he'd been aroused. Her "sorry" was low and embarrassed.

“Oh, honey, it gives me pleasure to know you want to touch me. I promise you can. Later.”

She'd never be able to hear that word again without her body being flooded with promises of pleasures to come.

Jared took the condom out of her hand and gently urged her to lie back down on the bed. He quickly sheathed his cock and positioned himself between her legs.

Slowly he pushed into her, his eyes locked onto her face.

She felt each centimeter as he stretched her body, pushing his way in. He filled her like she'd never been filled before, making her feel as though she were a virgin all over again.

Her pussy wrapped around his cock, holding it tight in her inner walls. She draped her legs around his ass, eager to keep him buried within her.

He leaned on his arms, letting little of his weight on her. Once he was seated fully, he stayed there for a moment, staring into her eyes. He brushed back a curl of her hair that had fallen over her eye. “Are you okay?” he whispered.

“Oh yeah. More than okay.” Larissa tilted her head. “Jared, I'm not a virgin, you know.”

“I know. I just want to savor the moment.”

With that, he closed his eyes and slowly pulled out before pushing his way back in.

Larissa was in heaven. There was no other way to describe it as she arched back and grabbed hold of his arms while he pumped her. With each push, her body reacted to his presence, shivers running through her, deep inside her soul.

She tightened her legs around him, meeting him thrust for thrust. Her orgasm built too slowly to satisfy her. She wanted more, and she wanted it now. Her release was just out of her reach, as though teasing her with its promise.

She whimpered, but Jared continued his slow pace, making love to her deeply and intensely. The buildup continued. The pressure wrapped her in a cocoon of need and sensations until she felt ready to cry from the tension.

When her orgasm came, it crawled through her and crashed like a wave rushing over her body. It dragged her down to a point of breathlessness and ecstasy.

His shout of joy followed hers as they collapsed together, breathing heavily. When he rolled off her, he kept hold of her and pulled her tight against him.

* * * * *

Larissa woke to a hand stroking her back, and she cuddled back into it.

“You stretch like a contented cat. Are you a happy little pussy?”

His voice ran through her, warming her. She purred and snuggled back more.

“What are your plans for the day?” He wrapped his arms around her and pulled her back against him.

“I don't know yet. I haven't decided what I want to do. Susan suggested something about local museums.”

“How about the art museum? Would you like to go with me?”

Larissa turned around to face Jared. “Why would you want to do that?”

Jared smiled, and his face lit up. Her heart tripped at the sight. “A couple reasons. I love art, the museum here is a pretty nice one, and I would love to spend the rest of the day with you.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really. Maybe I can convince you to spend the night with me as well.”

Larissa felt the smile on her own face disappear as she realized what she had done to herself.

“What? What's wrong, Rissa?”

She bit her lip. “Um, about tonight.”

Jared tilted his head, looking concerned, and then he smiled. “Another date?”

Larissa looked down, heat rushing to her face. How could she have forgotten about the man from yesterday? She pulled out of Jared's arms and sat up, turning her back to him.

“Rissa? Come on, talk to me.”

Maybe if she just said it fast, it wouldn't come out so bad. It wouldn't sound so slutty. “I'm sorry, Jared, but I have another date tonight.”

“Someone important?”

“No, I just met him yesterday.”

“Can you break it?”

Larissa shook her head. "No. I don't know how to contact him."

Jared sat up and leaned against her. "Do you want to break it?"

Did she want to? She'd just had the most wonderful night she could ever imagine with a man who she seemed to click with in all ways, and here she was thinking of another one. Another man who had made her blood boil as quickly as had Jared, one who made her want to explore the sensations as she had with Jared.

"No." Her response was soft and low, and she wasn't sure he could hear her. When he grasped her chin gently and turned her to face him again, she was sure he hadn't.

"What was that?"

"No. I don't want to cancel it."

The smile that came across his face confused her. Was he glad she had another date scheduled? Did it get him out of spending more time with her? But then why did he ask to spend it with her? It wasn't as if she expected it.

"Then don't."

"Excuse me?"

He stroked his thumb over her lips, and her tongue darted out to taste it as it ran past. Here it came, the brush-off.

“First off, last night was incredible. I can't tell you how incredible it was for me.”

Incredible, yes. But not permanent, or even long lasting.

“But we didn't agree to exclusivity before we climbed into bed. I have no right to expect you to drop this date just because of what happened last night. You're on vacation; you have the right to do what you want. Am I disappointed? Definitely. But instead of dwelling on it, I plan on doing my damndest to make sure I'm never far from your thoughts even while you are making love to him tonight.”

Larissa wasn't sure what to think. She hadn't made any promises, and neither had he. And she really didn't want to cancel tonight's date, but suddenly she didn't want to lose Jared either.

Then his words sunk in.

“I didn't say I was going to sleep with him. It's not like I jump from one guy's bed to another.”

“Why shouldn't you? You have no one special waiting for you at home. You have no one you have to answer to. You

have you. As long as you're careful, and you aren't hurting anyone, do what you want."

Larissa nodded. Okay, she got the hint. She hadn't expected vows of undying love, but she hadn't expected him to be this blasé. It was only what she deserved. She started to climb off the bed. "Okay. Well, thanks. Last night was fun. I appreciate it."

The arm that wrapped around her waist and pulled her back threw her off balance until she was lying on the bed once again, this time with Jared hovering over her.

"What do you think you're doing?"

"I was going to go take a shower and let you get dressed so you could leave."

His glower made her heart jump in fear first, and then all she wanted to do was rub it away. His words, though, stopped her from moving. "What makes you think I wanted to leave?"

She shook her head. "You just said no promises were made. That I was free to be with whom I wanted."

"I also said that I planned on making sure you were thinking of me tonight."

Larissa couldn't help it; she smiled, close to laughter. "Have much of an ego there?" His growl sent shivers through her body.

"I think after last night, it's more than just ego speaking, don't you?"

"Maybe."

"Anyway, I don't mind sharing. In fact, I rather like the idea."

What? Did he just say what she thought she heard him say? "Excuse me?"

"This guy you're going to see tonight. Does he turn you on? Do you want to be with him?"

"Just because someone turns you on doesn't mean you should sleep with them."

"You did me."

"That was different."

"How so?"

How did she explain to this naked man looming above her that she couldn't have not slept with him last night? It had nothing to do with him practically rescuing her; it was more

that she just had to make love to him. Her body called out to him, it had craved his touch, and the more she got to know him throughout the evening, the more she'd wanted him.

She shook her head. "There was something more there. I can't explain it."

"And do you feel this moreness with this other man?"

"Yes. No. I don't know. I haven't had a chance to get to know him yet. And I can't have this conversation with you naked on top of me."

He grinned and readjusted his lower body to straddle her. He brushed his now-hard cock against her. "Why not? I told you I don't mind sharing."

"I've never."

His grin grew larger. "Is that a challenge?"

"Why? Have you?" She couldn't help it, but her heart tripped a little at the thought.

"Would it change your opinion of me if I said I had?"

"That depends." Larissa narrowed her gaze. "Was it two women or two men?"

“What difference does it make?”

Larissa knew it shouldn't make a difference, but it did. The thought of him and another man making love to a woman disturbed her, but not so much as the thought of two women making love to him. The green-eyed monster reared its ugly head.

She had no right to be jealous, none at all, but there it was. Jealousy full-blown, and now impossible to get rid of.

She tried to fake her way out of it. “It doesn't matter. Like you said, you have no one to answer to.”

“But does it bother you?”

“Can we really not have this discussion right now?” She was very conscious of the fact that he was lying on top of her, both of them completely naked, and he was still as hard as a rock.

He bent his head down and kissed her shoulder, then worked his way across her collarbone, laying little kisses as he moved. “I don't know. It might be important.”

Larissa gasped when he moved quickly to a breast and sucked a nipple into his mouth. “It's not important. Really.”

Jared licked at her breast, teasing the nipple to a hard

peak. "But it matters to me. Which would you prefer? Or which would bother you? The thought of me sharing a woman with another man? Or two wom—"

"Stop. Okay. You win. I don't like the thought of you with two women, okay?"

Jared stopped and looked up at her. "Why not?"

Larissa closed her eyes, not believing she was about to be as honest as she was with a man she had known for such a short time. "Because it's not something I can give you. I'm not comfortable with it."

She knew it was stupid. It wasn't like they were planning a future together. Hell, they hadn't even decided if they were spending the day together, never mind another night together. But it still bothered her.

"But what about the other?" He resumed his attentions to her nipple, bringing it to a hard peak once again. Shivers ran up and down her spine when he nibbled at her breast, working his way to the other one. She held back her groan and instead tried to concentrate on what he was saying.

"What other?"

His hand snaked its way down to her pussy, where he slid a finger into her before answering, "Would you do a

threesome with two guys? With me, and maybe this man from tonight.”

He pulled his now-wet hand from her and grabbed one of the loose packages still lying on the bed and put a condom on. When he spread her legs and slid into her, she moaned in satisfaction as he filled her.

“Is that a yes?”

“What?”

He slowly pulled out and then pushed back into her before responding. “Is that a yes? To the thought of two men making love to you at once?”

Larissa couldn't have stopped it if she knew it was going to happen, but her inner muscles tightened on him at his words. His smile said all he needed to say.

“Hey, that doesn't mean I want it.” She tried to keep the thread of conversation going, but her body was reacting to him and distracting her.

“Oh, you want it. Your body didn't lie.” He thrust in deeply, and she sucked in a gasp of breath. “Picture it, Rissa. Two of us, giving you all the attention you want. Anything and everything you've ever desired. Never going without.”

His words rang down her body, striking a chord deep within. She could imagine it. That was the problem. She'd been imagining it ever since she picked up her first erotic romance that had a ménage à trois. The fact that Michelle's books almost all involved triads, and she was here because of Michelle, only made the thoughts more surface ones and less subconscious ones. Hell, who was she kidding? Between that and meeting him and Devon, it was all she'd imagined for the last four days.

Did that make her some kind of slut? "I don't know if I could. I would need there to be some kind of connection, something there."

"Something like the 'moreness' you talked about before?"

Somewhere he'd stopped moving and now lay propped above her. He was still buried deep inside and still obviously excited.

"I don't know. Maybe."

"Okay. I'm gonna drop it for now. But remember, you agreed to spend the day with me." When she opened her mouth to protest, he shoved himself deeper into her, and her gasp took the words out of her mouth. "And you *will* think of me tonight. I can promise it."

Chapter Four

Larissa looked out onto the large green lawn of the museum and took a deep breath. It had been a beautiful day. She'd enjoyed every minute with Jared, liking him more, the more time she spent with him.

He was very intelligent, and his charm seemed authentic. His formality of last night had relaxed, and she felt comfortable around him. And it had little to do with the sex of the night before or that morning.

He was smart, well educated, and had a wonderful sense of humor.

She just felt good with him. She hadn't felt the need to hide away parts of her body, or shy away from mirrors, or only let him see her "good side," whatever that may be. She was relaxed and comfortable with him and could be herself.

It was a rare feeling, and one she enjoyed immensely.

She glanced back at him, smiling. He was more than twenty feet from her, talking to an elderly man who had asked for his assistance. And she could still feel the sexual attraction she'd felt from the instant she'd met him. Her body zinged

with desire whenever he was near.

But it wasn't only desire; there was something else there. The attraction was much more than physical, even if he was sexy as all get-out, a great lover, and a snazzy dresser.

She looked down at her own clothes and sent Susan a silent "thank-you" for insisting they go shopping yesterday afternoon. Not that Larissa wasn't capable of buying her own clothes, but she never seemed to have a sense of what looked good on her. Whether it was expensive designer clothes or cheap discount items, Larissa had never felt like she looked her best. But today was a different story. Her new light-colored pants and striped tunic seemed to complement her figure perfectly, and she felt good wearing them.

Thinking of shopping, her mind drifted to the man from the day before. Devon. He was just as hot and seemed just as charming. And something about him was just as alluring as Jared.

Mix that with Jared's comments this morning about sharing, and her mind and body were in a tizzy.

Larissa didn't consider herself easy. Even if the offers came less often than she would like sometimes, she still

tended to be pickier than a lot of her friends. But that didn't mean she wasn't above having a little bit of fun. Like Jared said, she was young, single, and had no one at home waiting for her. She had the right to have fun.

And there was something about both Jared and Devon that called to her. They woke up a part of her body that had been silent too long. But there was something more there that she couldn't explain. She was almost driven to spend time with them. She couldn't wait to see Devon tonight, yet the last thing she wanted to do was part ways with Jared.

In short, she was screwed, and she didn't know what to do about it.

Jared came up from behind and wrapped his arms around her, pulling her into his warmth. She melted against him and felt like purring, she was so content.

"What are you thinking?" His voice rumbled in his chest against her back, and her body reacted instinctively. She didn't have the heart to admit what she had been thinking. Instead, she admitted to half of it.

"About how good a time I've had today."

"Mmm, me too." He raised a hand and cupped her chin to turn her face toward his, then laid a gentle kiss on her lips. Heat shot through her at the touch, eliciting a totally

inappropriate response to such a sweet kiss. Her body grew weak, and she moaned. He stroked her, and she reluctantly pulled away to admonish him.

“Stop that. If you aren't careful, we'll get out of hand and then spend the night in jail for indecent exposure.”

“We don't want that. You'll miss your date with the mystery man.”

“You're right. We wouldn't want that, would we?” Her words were more snide than she had any right to. Hell, she had no right at all to be snippy with him. He hadn't done anything wrong except unknowingly call her on exactly what she had just been thinking about.

Jared stepped away and released her, only to turn her to face him fully. “Why are you mad at me?”

“I'm not mad.”

“Yes, you are.”

“No. I'm not.”

“You're mad because I brought up your date.”

“That's stupid. Why would that make me mad?”

"I don't know. Why don't you tell me?"

Larissa felt like stomping her foot. "Oh shit. I don't know. Here we are having a good time—"

"And I have to go and ruin it by bringing up another man."

"Yes. And no."

"Explain."

"When you asked me what I had been thinking about, I'd been thinking about today, yes, but also the fact that I was looking forward to tonight."

"Larissa, how many times do I have to tell you that it doesn't bother me?"

"Well, maybe it bothers me."

"Does it?"

"Yes. No. I don't know."

"You say that a lot, you know."

Larissa sighed. "I know. But you get me so confused."

Jared smiled and stroked her arm with his thumb. "Let's go sit down on the grass, so I can tell you something."

"I don't know—"

"Please, Larissa."

The pleading tone in his voice melted her heart. "Okay."

They walked over to the large expanse of grass on the side of the museum. They picked a quiet, shady spot, away from picnickers and others strolling the grounds.

Jared gazed at the woman who he knew to be the one woman in the world for him and wondered how he was going to explain to her who and what he was. He wanted to tell her everything, but he couldn't. Not yet.

She was obviously tense, unsure of what he had to tell her, and he wanted nothing more than to wipe the tension off her face, to kiss her silly and make love to her once again. Instead, he sat down beside her and took her hand in his, stroking the back of it.

Damn the rules that prohibited him from declaring his affection. If there weren't so much at stake, he'd do just that. But he owed too many people to hurt them like that. So instead he had to hurt the woman who already meant more to him than his own life.

Once they were seated, he turned to face her and started his story. "Let me tell you something about myself. I told you I had two sisters and that my parents live outside the city, right?"

"Yeah."

"What I didn't tell you was that I have three parents. One mother and two fathers."

"What? That's impossible." Her face crinkled up in confusion.

"Biologically, yes, it is impossible, but not emotionally."

Larissa shrugged. "So your mother got remarried, and you think of your stepfather as another father. That's not a big deal."

"No, my mother is married to two men. Legally, she's only married to one, but they all three live as husbands and wife."

"Excuse me?"

"It's a life choice. They aren't the only ones who have made that choice."

Jared knew she knew about triads. No fan of Michelle's

could be ignorant of them, as all her stories dealt with the Ozark wolves, and for the most part, they lived in triads. He hoped she didn't know Michelle was also in one, though. Kansas City wasn't a large city, nor was it known as a hotbed of kinky families. The last thing he needed was for her to make the connection. Not yet, at least.

"I know they aren't. It's just not a usual arrangement. Until fairly recently, a part of me really thought they didn't exist except in books." She shook her head. "No, that's not right. I knew they existed, but I didn't know anyone personally in them. And hadn't really heard of any regular, everyday people who had made that choice."

She looked out over the expanse of grass and trees, seemingly lost in thought. "So you wanted me to know this, why? To prove that you are okay with women sleeping around?"

Jared smiled. "Well, I don't know about that. Sleeping around implies a lack of respect both for yourself and the people you are with. And that's not what you'd be doing." He reached out and turned her head to face him once again. "I said it before. You're on vacation. You aren't committed to anyone. You owe it to yourself to experience as much as you can, as much as you want."

He moved his hand and clasped hers between his two. "I

see nothing wrong with a woman who wants two men at the same time. As long as she is respectful to herself and them.”

He waited a moment. “Knowing this, can you understand why I said I don't mind sharing? It's okay with me. But is it okay with you?”

Jared could see her contemplating what he had said. It couldn't be easy for her; his lifestyle was totally contrary to what she was used to. Her normally clear green eyes grew muddled with thoughts. He could tell she had something to tell him, but she was either unsure of how to say it, or unsure of how he would take it. Maybe both.

“I know you probably won't believe this, but I don't normally sleep with men the same day I meet them. And I never contemplate sleeping with two men in the same week, never mind at the same time. This morning we talked about me feeling something more with you. There was an attraction with you I've never felt before. I think I felt the same with Devon.”

“Devon?”

“The man I'm supposed to meet for dinner. This is going to sound wrong, but from the moment I met both of you, I knew there was something else there. Something I had to

explore. I feel as though if I don't see Devon tonight, I'll be cheating myself out of something, even though I don't know what that something is. But I don't want to hurt you either. I also don't want to lose you." A bitter laugh escaped her lips. "Not like I have you anyway, right?"

He felt his heart break at the confusion and uncertainty in her voice. This was so contrary to how she normally lived her life; it had to be killing a part of her. He cursed at himself and his pack once again.

"Larissa, I grew up with people who put great store on instincts. My mother will tell you she knew my fathers were meant to be hers from the moment she met them. One of them grew up with her, the other she didn't meet until she was in college. But she knew right away."

"I don't believe in love at first sight."

"Then maybe lust at first sight? Either way, you already said what you need to do. You owe it to yourself to find out what it is."

Larissa looked at her watch. It wasn't even three; she had plenty of time to get ready for dinner, but Jared was sure she wanted time to digest everything he had told her. It couldn't be easy, feeling like this for two men she didn't really know. He couldn't imagine the swirl of emotions and

thoughts running around in her brain. The best he could do was be as honest as he was allowed and be there for her when she needed him. If she would let him, once she found out the truth.

* * * * *

Devon and Jared stood on the balcony of the owner's office to the hotel and watched the woman both of them were destined to mate with sit at the hotel pool.

"I hate this." Devon started the conversation, taking a drink of the brandy he held in his hand, swirling the liquid in the crystal glass.

"It's tradition. There's nothing we can do about it."

Devon spun around and walked back into the office, Jared following. "To hell with that shit. There damn well is something we can do about it. We can send her home right now. Tell her that plans have changed, that she can have her shopping spree at home, but not here. Hell, we can send her to New York. What woman would turn down a shopping spree there?"

"Can you really send her away now? After knowing she's the one?" And even if Devon could, Jared knew there was no way in hell that he could.

“How do I know that? Just because my fucking hormones are going nuts? For all I know they'd do that with any new woman.”

“You can try to lie to me and the rest of the pack, Devon, but you can't lie to yourself. You knew the instant you saw Larissa that she was meant to be our mate. No other woman will do for us.”

“Are you sure it's not just *your* hormones talking? After all, you spent all night with her.”

Jared leaned back onto his desk and crossed his arms.

“Don't you dare let your jealousy screw this up. You were the one who thought she'd do better if we approached her separately. Don't blame me because you regret it now.”

Devon sighed. “This isn't fair, Jared, and you know it. The woman is going through pointless pain. And we have no way to stop it. I thought she wasn't going to see Philip until tomorrow night, but they lied. I thought we had time to convince her not to see him. The bastard tried to tear her apart downstairs last night.”

“I know. But he didn't succeed, did he? I heard she told him exactly what she thought of him. And I was with her afterward. She's a strong woman; she'll survive this.”

“But will she forgive us? Will she understand what this was

all about?"

"We had no choice. It's not like we were the ones who started this."

"Damn you! That doesn't make it right."

"I agree with you. How hard do you think it was for me not to tell her what was really on my mind? To spend the day knowing that the pack had yet another test planned for her, something I wasn't allowed to help her with? Hell, Mom is gonna kill me because I kept her from the fountains."

"Then when she talked about you, about feeling guilty because she wants both of us, I couldn't tell her that it's completely natural. That it's the way our mates are hardwired. She thinks she's a slut."

"Why would she think that? There's nothing wrong with it."

This time Jared sighed. Heavily. "I know that, and you know that, but we were brought up differently. She's confused, and I think it pains her."

"Did you set her straight?"

"I tried to. I told her a little about my mother and fathers."

Devon glared at Jared. Jared knew it was pointless to get

on to that discussion. They both knew it was Jared's mother who chose Larissa as the winner of the contest. "Don't start on it, Devon."

"She had no right to interfere."

"She had every right, and you know it. Once she and the dads step down and we're asked to lead, the pack won't be complete without an alpha female. She's only doing her job. The job that may become Larissa's if she wants it."

Devon threw the glass into the marble fireplace, the crystal shattering from the impact. "If she wants it. That's the thing, Jar. If she wants it. No one asked her about this. No one asked her if she wanted to be mated to a pair of wolves. She didn't come here to find out her favorite paranormal romance was real. She came here for a week of shopping and sightseeing."

"With a couple dates thrown in." Jared smiled wryly, trying to lighten the too-tense moment. He wasn't any happier about what they were doing to Larissa than Devon was. The only difference was he had spent considerable time with the woman in question and now knew he would do anything in his power to keep her. Once Devon spent some time with her, he would feel the same way.

Even if it wouldn't change how they got her. Maybe

someday she would forgive them.

"Yeah, such great dates. A gay guy, someone who's in a committed relationship, and someone who needs to be committed. Who the hell thought up those?"

"Michelle."

"Michelle? Excuse me? The woman is a damn *New York Times* best seller. Couldn't she come up with something better?"

Jared shook his head. "She was afraid Larissa would be able to see past anything more subtle. After all, she's practically told the world how we find our mates. This was her way of keeping Larissa off balance."

"I still don't think it's a good idea."

"Which? Bringing Larissa here like this? Or the whole writing a best-selling series romance thing?" Jared shook his head. "Either way, it's too late."

"I know. And I can't help but feel that it's all going to blow up in our faces."

Jared sighed and walked back to the balcony. Devon was right. He'd spent the most time with Larissa, and he was an excellent judge of character. If Larissa was half as strong

and determined as everyone thought she was, she wasn't going to take this trial period lightly. She was going to be infuriated.

Rightfully so.

Chapter Five

Once again, Larissa found herself staring in a mirror while wearing a dress she never would have expected herself to wear. Not only was the thing way too expensive, she still felt it revealed way too much of her skin.

Even if it did make her look sexy.

Especially with her hair done up and enough makeup for a night on the town. Even the butterflies fluttering in her stomach were impressed.

What was she doing? Here she was on a dream vacation, having met a dream man, and she was preparing to abandon him for another man.

Well, not abandon him, but she couldn't believe she was going on a date with another man. She still hadn't figured

out exactly why she was doing it.

She hadn't lied to Jared. The “moreness” she had talked about was there with both him and Devon. She felt attracted and pulled to both of them in ways she couldn't describe.

She couldn't have stopped herself last night even if she'd wanted to. And she hadn't wanted to. It had been wonderful, and she didn't regret one bit of it.

Tonight felt much the same way. Last night she'd had the time of her life, but when she thought that Jared was going to ask—or even demand—she cancel her date, she had panicked. She'd felt like her arm was being cut off.

It made no sense at all, but she wasn't going to fight it. She was going to let tonight happen the way it was intended to. And if that meant she went home in a few days heartbroken over two men, then so be it.

One final deep breath and a grab for her wrap, and she was out the door on the way to her date.

“Ms. Myles.” The friendly hostess she had grown to know was on duty again. “Your date is waiting for you.”

Larissa nodded her head and followed the young woman into the restaurant proper, toward the back of the room.

When a waiter grabbed the hostess's attention for a moment, Larissa got the chance to see her dinner date waiting in a secluded corner.

Electricity zinged through her body at the sight. He was sexier than she remembered. Close-cropped brown hair framed a face that looked like a goddess had carved her dream man out of granite. His lightly tanned skin had her drooling and wondering what lottery she had won to be able to look at that face all night.

His well-tailored suit showed off his fit and trim body to perfection. He was absolutely delicious dressed in evening wear.

He looked up at that moment, and her breath stopped at the look in his eyes. Approval, appreciation, and desire all ran across his face, making her heart flutter and her pulse speed. Her pulse sped up at the shine in his eyes and the look on his face.

He stood up with a grace most women would envy and smiled at her in welcome.

She didn't remember taking the last few steps to the table, but suddenly she was by his side. He leaned down and gently placed a kiss on her cheek.

"I'm glad you came."

"I agreed to dinner, didn't I?"

He held out her chair, and she sat down. Gratefully, he didn't try to push it in under her legs. She always hated that and could never sit right when someone did it for her.

"Yes, but I didn't know if anything might have come up. After all, we didn't give each other a way to cancel, now did we?"

"I almost got the impression that was on purpose."

Devon smiled, not saying anything. *Smart man.*

Their waiter brought her a soda, and she raised her eyebrows at Devon.

"I asked Andy what you've been drinking. The staff here are pretty good at learning guests' preferences."

"You've been here before?"

He nodded again, once. "Let's order, and then I have a confession to make."

Larissa sat up straight, suddenly nervous. She ordered without opening the menu, already having decided what she wanted.

When Andy left, Devon reached across the table and placed his hand lightly on hers.

“Yes?” She wasn't sure what she was preparing herself for, but she wasn't sure it was going to be good.

“Yesterday wasn't the first time I saw you. I saw you the other day, here, at the hotel; you were walking across the lobby toward the elevators.”

Larissa thought she should be feeling apprehensive but instead found herself intrigued. “Really? And you just happened to run into me at the boutique?”

“Honestly? Yes.”

“And what made you decide to ask me out?”

He grinned self-deprecatingly. “I've been looking for the chance to ask you to dinner since that day in the lobby. You were beautiful in your jeans and frilly red shirt, striding across the foyer. I couldn't take my eyes off of you.” He shook his head. “I know it sounds like a line of bullshit, but something about you pulled my attention.”

“I'm not sure when you're talking about, but I refuse to believe I was the most striking woman in the lobby.”

Devon shook his head. “I guess that depends on what you

mean by striking. Were there women who were thinner or taller or anything else that society deems necessary to be beautiful? Maybe; I don't know. You were the one who attracted me. All my attention was on you."

Larissa felt herself blush.

"Believe it or not, it's the truth, Larissa. You're the only one I saw."

Larissa wanted to deny his words, to tell him she knew he was full of bull, but she'd felt the same pull when she'd seen him yesterday, as well as when she'd first seen Jared. She'd felt the entire rest of the world fade away to nothing both times. But she prided herself on being a realist and still found it hard to accept.

"What were you doing here?"

"A friend is part owner of the hotel. I was here to see him. I'm not stalking you, I promise."

He brought up a good point. "And the boutique?"

He held up his hands in surrender. "Coincidence. I was there buying something for my sister. It's her birthday in a couple days, and there was a necklace there she mentioned."

“A necklace?”

He shrugged. “We’re a close family. It’s by a designer who sells only in that shop.”

Larissa debated pushing the question further but realized it was pointless. She either believed him or she didn’t. And if she didn’t, then she needed to leave right now. And that was the last thing she wanted to do. Instead, she changed the subject.

“So what do you do for a living?”

He grinned before answering. “I’m a lawyer. But trust me, I’m one of the good guys.”

“Really?” Her own mouth twitched in doubt.

“Yes, really. I even donate time to one of the local women’s shelters.”

“Why?”

“Many of those women leave everything they know to get themselves out of a bad situation. There’s no reason they should have to pay for making the right decision.”

Larissa felt a surge of pride for the man in front of her. She didn’t know why. It wasn’t like he was anything to her, or like

she had any claim on him, but she suddenly was very proud to be with him.

He shook his head. "Enough about me. What do you do when you aren't staying in hotels in the middle of the country?"

"I'm an accountant in Philly."

"And you decided to take the trip this time of year to celebrate the end of tax season?"

"No. I wasn't offered a time other than a couple of weeks to choose from. I won a contest for romance readers."

Devon's smile was crooked, and she could just envision the thoughts running through his head.

"Hey, don't even start." Larissa started to get heated. "Well over forty percent of all fiction sold is romance, and over half the fans of romance are college-educated women. They aren't the same old romances our mothers used to read."

"Okay, I'll bite. What makes these so different?"

This time she was sure she blushed. "The heroines have brains, not just boobs, they aren't all perfect skinny little women, and well, this one has werewolves."

He nodded. "Michelle Harrington has werewolves."

"That's who I'm talking about! How did you know?"

"Kansas City isn't a large city by most standards, Larissa. That would be like saying someone from Boston didn't know Robert Parker or someone from New Orleans had never heard of Anne Rice."

"Well, I won a contest presented by her publisher. I got a week here, all expenses paid, in addition to a shopping spree."

"Are you enjoying your vacation so far?"

"Yes, very much so."

"What have you been doing besides shopping?"

Larissa bit her lip and looked down quickly before meeting his gaze. "My time for confession."

"What could you possibly have to tell me that has you looking so worried?"

"Um. You see. I got here Saturday, and I've had a couple dates."

"Well, obviously none worth anything, or you never would

have come out with me.”

Larissa cringed. She didn't know how to tell him what was going through her mind. Hell, she wasn't sure what was going through her mind. Or why the hell she was telling him this. It wasn't like she owed him an explanation or anything. She hadn't done anything wrong. And as he'd pointed out, she hadn't had any way to cancel the date.

“Well. Yes and no.”

She looked at him. He sat back and seemed to be waiting patiently for her to continue. She swallowed hard.

“When I agreed to go out with you yesterday I hadn't had a good date yet. And last night's planned date was the worst yet. But I did meet someone last night.”

“After your date?”

“Yes. The date was so bad I left him at the table. Jared and I met later.”

“And the two of you hooked up?”

“Yes. And then we spent the day together today.”

“So this is your way of saying thanks, but no thanks?”

Larissa bit her lip again. Then cleared her throat.

He reached for her hand again. He squeezed it tightly, almost as though he was nervous, but his words came out tension free. More full of assurance than anything else. "Larissa, what is it? If you're trying to blow me off nicely, just tell me."

"No. It's not that."

He smiled, and her pulse jumped at the look. He was gorgeous and sexy, but there was more than that. She only wished she could identify why she was drawn to him so strongly.

"Then what is it?"

"I didn't want to cancel the date. I wanted to see you again."
"

"Why?"

"Does it matter?"

"I think it does. You obviously had a good time with Jared last night. So why are you here with me? And don't tell me you decided to just show so I wouldn't be disappointed; if that had been your plan, you wouldn't have made yourself look so beautiful."

“Can't a girl just get dressed up because she wants to?”

“Of course. But I prefer to think you did it for me. It helps boost my fragile ego.”

Larissa couldn't help herself; she had to laugh. “What is it with the men in this state? Ego seems to be the least of your problems.”

He picked her hand up and stared into her eyes as he kissed her palm. “Well, when we get a beautiful woman like you to agree to go out with us, we can't help but be full of ourselves.”

She looked away, tugging at her hand. She was okay with a bit of flirting, but he was going over the top, and she found it difficult to trust his sincerity. “Stop that.” Her words were curt, short.

He refused to let go of her hand. “There you go again, doubting yourself.”

“I don't doubt myself. I'm a realist.”

“How so?”

“Look, Devon, I know I am not the ugliest woman alive, but I also know I'm far from beautiful.”

“Do you like modern art?”

The question threw her for a loop; it seemed totally off topic. “No, not really. What does that have to do with anything?”

“Bear with me. Do you like impressionistic art?”

“Yes, it's one of my favorite styles.”

“Free-form sculpture?”

“Not really.”

“What if I told you that my aunt is one of those artists that puts a Styrofoam cup with a coffee stain onto a pedestal and calls it a masterpiece?”

“Honestly? I'd say she's nuts.”

“I have to agree. But you would agree that she and her fans have a right to believe what they want about art, that even though we may find it ugly as sin, not to mention maybe stupid, they find it creative, exquisite, and beautiful.”

“Of course I'd agree. Everyone has a right to their own opinion about art and beaut—Shit.”

His smile had her ready to crawl under the table. “Exactly.

Just because society says that I am supposed to fall for a tall, thin model with fake boobs doesn't mean I have to listen to it. To me, you are beautiful. I love your face. It's full and expressive. I adore your firm, muscled calves. And your curves turn me on just thinking about them. They prove you are a woman to the core, and I can't wait to get my hands on them. Let the other losers ogle over that modern-art crap. Let me savor my Renaissance beauty."

Tears formed at his words. They should have sounded sappy, stupid, corny even, but they didn't. Instead they rang a chord deep within her, and she felt her heart open a bit, allowing this complete stranger in even further than before.

Speechless, Larissa blinked the tears from her eyes as she looked away. His hand lay on hers gently, as though waiting for her to compose herself. He let her take a deep breath before speaking.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make you cry. I just wanted you to see how I felt."

Larissa turned back to him and smiled. "I don't know what it is about this place, but ever since getting here I have been on an emotional roller coaster. Are all the men from here like this?"

Devon shook his head. "Nope. I'd have to say you won—or maybe, lost—the lottery."

She shook her head but was saved the need to respond by the arrival of dinner. By the time the plates had been set and the waiter had made sure they had everything they needed, thankfully, the mood was broken. Instead, they concentrated on their meals. Conversation was light as they ate, talking about sights to see and things to do while she was in Kansas City. It was another very enjoyable evening.

Part of her had hoped that Devon would prove to be less than she'd thought at first. That maybe he wouldn't be amusing or entertaining. That the rush of desire that had overcome her when she'd first seen him would have been misleading, and maybe disappear.

But it hadn't. She was forced to accept the fact that her attraction to him hadn't diminished at all. In fact, it only proved to grow as the night went on. She was just as attracted to him as she'd been yesterday. Only now she had real concrete reasons to like him, not just lust after his body.

"So when do you leave?"

"Sunday."

“Anyone waiting for you at home?”

Larissa scowled, mostly at herself. She couldn't blame him for asking the questions; after all, she was here after having admitted she'd spent the night with another complete stranger.

“I meant family. Not a boyfriend. I know you wouldn't do that.”

He couldn't possibly have known what she was thinking. She narrowed her eyes. “Why not? Not thirty minutes ago I admitted to sleeping with a stranger, and here I am having dinner with you, another complete stranger. What would stop me from having someone at home waiting for me?”

“Because I don't think it's in your character to cheat. If it had been, you never would have told me about Jared. You're very honest and up-front. Not the characteristics of a cheater.”

Larissa ducked her head, embarrassed and complimented. “Thank you.”

“How about a walk?”

“Excuse me?” Larissa was thrown by the sudden change in subjects once again.

“Well, we're done with dinner, and to be honest, I'm not ready for dessert, so I thought maybe a walk around the grounds and then we could come back for dessert if we wanted one.”

“Sure. Why not?”

Devon caught Andy's gaze and gestured for the check before Larissa could tell him it would just go on her tab. When Andy brought it, she tried to sign for it, but Devon refused.

“I don't care if all your expenses are paid; I invited you to dinner, I am paying.” After he signed for the bill, he stood up to hold a hand out for her as she, too, stood up before turning them to the exterior door.

The grounds of the hotel stretched for over thirty acres of woods and gardens with paths running through most of the land. From a traditional English garden with a hedge maze to a more natural stone and wildflower garden, it was all surrounded by trees, allowing one to forget they were minutes from a major midwestern metropolis.

Devon guided her down the flagstone paths, ever conscious of her footing, despite the fact the way seemed to be kept clear of debris.

He led her to the center of the maze, where the requisite

gazebo awaited. It was maybe twelve feet across, with benches lining the interior sides and a smattering of chairs throughout the middle. They climbed the stairs, and Larissa's attention was pulled by the tiny fairy lights that lit the ceiling of the structure. Not bright enough to attract any bugs, the lights were just enough to enable them to see each other and where they were going.

Despite the fact the area seemed built for romance, they had the space to themselves. Larissa wasn't surprised, though, as it was the middle of the week. She was sure most of the guests at the hotel were there for business, not romance.

They sat down, and Devon put his arm around her while they listened to the night sounds.

"You never answered my question." His reminder was soft, gentle almost.

"Which question was that?"

"Why did you come out with me tonight? If you had as good a time with Jared as you said you did, I'm surprised you didn't either leave me a note at the hostess station or show up and cancel in person."

Larissa thought for a few moments how to answer. Should she be as truthful with him as she had been with Jared?

Didn't she owe him the same level of honesty? He'd commented on it earlier; there was no way she couldn't be.

Instead of answering, she stood up and walked to the other end of the gazebo. Still close enough that he could hear her, but so he wasn't touching her. She started talking with her back to him, still looking out to the night sky.

"Honestly, I don't know why I'm here tonight. I don't know why I spent the night with Jared last night. Both are very atypical of me. I told Jared earlier that I felt something more with him. I had no other explanation for it, and still don't. There was something there with him that made me want to spend more time with him, made me want to *be* with him."

She turned around to face him, still leaning against the railing, feet away. "But I have that same feeling with you. Just after spending those few seconds with you yesterday at the store, I knew I needed to spend more time with you. I knew that if I didn't, I'd regret it and always wonder what might have been.

"I couldn't not meet you tonight. And I couldn't not spend last night with Jared. I can't explain it. It's never happened to me before. I'm not psychic; I don't get hunches. I'm a damn accountant. I deal with facts and numbers. Not this." Her hand waved at thin air in frustration.

Devon finally understood what Jared had been trying to tell him earlier. This was tearing her apart, and because of that, it tore him apart. He'd thought hearing what Philip had said to her was bad, but seeing her like this, her wondering if she was going crazy, hurt him like nothing else could.

And he also understood Jared's determination to see this through to the end. After just spending the last couple of hours with Larissa, there was nothing he wouldn't do to keep her. Whether it was his werewolf DNA rearing its ugly head, or just her, he knew she was the one for them. And he'd never let her go.

He struggled to stay seated, to keep himself from wrapping her in his arms. "Is this a bad thing, Larissa? Is there something wrong with being attracted so strongly to someone else? Even if it is two someone elses?"

"Jared asked me the same thing. He tried to assure me that I wasn't insane." She smiled wryly. "Or a slut."

Devon jumped up from his seat and went to her. He grabbed her by the shoulders. "Don't use that word. Stop it."

"Okay, already. I know it doesn't make me a slut. But it's different from anything I'm used to. Hell, the fact I'm

thinking of being with both of you bothers me less than this damn compulsion does. Although I'm not sure if that makes any sense."

"How do you feel when you are with me or Jared, Larissa? Besides wanting to be with us."

She took a few moments before answering. Her face was very expressive, and he could see all kinds of emotions and thoughts run across it.

"Desired, wanted, protected. But more than that." She turned away from him again, as though unable to face him. "I feel honored and respected, revered almost. Like I belong. Like I've come home. And none of this makes any sense at all, does it? I'm freaking insane, aren't I?" She laughed. "Oh God, Toto, we *are* in Kansas, and this is what happens to you."

Devon smiled at her back and pulled her into his arms. "Well, you know, Dorothy really wanted to get back to Kansas. Maybe it wasn't just Auntie Em and the farm."

"You idiot."

Devon buried his nose in her hair, smiling at the sound of laughter in her voice. It was good to hear her happy; it made him happy as well.

He turned her around and lifted her head. It was mere milliseconds that he stared into her eyes before he lowered his head and took her lips with his.

Smell, taste, sensations enveloped him as he lost himself in her and all she was. Devon felt a shock run through his system at the touch of their lips, and he knew what Jared knew, at a level he hadn't experienced previously. This woman was meant to be theirs, no matter what.

Her sigh as she pressed against him sent his body on fire, and he wrapped his arms around her tightly, pulling her in closer. She parted her lips, and he slid his tongue between them to taste her essence. He moaned, his hormones begging him to move faster.

Knowing he had no choice, he pulled back and leaned his forehead against hers.

"Wow." Her whisper sent shivers down his body as he tried to calm himself down.

If he didn't, he'd take her now and to hell with the consequences.

"You can say that again," he said. She opened her mouth, and he quickly placed his finger across it. "Don't you dare," he whispered, glaring at her.

In case she was still planning on it, he lowered his head to hers once again. Her lips were smooth and plump, giving and responsive. This time when she parted them, he waited a moment, savoring the feel of her, enjoying the stroke of skin to skin. His hand moved to cup her cheek, his thumb stroking her cheekbone, feeling the softness that was her.

When his tongue penetrated between her lips, he took his time appreciating all she was. He still got the essence of what she'd had for dinner, but he also tasted her. Sweet, sensual, erotic all came to mind as his tongue gently stroked hers.

He inhaled deeply, tasting and sensing a wildness in her he'd been unaware of before. His inner beast woke up when it sensed the matching animal within her. It was eager to mate, wanting to claim her as its own.

Devon tamped his beast down, reminding it it wasn't the time. Or the place. They'd claim her as their alpha female, but they'd claim her together, and only when she knew what she was agreeing to.

Her moan of pleasure encouraged him to hold her snugly. Her body molded against him, fitting just right despite their height difference.

Slowly he pulled away again and gazed into her eyes. They were clouded with desire, her inner flame flickering. Her face was flushed and her breathing fast. Pleasure zinged through him at the signs of the effect he had on her.

“Damn.”

His heart felt a mixture of pleasure at her amazement and pain at the half-truths they had told her up to this point.

“We need to talk.” He hated saying it, but he knew they couldn't go any further until he'd come clean. Until *they'd* come clean.

He led her back to the seat at the other side of the gazebo. Once seated, he held her hand in both of his and took a deep breath.

“I have something to tell you. Another confession. It's about the friend I mentioned earlier.”

Larissa looked at him for a moment before saying, “It must be difficult, trying to figure a way to tell me that you and Jared know each other.”

Devon blinked. “What?”

“You're about to tell me that you and Jared know each other and you guys hoped to get me into bed together. Not

that I particularly object, mind you, but I think you might have managed to do a slightly smoother job of it.”

Devon said nothing. He realized for the first time in his life he was totally at a loss for words. He didn't know why he was so surprised she'd figured it out. Her intelligence was one of the things that attracted both him and Jared.

He opened his mouth to say something, but whatever it was, he was forestalled by her.

“So, is he gonna be here? Or do you take me back to the hotel and we meet up there?”

Jared's chuckle came from the shadows outside the gazebo. “That depends; what would make you feel more comfortable?”

Devon barely registered Jared walking up the steps. Instead, he turned to Larissa. “How did you know?”

“I could say that it's rare enough for me to find one man interested in me, never mind two at the same time, but that will just piss you off.” She smiled at Devon. “I could say it was the fact you were both interested in sharing me. But honestly, I can't pinpoint one thing in particular. Part of it was your whole attitude and what you said earlier, Devon, the comment about your friend owning the hotel.”

"I never told you I owned the Betran." Jared grabbed a loose chair and pulled it over to the bench Larissa and Devon were seated on.

"You didn't have to. Last night at dinner you talked about tourism being down, and how it was affecting all the local places of business, including your own. Paired with your similar attitudes toward a ménage à trois, and the way Devon referred to you so easily all night, not to mention at first I thought you both worked for Canid, well, I put two and two together. It was a huge assumption, I know, but it just seemed right."

"I told you she was smart." Jared looked to Devon.

"Are you upset?" Devon squeezed her hand. It had been his idea to seduce her separately, but maybe it really hadn't been well thought-out.

"I should be."

"Would it make any difference to know that it wasn't really our intention to do it quite like this? That we really did see you independent of each other? That I didn't even know who you were the first time I saw you in the hotel?"

Larissa sighed. "I don't know why, but I'm really not pissed about it. Part of me is screaming that I was set up, that the two of you manipulated me. But a bigger part of me is

turned on, excited. Honored, almost.”

Jared took her other hand in his. “I won’t tell you that we’ve never shared a woman before, but I can tell you that we want this more than anything either of us has ever wanted before. But if it isn’t what you want, then we will walk away.”

“Both of you?”

“If that’s what you want.”

“What if I choose to be with only one of you?”

Devon answered this time, his eyes on Jared as he spoke, knowing his best friend would know what he meant without saying the exact words. “Then the other will walk away. Regretting what he didn’t have, but knowing it’s for the best for everyone.”

If Larissa chose him, he would walk away from the pack and allow Jared to find a new coleader, a new mate. If Larissa chose Jared, and the pack, then Devon would back down and allow Larissa to choose from the others in the pack if she wanted a third.

“I need to know a couple of things first.”

“Understandable.” Jared nodded.

“Have you ever done this before?”

“Split up to seduce a woman?” Trust Jared to be blunt about it.

“Yes.”

“No. Never. Like I said, we've shared women before, but we've never met her independently of each other and decided we wanted her. I also hadn't realized that Devon had already approached you yesterday afternoon when I joined you for dinner. Remember, you didn't tell me about it until the next day.”

Devon had never let go of her other hand, and he stroked the back of it with his thumb. “After I told Jared about having seen you in the lobby, we realized you were the same woman. You seemed jittery to him, so I suggested we meet you independently. Give you a chance to get to know both of us, and then approach you together.”

Jared spoke up. “To be honest, I didn't expect to go to bed with you last night.”

Larissa blushed, and Jared continued quickly. “But that doesn't mean I didn't want to. We had planned to take it slow, each of us wooing you in our own way. But after spending even just the short time dinner took with you, it just seemed natural, the right thing to do. And to be

honest, I don't think anything could have stopped me from taking you from the moment I first kissed you. Not even the knowledge my best friend might never forgive me.

“Earlier today you talked about feeling this 'moreness' with both of us. Believe me when I say that I, too, have experienced it. That I know this is more right than anything I have ever done.”

Devon watched Larissa as she digested Jared's words. He couldn't even begin to fathom what was going on in her head. Just the fact that she was sitting here, talking to them, spoke wonders to his mind.

Even given the attraction she felt for them as her mates, she still had the power, the ability to walk away.

“And you, Devon? Did you really run into me accidentally at the boutique?”

“Yes. I told you the truth, I was there buying my sister a necklace. I saw you walk into the dressing room as I was paying for it.” He shrugged. “I will admit to walking back there to see you again after spotting you. I wasn't going to let you go without saying something again. Jared's right, Larissa. There is some attraction that we can't explain. When I look at you, I ache to be closer to you, to be with you.”

Even as a werewolf, being prepared for the attraction they'd have for their mate, he found himself hard-pressed to truly explain the attraction. He just accepted it and was glad for it.

Larissa nodded, listening to the two men. She knew she should be shocked by everything they were admitting, but she wasn't. She really did feel honored that they would go to so much trouble to be with her. And she couldn't force herself to disbelieve their claims of feeling more for her. If she felt it, there was always the chance they were being truthful and felt it as well. She actually found it hard to believe that they didn't feel anything more.

But what she still couldn't understand was: why her? Even with Devon's explanation earlier, she found it hard to accept that they both wanted her. Oh, she could accept it on an intellectual level, but deep down it was hard to accept. Why would two men this hot want *her*?

And why did she want *them* so badly? The desire was practically eating away at her, it was so strong. She'd wanted men before, but never to this extent.

She'd thought it was bad being with just one of them, but now with both of them near her, both of them touching her,

her body was on fire with need. All hopes that her overly horny body had convinced her brain that the desire was so strong went out the window. There was no more kidding herself. She wanted these two men, and she'd do anything it took to get them.

“Okay. Let's go.” She stood up and took a couple of steps before she realized they hadn't moved an inch. Turning around, she looked at them. “Well?”

“Where are we going?” Jared asked carefully, one eyebrow raised.

“To my suite. Unless you have somewhere else you'd prefer to do this. I'd rather not do it out here where anyone can find us.”

Devon stood up and walked to her, then cupped her face in his hands. “Darling, although the thought of spending the night with you fills me with joy, I need to make sure you really want this.”

“I said okay, what more do you want?” Please don't let them ask for an explanation, a reason why she was doing this. She didn't have one. At least not one that didn't sound crazy. It was bad enough she'd told them both she felt something with them; did they really need to make her spell it out again?

"Rissa." Jared's softly spoken nickname for her made her turn to look at him. "Let's take this slow. Come dancing with us."

Slow? Dancing? She was burning up here. After all this setup, they were going to leave her cold?

"Larissa. Please," Devon said. "We screwed this up. Neither of us wants this to be clinical. Let us at least start over tonight."

"But you—" Larissa nodded. They were right. She'd already told them she wanted to be with them; they knew that. But if they wanted to make the night more than just a roll in the hay, who was she to deny them? "Okay, where to?"

Jared smiled. "There's a small jazz club down the street. Very private and discreet. Unless that would bother you?"

Leave it to one of them to think of her sensibilities while they were plotting to get her into bed.

"Not at all. In fact, I'd love to go dancing with the two of you."
"

Devon's kiss was quick and gentle, but the feel of his lips lingered on hers, his taste mingling with Jared's when he kissed her as well. Mmm, if that was a precursor to what

she had to look forward to tonight, bring it on.

"Wait. I just thought of something." Larissa wasn't sure which answer she wanted them to give, but realized she'd be remiss if she didn't at least ask the question. "You two, you're best friends. Um, is there anything else there?"

Jared answered her. "No. Devon and I are as close as brothers, and that's where it ends."

A thrill of pure sexual excitement ran through her at his words. It would be as he said this morning. Two men there for her satisfaction. There to please her and do whatever she wanted. She almost regretted agreeing to go dancing. The only thing she wanted to do now was be alone with them, letting them fulfill their promises to her.

Jared hopped down the three steps and then reached up to grab her waist and swing her down to the ground. Once her feet touched, he let go of her waist and turned her to face Devon, who was now also on the ground. "Your date, milady. Just consider me an extra treat."

Devon put his arm out, and Larissa linked hers to it. The pathways in the maze were only wide enough for two, so Jared followed behind, a close, warm presence at her back.

Chapter Six

Larissa sat back and watched Devon at the bar. He was joined by Jared, who had been talking to an employee for a moment. She sat there and stared at them.

For the last hour they'd been perfect gentlemen. But fun, flirtatious gentlemen. Dancing, flirting, and making her feel the sexiest she'd ever felt in her life. She was so turned on, she was ready to explode. The light touches and soft glances they sent her way made her squirm with desire. But she was afraid to ask them to take her back to the hotel. She didn't know if they were ready.

The bar had started to fill up and there was a pretty good crowd, even for a weeknight. The small dance floor was fairly full, and watching some of the dancers gave her an idea. If she was too chicken to ask them to her room, then she'd be damned if she couldn't make at least one of them want to go.

They turned and walked toward her side by side, and she couldn't help but rub her legs together at the sight. Jared, well over six feet tall with black hair and dark, chestnut-toned skin, had the body of someone used to hard physical

labor. His suit was tailored to his body and fit him perfectly. Charcoal gray with small pinstripes, it framed his black shirt perfectly. He looked so good, she couldn't wait to eat him up.

Devon was equally sexy. His brown wavy hair was the perfect complement to his chiseled face and green eyes. There was something dangerous and wild about him, much less refined than Jared, and it turned her on more than it should, she was sure.

They both moved with an animal-like grace, as though stalking their prey to arouse the minimal amount of suspicion. The thought of her being their prey had her squirming in her seat.

It wasn't until they were nearly at the table that she realized they didn't have anything in their hands. She swallowed in nervous anticipation. Maybe she wouldn't have to put her hastily made plan into action.

Jared reached for her hand and pulled her to a standing position. "I have a car waiting for us outside. I know we walked here, but I don't want to wait any longer. The car will get us back to the hotel much faster. That is, if you care to continue our evening together."

Larissa bit her lip. Hell, yeah, she cared to continue their

evening together. She'd wanted to continue it since she'd met him. Them. But instead of jumping on him and wrapping her legs around his waist and riding him like she wanted to, she just nodded.

This time Jared took her hand and put it in the crook of his elbow, and Devon followed behind. She stopped short and turned around to look at him. She waited until he got closer and looped her other arm through his. She had made her decision, and she wasn't embarrassed about who knew. If the guys had a problem with that, too bad.

Devon's face lit up as he looked down at her and smiled. Nope, they didn't seem to have a problem. They climbed into the car and were back at the hotel in a matter of seconds. Other than the valet they were able to make it upstairs without running into any staff.

The men stood back to allow her to open the door to her suite and then followed her through. Jared had been busy. The large coffee table in the living room had been set with a white tablecloth. Assorted finger foods and desserts in silver and crystal lay atop the silk awaiting their attention. Enough candles lit the suite that concern for the smoke alarm crossed Larissa's mind. When she turned to look at him, he shrugged.

"I wanted a romantic setting. I left it up to the waitstaff to

decide what that was. Apparently they like you.”

She gradually became aware of the soft music playing through the speakers in the walls. Someone really had gone all out. Now she was embarrassed.

Devon tugged her toward the middle of the room, where the small feast was spread. He knelt and pulled her with him. She kicked off her shoes before joining him on the floor, wanting to be as comfortable as possible.

Once she was tucked under his arm, he reached for something on the table.

“Close your eyes.”

“Devon, you guys don't have to do this. I'm a sure thing.”

“Hush. You may not want it, but what if we do?”

Larissa smiled. “You want to seduce me with strawberries and music?”

A hand lay on the back of her neck and stroked across to her jawline. Lips gently lay against her ear, sending shivers down her spine. “Please, Rissa, allow us to take pleasure in pleasuring you. I promise it will be worth it.”

Larissa melted back against Jared. He was sitting on the

couch behind her, cradling her body between his knees. Her eyes closed on a sigh, and she allowed herself to get lost in their ministrations.

“Open up.” Devon's softly spoken order had her opening her mouth for his first treat. “Stick out your tongue.”

Larissa once again did as ordered, and immediately was rewarded with a drip of warm chocolate followed by the scent of strawberries.

“Bite down, sweetheart.” The strawberry was perfectly sweet and juicy, spurting liquid down her throat as the fruit mixed with the melted chocolate and coated her mouth.

“Mmm.” She couldn't help but moan at the decadence of what the two of them were doing. She'd never been treated to something like this and had always considered it kind of silly, but now that she was the recipient, she was in heaven.

Jared trailed his lips down her neck, across her nape, and up to the other ear. His tongue flicked out to lick at her lobe, and she jumped in reaction at the touch.

Her eyes still closed, she felt Devon move closer, and when his tongue licked at the strawberry juice that was dripping down her chin, she moaned again.

Her body was soaring in ecstasy, and they hadn't done

more than touch her with their mouths.

When a hand stroked down her arm and then back up again, sparks shot through her body wherever he touched her.

Devon seemed to forget the strawberries, which was perfectly fine by her, as he continued nibbling his way down her chin, the front of her neck, to her chest, where he laid soft, gentle kisses on her bare skin.

Larissa's body was alive with the sensations the men were creating in her. Every touch, lick, nip sent fire through her veins, making her blood boil. She arched against Devon, urging him further as she stretched her neck, allowing Jared better access. Her hands were grasped by someone and held against the front of the couch as she writhed under their touch.

Jared found the sensitive nerve that ran down the side of her neck and bit it, ripping a gasp from her throat that was followed by a moan.

"Like that, do you?" His voice was full of laughter. He'd found out how sensitive that nerve was last night and had made good use of it.

She growled, eager for him to continue. When the breath from his chuckle raced down her neck, it sent her shivering

in response all over again.

Meanwhile, Devon had kissed his way down her arm and now nibbled on her wrist. Good Lord, who knew wrists were erogenous zones? Larissa's eyes popped open, and she looked down at him. She turned her hand and brought his head up for a proper kiss.

Fireworks. Fireworks went off in her brain, sending heat to every portion of her body.

He tasted good. So good. Similar to Jared, but different in ways she couldn't define. His wildness came through in his taste, and it inflamed her desire further. When he pulled away, she was breathing hard, her pulse out of control.

With one swift movement, he scooped her up and stood.

"Stop! Put me down!" What was it with these men and carrying her to bed?

Devon ignored her and just kept walking to the bedroom, where he sat her at the foot of the bed, which had already been turned down.

"I want to make love to you, Larissa. I want to bring you pleasure beyond your wildest dreams. I want to share you with my best friend and watch him bring you to the peak of excitement. Will you let me do this?"

Larissa nodded, at a loss for words. She watched as Devon slowly removed his suit coat and tie and then reached for his buttons.

“No!” She hadn't intended to yell it, so she climbed up on her knees and smiled. “Let me do it, please.”

Devon nodded, and she started to remove his clothing, eager to see his naked form.

Both men were hot, there was no doubt about it, but Devon had the body of a runner: sleek, smooth, and svelte, where Jared was much more built-up.

She was vaguely aware of Jared behind her on the bed. He ran his hands up and down her arms. She turned to look at him, and he was smiling at her.

“Go ahead, explore. I don't mind.” He gave her a quick peck on the lips and urged her to turn back to Devon.

The first button opened easily, revealing the hollow of his throat. She leaned forward and kissed it gently, her tongue darting out to taste him. The saltiness of his sweat told her he was probably as excited about this as she was. The second and third popped open almost without her help, and she spread the shirt out to gaze at his chest.

Eager to see more, she quickly pulled at the rest of the buttons until she could spread his shirt wide open. He helped her along by tugging it out of his pants.

His white shirt framed his beautiful, tanned chest, and she felt herself almost drool in appreciation.

A light spattering of hair covered him. Just enough for her to run her fingers through, but not enough to be a carpet. And run her fingers through it she did. He closed his eyes and leaned his head back, groaning as she caressed his chest.

"I think Devon likes you playing with him, Rissa."

Larissa smiled and felt the smooth skin under the rough texture of Devon's chest hair. She could do it for hours, just rubbing him like that. When her hands went lower, toward his waist, he sucked in his breath and brought up his head to meet her gaze.

She grinned and then worked her way back up to his chest. His nipples were buried in the hair, and she flicked at one with a long nail. The obvious shiver that ran through his body gave her a sense of power. To be able to control his reactions like that with such a little touch filled her with pleasure.

Jared, meanwhile, hadn't been idle. He'd found the side

zipper to her dress and started pulling it down slowly. When it released her breasts, he caught them in his hands and held them tenderly. She gasped in pleasure at his touch. Devon's gaze turned to Jared behind her. The predatory smile that ran across Devon's face gave Larissa an instant of fear, followed by another groan as he reached out to her.

He tugged slightly at her dress, helping Jared disrobe her. Between the two of them, they managed to free her of the restricting clothing. They did it a hell of a lot faster than she'd been able to get it on too.

Once her outer clothing was taken care of, he turned his attention back to her and reached out to touch her breasts. Jared still cupped them in his hands, as though holding them out to Devon, who flicked at her nipples with his thumb before brushing them softly.

She dug her nails into his chest as he stroked and caressed her breasts. He squeezed her nipples between his thumbs and forefingers and pulled. Slivers of pleasure sliced through her body, and she tugged at his hair in response, arching her body toward him. Oxygen was ripped from her lungs, leaving her breathless and panting.

"That's it, Larissa. Enjoy it. Feel it. Both of us making love to you at once." Jared's whispered words made her quiver

in anticipation.

Devon stepped back and bent down to take a nipple in his mouth. She wrapped her hands in his hair and held him against her as he suckled her. Shafts of pain/pleasure shot from the nipple to her core as he bit and sucked forcefully. She thrust her chest against him, urging him harder.

His hand pinched her other nipple, and she arched again.

She realized that Jared had moved his hands and now had her pulled against his naked chest with one arm. When had he gotten naked—

Her thought stopped short when he slipped his other hand under her panties and slid a finger into her.

Slowly and smoothly he pumped in and out, making it difficult for her to concentrate on both him and Devon at the same time. She slid one arm back to wrap around his neck while the other hand dug into Devon's biceps on a sharp intake of breath.

Devon pulled back from her and smiled while he continued to caress her breasts. He watched his best friend and their soon-to-be lover wrapped together, and his cock hardened even more.

He and Jared had shared women before. Women from the pack, and women they'd met in the outside world, but the thought of watching Jared pleasure a woman had never really turned him on before. Tonight it did.

A large part of him wanted to just sit back and watch Jared make love to Larissa while he stroked himself. The thought of the two of them getting it on made him so hard he was already about to burst.

But then he looked into Larissa's eyes, glazed over with desire, and he realized that there was no way in hell that he would give tonight up. He wanted—he needed—tonight like he needed to breathe.

“Larissa, tell me what you want.” He watched as she struggled to concentrate on his words, to understand what he had asked. “What do you want, sweetheart, what do you like?”

Jared bit at the side of her neck, and she arched back with a gasp and visible shiver.

When no answer was forthcoming, he decided to try another tactic. He tugged at her panties, sliding them slowly down her legs, dropping to his knees in front of her to follow them down.

"Well, if you can't tell me, then I guess I'll just have to do what I want." He lifted first one foot and then the other, removing both panties and dress from her feet before sitting himself between her knees and looking up at her.

Jared was still playing with her, and her breathing was quick and hard. Devon could tell she was close to coming. Selfishly he wanted to rip Jared's hand away and plant his face in her pussy to taste her essence as it leaked out of her body, but he couldn't bring himself to do that. Instead, he stroked her legs and watched her face closely as she got closer to her orgasm.

The muscles of her thighs bunched and released under his hand and then began to tremble as the start of her climax began to roll over her. Visible shivers moved through her body rapidly, seeming to be headed for some secret inner place in time to meet her orgasm.

When it came, her face tightened slightly and then relaxed as a glow of pleasure spread across her features. Her skin flushed, and her lips parted as breath was forced into her lungs with her heavy breathing.

He realized he had never seen anything more beautiful than she looked right now, her orgasm rolling through her, her skin shining with an inner radiance that made her normally beautiful countenance something more like a work

of art.

Her tongue darted out as she breathed into the orgasm, her body shivering as Jared continued to play with her. Devon's hands tightened against her thighs, and his gaze flew to meet Jared's.

Jared smiled and nodded, and when he quickly removed his hand from Larissa's core, Devon's mouth was there to replace it.

Perfection. She tasted absolutely wonderful, and he lapped up her juices as her body continued the orgasm Jared had started in her. He pulled back slightly and slid his mouth to cover her clit. He flicked at it with his tongue before sucking on it and nipping at it with his teeth.

Larissa's yell of pleasure as she thrust against his face and wrapped her hand into his hair encouraged him to continue. He pulled back only long enough to order harshly, "Lie down," before going at her again.

When Larissa was lying down on the bed, he hung her legs over his shoulders and pulled her ass closer to the edge, eager to get as much of her as he could. Eating pussy had always been a favorite of Devon's, and tonight he wanted nothing more than to eat at Larissa until he took her over the edge again and again.

He licked and lapped at her, drinking in her juices as she writhed and moaned on the bed. He had no idea what Jared was doing to her, but a sharp, "Jared!" and a moan of delight assured him that his friend was doing his best to pleasure their mate.

Devon slid two fingers into Larissa's pussy and pressed against her walls. Her moan and thrust of her hips urged him to continue, and he scissored his fingers against her. She was tight and wet, and tasted so good.

He thrust his fingers hard into her, adding a third and a fourth as he turned and twisted his hand, wringing cries of pleasure out of her. She yelled at him to stop, that she was coming, but he ignored her, instead increasing his pressure, sucking on her clit harder, urging her to come harder than she had before.

"Devon!" She screamed his name and thrust at him again and again, writhing like a wildcat on the bed. When she sat up and grabbed at his hair, tugging him off her, he gave one final lick and let her pull him away.

"Goddammit, Devon, enough! What the hell are you trying to do to me?" Her skin was rosy colored, and he saw goose bumps all over her body as shivers ran through her. She pulled at his hair with one hand and squeezed Jared's hand with her other.

The smile Devon gave her melted her heart even as more aftershocks overtook her, forcing her to flop back down onto the bed and pull her legs up tight to her chest. She didn't know what the two of them had done to her, but she'd never had an orgasm last this long before, nor be this strong.

"Larissa, honey, are you okay?" Jared's voice penetrated her orgasm-fogged brain, and she nodded and laughed.

"Oh yeah. Definitely. Just give me a minute."

When he reached out and stroked her back, she jerked away from him, her nerve endings too sensitive for even the brush of his hand. "No! Don't touch me. Let me come down."

After what seemed like hours, but she was sure was only seconds, she relaxed her body and turned to look into the eyes of two very worried men.

She smiled crookedly. "Sorry. I don't know what happened. That was, um, freaking incredible." She turned and looked at Jared. "When you touched me, my body started going into overload." She shook her head and laughed. "My God! What the hell did you two do to me? And please God, do it

again." She put up her hand. "But not tonight."

"It was good?" Devon asked, grinning.

"More than good."

The two of them crawled up on either side of her and sat cross-legged, facing each other over her. They reached out for her to stroke her.

Jared spoke first. "I'm glad we pleased you, Larissa."

"Are you okay to continue?"

Larissa bit her lip to keep from laughing. She'd just had the most intense orgasm in her life, the aftershocks more than most of her full-blown orgasms, and here they were concerned that she wouldn't continue. And she knew that if she told them she wasn't up to any more, they'd accept it easily. Maybe not happily, looking at the sizes of their erections, but they wouldn't fight her on the issue.

Warmth flooded her body as she thought of the two wonderful men sitting beside her. All her life she'd looked for a man who would be as understanding, attentive, and caring as these two were. Why couldn't she have found this at home, where there was a chance for a future?

Well, there was no use regretting what was. She either put

a stop to it or kept going and enjoyed it for what it was. Calling an end to it would be just plain foolish. And many things she might be, a fool wasn't one of them.

Instead of answering Devon, she reached for each of their legs, and stroked them up and down. She sat up, keeping her hands on their legs, needing the touch of their skin. For some reason it calmed her at the same time as it excited her. She bit her lip again, this time because she was nervous. "I don't know what to do, to be honest. I've never been with two men before."

"We'll take it slow, babe. Do only what you want to do," Jared assured her.

"What do you normally do? How do you do it?" She felt the heat rush to her face at the naïveté of the question, but she didn't know how else to ask. "Do you take turns? Do you, um...?"

Devon cupped her chin and pulled her gaze to meet his. "What do you want? Is there something you've dreamed of?"

Oh, God, there were tons of things she'd dreamed of, but she knew damn well she wasn't truly prepared for most of them. Best to go the easy route first. And the most truthful one.

She glanced at Jared quickly before returning her gaze back to Devon. "I want to taste Jared. Really taste him. He wouldn't let me last night. And I want you inside me. I ache to feel you making love to me like that."

Devon's eyes shone with pleasure at her words, and she knew she'd made the right decision. She'd had Jared last night. Numerous times. As well as this morning. Now she wanted Devon.

Despite all her reading, she still was unsure of how to proceed. There were all kinds of positions they could take to do what she wanted, but she didn't know which one to suggest.

Jared scooted toward the head of the bed. "Turn toward me, babe. On your knees." She did as directed and found herself facing Jared's cock with Devon at her backside. "This will actually be the most comfortable way for you. Unless it will bother you in this position?"

Her stomach did flip-flops as she imagined Devon fucking her with all his strength from behind. Ramming into her and pushing her mouth onto Jared's cock with each stroke. She swallowed hard at the mental picture. Hell no, it wouldn't bother her, not in the least.

Incapable of speaking over the lump of excitement in her

throat, she shook her head no and immediately moved into position.

Jared was in front of her, legs spread open, her kneeling between them. She reached for his cock and stroked it slowly. She'd wanted to explore it last night, but he'd refused, and she'd be damned if she let him refuse tonight. He kept saying tonight was for her, so dammit, she was going to take what she wanted.

She ran her fingers along the sides of his cock, feeling the extra skin, enjoying the sensation of it under her fingertips. She played with it for a moment and watched his eyes flutter as she explored.

She kept one hand on his cock and let the other drift to his balls to cup and caress them gently. Her previous partners hadn't been much for this kind of stimulation, but by the expression on Jared's face, he enjoyed it immensely.

She moved them between her fingers, careful not to squeeze, but eager to explore as long as he would let her. Her thumb flicked at the liquid on the tip of his cock, spreading it around the wide head.

"Rissa, babe." His eyes were closed, and he moaned her name, slowly pushing his cock into her hands. The sight of it sliding between her thumb and forefinger suddenly made

her even more eager to have him in her mouth.

She licked her lips in preparation and opened them to take his head into her mouth. Slowly she slipped her lips over him, holding on to him tightly with mouth and hand, making it last as long as possible.

Once the head was past her lips, she stopped and explored further. She found herself fascinated with the extra skin, and lost a few moments as her tongue teased against it, moving it slowly around. It felt so different to what she was used to that she couldn't help herself.

She was dimly aware of hands on her hips, lifting them and moving her into position. When Devon's fingers probed her pussy, she moaned around the cock in her mouth.

Jared shivered, and she moaned again.

"You ready for me, sweetheart?"

Oh boy was she ready. She was dripping liquid down the insides of her thighs and wanted to be filled so badly, she almost hurt. But instead of telling him all this—after all, her mouth was full—she shook her ass, urging him on.

His latex-covered cock probed at her nether lips, and she rocked backward, urging him in.

A light slap on her ass made her stop, but she whimpered instead as she waited for him to enter her.

A hand stroked her cheek and she lay her head on Jared's thigh, his cock still buried in her mouth.

When Devon finally started to push his way past her outer lips, she tightened her mouth around Jared's cock and grabbed his thighs with her hands.

"Does it hurt?" Jared's softly spoken question penetrated the sensual haze she was in.

Pulling away from him for a moment, she responded. "No, not at all. I just want more."

Jared smiled and looked behind her. "You heard the lady, Devon. Give it to her."

Devon took her at her word and pushed into her with an unexpected speed, ripping a gasp from her lips. Her nails dug into Jared's thighs, and she arched back, trying to keep herself from moving from the thrust.

"How's it feel, sweetheart? You want me to continue?"

If he stopped now, she swore to all the gods in the heavens that she would kill him.

"If you have to ask, Devon, then you shouldn't be down there." Immediately she regretted her sarcastic answer, afraid she'd offended him.

Instead, his chuckle ran up her spine, followed by his tongue as he licked his way quickly up her back until he was bent over her completely, still seated inside her. "Oh, babe, trust me, I know what I'm doing. And by the time I'm done, you are going to be screaming my name around Jared's cock and wondering how you ever survived without me."

Shivers ran through her at his promise, one that she felt he could, and would, deliver on. When he moved back and started to pull out of her before pushing back in, her feeling turned into a surety.

She closed her eyes and felt him slowly push and pull his way into her. Oh, God, yes, this man definitely knew what he was doing.

When she opened her eyes, she saw Jared's cock waiting for attention once again. She smiled and grabbed hold of it, then wrapped her lips around it and pushed it into her mouth as deep as she could take it.

She sucked hard when Devon thrust into her forcefully. Yes, this was what she had wanted.

Devon led the dance that followed, each thrust and push sending her mouth onto Jared's cock harder, only to pull her back when he slid partway out of her pussy. In and out, they filled her from both ends. Friction built up, and her body began to shake once again as it climbed high in excitement. She let herself go, moving with Devon, letting him lead the way to their completion.

Jared repositioned himself, though, and suddenly he was in charge of the thrusts into her mouth. He was no longer letting her ride Devon's movements. No, he was directing his own, and she didn't know where to pay attention.

Both of them pushed into her at same time, filling her, and then pulled out, leaving her feeling empty and bereft for the brief seconds before they pushed back into her.

Jared supported her chin. Devon had his hands on her hips, and together they fucked her, their speed increasing with each thrust.

Soon they were fucking her hard and fast, just the way she'd imagined it. The sound of Devon's cock sliding in and out of her soaked pussy and Jared fighting the suction of her mouth met her ears, and the tension coiled deep in her stomach once again. The groans and moans of all three of them reverberated in her ears as she neared orgasm.

When it came, it was sharp and hard, starting deep in her belly and stretching out to the rest of her body, sending tiny explosions off under her skin. Her pussy pulsed and squeezed around Devon's cock. Instinctively she tightened her lips around Jared and sucked hard as she moaned out her pleasure.

The spray of cum into her mouth had her swallowing rapidly to get all that Jared had to offer. His groan as he pushed one final time into her mouth pleased her as she swallowed the last of his juices. She wanted to lick him clean, but Devon's thrusts had her gasping and straightening up with a shout.

Devon, too, groaned, pulling her against his chest as he thrust quickly into her. His arm tightened around her waist, and with a final shudder, she felt his orgasm roll through his body, his cock rapidly twitching and shooting into the latex barrier covering him.

Chapter Seven

Light streamed through the French doors and danced across the coverlet. Jared lay beside Larissa, whose upper body was draped over Devon's chest. He reached a hand

up to stroke her hair and contemplated their situation.

He was in love with her. There was no doubt in his mind that it wasn't just physical attraction; it wasn't just his werewolf chemistry reacting to her. It was love. Everything about her: from her sense of humor, to her insecurities, her willingness to go after what she wanted, and her assurance to handle the repercussions.

She was intelligent, funny, and gorgeous. But she was also independent and lived her life the way she wanted, to hell with anyone else. Which made him love her even more.

She also was one of the most honest people he'd ever met. Devon was right last night. She didn't have to tell Devon about Jared at dinner. And she didn't have to tell Jared about Devon yesterday morning. But she had. She believed in being up-front about things, which just made their whole situation even worse.

Once she found out their entire relationship was based solely on lies and misdirection, would she ever forgive them?

“We are so screwed.”

Devon's softly spoken words had him turning to his best friend and soon-to-be coleader. He was right; would she ever forgive them?

"We had no choice, Dev."

"Don't get me started on that again, Jared. You know how I stand."

"Fine, but would you have been happy with the alternative?" They continued to keep their words low in an effort not to wake the woman between them. "If Mother hadn't interfered, we never would have met her. And I, for one, find that option unacceptable."

It was Devon's turn to stroke Larissa. "No, you're right. Now that she's come into our lives, I don't know how I could live without her."

"So what are we gonna do? We can't continue to lie to her, Dev. I can't do it. Even telling myself we aren't lying, that we're just avoiding telling her some things, it's not enough." His gaze rested on her sleeping face. He felt his heart crack when he thought of her leaving them.

"You're right, we can't. But I don't have the foggiest."

"Maybe today when she's with Michelle we can come up with something."

"Shit. That's today?"

“Yeah, why?”

“Have you told her we met Larissa? Does she know to keep her mouth shut?”

“She's not stupid, Dev. She knows what's at stake.”

“Sorry, you're right.” Devon shook his head. “I know better than that.”

Larissa moved, and the two of them instantly watched her for wakefulness. That was all they needed, her waking up and hearing their discussion. She wasn't ready to hear anything. And they weren't ready to tell her.

She rolled onto her back and then stretched before opening her eyes.

“Morning, beautiful.” Jared watched the blush race across her face as she remembered the night before. “How do you feel about some breakfast?”

Larissa reached for the sheet, making sure it covered her completely before looking back at the two men hovering over her.

“Um, I don't normally eat breakfast.” Her voice was small and high. She seemed to be nervous, and he didn't know why. “Why don't the two of you go ahead, and I'll meet you

in the sitting room after I've showered and dressed."

Devon shook his head. "Oh no. You aren't gonna do this."

Larissa's gaze turned to Devon. Her eyes widened in shock as he reached for the sheet. He pulled it, hard enough to rip it out of her hands.

"Hey!" She reached for the sheet, but he held it out of her reach.

"No. No 'hey.' You are not gonna hide your body from us after everything we shared last night."

"I wasn't—"

"Don't even try to lie to us, Rissa. You know Devon's right. You were trying to hide from us. Be shy, be uncertain, but never be embarrassed or ashamed. We love this body."

"And you don't hide it from us."

Larissa's eyes narrowed. "Did it ever occur to you that I was telling the truth? That I don't eat breakfast, and that maybe I was cold?"

The men looked at each other before chuckling. "No," they said together.

“Fine. If you don't mind, I have to use the facilities. Order what you want for breakfast; I'll meet you in the sitting room.”

The two of them put their hands up in a “surrender” move and backed away as she crawled off the bed and reached for the sheet. Devon reached it first and once again kept it out of her grasp. She huffed and walked into the bathroom, stark naked.

Once she'd shut the door, they turned to look at each other again.

“I think we've got our hands full.”

“Do you think she heard us?”

Jared shook his head. “Hell no. With a temper like that? She'd have torn us a new one if she'd heard any of it.”

“Damn, I can't wait for make-up sex.”

Larissa turned on the shower after stepping out of the small room that housed the toilet, still fuming. How dare they assume she was ashamed of her body? What made them think she was hiding?

But you were hiding. You know damn well you were.

Oh shut up.

And who gave them the right to order me around like that. "You won't hide your body from us." Yeah, right. Who the hell did they think they were?

She really needed to stop arguing with herself. It just plain wasn't healthy. She stepped into the shower and continued her inner monologue. Okay, so she had been hiding. And she hadn't been cold.

Far from it, in fact. As soon as she opened her eyes and saw the two delicious specimens of male meat in front of her, her body had heated to such a degree that she was ready to take them both on. Again.

And okay, despite what had happened last night, despite all their assurances, she still hadn't wanted them to see her naked like that. Dammit, it wasn't like they were in the heat of the moment, with low lighting and all that. It was bright sunlight.

Even Jared, yesterday morning, hadn't seen her body completely naked. She'd managed to keep under the covers most of the time. At least most of her body.

What was she going to do if they took a good look at her

and decided she was too fat for them? For more than a one-night stand?

Hell, what the hell was she thinking about? What did it matter? Of course it was a one-night stand. What else could it be?

Well, okay, maybe a five-night stand. She was going home in a few days. She lived in Philly; they lived here. There wasn't a future for them.

Where on earth did that thought come from? A future? She'd known them for less than forty-eight hours. Shit, she'd known Devon for less than twenty-four. What the hell was all this about a future?

Forget it, woman. It's your overactive hormones talking. Your biological clock or something. It's been so long since you've had any action, you're attributing things that aren't there. Just enjoy it as long as it lasts.

And keep the lighting dim.

“So what have you been doing since you got here? How are your dates going?”

Larissa choked on the water she was drinking. Overcome

with a coughing fit, it took her a few minutes to get her composure back.

“Are you okay?” Michelle looked concerned, leaning toward her with a frown.

Larissa wiped the tears from her eyes. “Yeah, I’m fine. Sorry.”

“No, I’m sorry. I didn’t think it would be that hard of a question.”

“I gather you haven’t heard?”

Michelle tilted her head, her long red hair nearly brushing the table. Tall and elegant, Michelle was everything Larissa had always wanted to be growing up. Until she’d learned to accept herself for who and what she was.

At times like this, she was grateful she’d gotten over that irrational jealousy from her youth. If she hadn’t, she’d never have given Michelle the time of day. And Larissa knew already that would have been her own loss. Michelle was the kind of woman who Larissa would be pleased to call friend.

“What happened?”

Larissa bit her lip before answering. “My first date missed

because his girlfriend went into labor. My third date had to run to Las Vegas because of a sick mother-in-law, and my second... Well, let's say I wouldn't wish that boy on my worst enemy from high school."

"Who was that?"

"Philip Prentiss."

This time, Michelle choked on her drink. "Philip?"

"Yeah. He was a pompous ass. I couldn't imagine a man as insulting as him. He's damn lucky he's as good-looking as he is, because as soon as he opened his mouth, all attraction was gone."

"Philip?"

"Yes, Philip. Why? Do you know him?"

"I thought I did. Apparently not."

Larissa looked at Michelle for a minute, confused. Maybe Philip had always been polite around her. After all, she was the reason he was on a cover. She probably had veto power.

"Well, I don't want him to lose his job or anything, but I have to say that I was glad to leave him." Larissa thought of what

happened afterward. Oh yeah, she was definitely glad.

"Hey, what's that smile for? What happened?" Michelle's eyes narrowed, but the smile on her face widened.

Larissa debated telling her anything. They'd been together for all of an hour at the most, and although they'd seemed to hit it off pretty well, Michelle was still a stranger.

But really, what did it matter? It wasn't like she was asking for Larissa's deepest, darkest secret. "Well, I met someone."

"Really? Spill."

What should she tell her? Most of Michelle's stories dealt with triads. Werewolf triads, okay, but triads nonetheless. It wasn't like she'd be disgusted by what Larissa had been doing. If she was so willing to write about it, she had to be okay with it in real life, didn't she? Could she trust Michelle with it?

Should she trust her with it? She didn't know what the hell had been going on the past few days, but she'd met so many people that she felt comfortable with, really comfortable, that it was almost wrong. Between Susan, the men, and now Michelle, Larissa felt like she was among friends. Among a group of people who would always be there no matter what.

What she had told Devon last night was true. It was scaring her, freaking her out almost. She wasn't the kind of person who did things on hunches. She based everything on hard, cold facts. This was so unlike her it was scary.

But at the same time, it was freeing as well. She'd never felt so unencumbered and relaxed at home or even on any other vacations. Maybe there was something in the air; she didn't know. But whatever it was, it had her acting strangely out of character, and to be honest, she didn't want to stop.

"Before I spill, I have a question for you."

"Okay, shoot."

"Your characters. What made you write them?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, the relationships. Why write triads? I know you write erotic romance, but there are all kinds of different versions, subgenres, whatever. You could have written about BDSM, capture fantasies, or even just straight hot sex between one man and a woman. Why did you pick triads?"

Michelle sat back in her seat and took a sip of her wine. She looked as though she was debating how to answer. Or maybe she was just thinking about her answer.

“There are a bunch of reasons, really. I didn't write BDSM because I don't know enough about it, and it's not something I'm into. I read too many capture fantasies in the older romances and I got sick of them. But why triads specifically?” Michelle pursed her lips for a moment before continuing. “Well, you know, they say write what you know. And I know triads. I should. I've been in one for the last ten years.”

“Excuse me?” Larissa's voice rose in surprise. Then she ducked her head as she realized how loud she had become. “Sorry.”

“I have been in a triad for the last ten years.”

“Really? Wow.”

Michelle laughed. “Yes, really.”

Larissa was shocked. How the hell hadn't she known that? You'd think something like that would have been public knowledge for a well-known author like Michelle. And why the hell was she telling her this?

“My husbands and I keep it pretty private. Even though I write about triads, most people are okay with it in their fantasy, but not in their next-door neighbors. It makes things easier all around to not be so public about it.”

“What about your kids?”

“We live in a small community that tends to be more accepting than most. Our kids go to a private school there.”

Larissa found herself full of questions. How did they handle jealousy between the men? Did the children know who their biological father was? Did she sleep with both of the men at the same time? But she had no right to ask any of those questions. So instead she sat there, unsure of what to say.

Michelle leaned forward. “Did I shock you?”

“Surprise me? Yes. Shock me as in am I bothered by it? No. Not at all.” Larissa pursed her own lips. “Especially not now. I, um, well, I said I met someone. But what I really meant was I met a couple of someones.”

“Damn. You're a fast worker, aren't you?”

“Hey, it's not my fault. It's not like I was looking for them.”

“Where'd you meet them?”

“At the hotel. Oh, and while I was shopping.”

“So tell me all about them.”

Larissa shrugged. Michelle seemed awfully interested in her love life. But then, who else did she have here to talk to about it? Susan was nice enough but seemed kind of reserved. So who did that leave her? Andy, the waiter at the restaurant?

She could call someone back home, but she couldn't think of anyone who would be accepting of what she had done.

"There's not much to tell, really. I met Jared after my date with Philip and Devon while I was shopping the other day."

Michelle opened her mouth as though to say something else, but the sound of a cell phone ring coming out of her purse forestalled her. "Sorry, I have to take this; it's my agent."

Michelle opened up her phone and started talking. To give her some privacy, Larissa excused herself and walked around the courtyard of the restaurant, looking at the plants and decorations set out for that purpose.

What should she tell Michelle about the men? Part of her wanted to shout about it to the world. Part of her wanted to keep it as secret as she possibly could.

What was there to tell, anyway? That she'd had absolutely incredible sex with two of the hottest men she'd ever met? That they'd made plans to see her this evening and take

her to a play? That she fully expected tonight to end the same way last night had?

That despite her short acquaintance with them, she felt as though she was falling in love with them? Every moment away from them, they were almost all she could think about. She pictured them together. Not just in bed. But together out in the world. Doing things, being with each other. And yes, she saw them together in the future. Hell, she *wanted* to see them together in the future.

It made no sense at all, but she felt like she had come home with them. Like they gave her something, filled a hole in her life she hadn't even known existed. The thought of going back to Philly and being without them filled her with a dread that pained her heart.

She didn't believe in love at first sight. She wasn't in love with Jared. And she wasn't in love with Devon. She couldn't be. Was it just plain old-fashioned lust? But if it was, why was it so strong? She'd never experienced it to this degree before. Not just lusting, but literally *needing* them. Her body craved their touches like a drug. And when she had first seen both of them, she had been ready to jump their bones almost immediately.

It had to be something else. It wasn't love.

Because she knew in a couple of days it would be over. She'd never see the men again. Like she and Jared had discussed before, no promises made, no vows expected. This was a vacation romance, a fling. Nothing more.

So, there was nothing to tell. She'd already told Michelle enough. She'd told her all there was to tell, actually. Definitely time to change the subject when she got back to the table.

By the time she returned, though, Michelle had seemed to forget their conversation. "Sorry. It was kind of important. My agent and I are having a bit of a disagreement."

"Sorry."

"No, actually I think you can help."

Larissa frowned. "How could I possibly help?"

"Hypothetical situation. You meet a man. You feel as though you are falling in love with him. And he has a secret. Do you forgive him when he tells you?"

Larissa felt like groaning. So much for changing the subject. "What's the secret?"

"He's a werewolf."

Of course he was. That's what Michelle wrote about.

"Oh, I don't know, Michelle. I can't predict that."

"What about your men? What if they had a secret?"

Larissa wanted to laugh, but she couldn't. The men had been talking about something this morning; she knew they had. She'd heard the murmur of their voices as she'd been waking up. But when she'd opened her eyes, they'd stopped talking completely. They hadn't looked guilty, but she knew they were hiding something from her. But then again, she was hiding things from them.

"This is all hypothetical, right?"

"Of course."

"I guess it depends on my feelings for them. If I felt as though I were falling in love with them, then part of me would want to forgive them no matter what. But I'd want to know why they'd kept the secret, and I'd have to agree that it was an acceptable reason for having kept it. Not to mention the time factor."

"What do you mean?"

"How long did it take them to tell me? Did they wait to make sure I was fully ensnared in their net? As in so in love with

them I would forgive them anything in the rush of fresh love? Or was it a beyond-their-control kind of reason. You know what I mean?"

"Yeah, I think I do. So basically if Ed and Danny make Marianna wait for no justifiable reason, whether it be fear of losing her, or that they just didn't want to tell her, then you'd find it more difficult to accept."

"Exactly."

"Okay. I'll bear that in mind."

"I gather the next story isn't your typical one?"

"Not really." Michelle shook her head. "Most of my stories have the women at least peripherally aware of the pack. This one is a complete stranger to the pack and what it means. I'm not sure how she'll handle it."

Larissa chuckled. "Oh, come on. A woman is told that her men not only love her, but she's guaranteed that they'll love her forever. They are physically and genetically incapable of cheating on her and will always desire her. Not to mention take care of her, give her independence, and always support her." Larissa shook her head. "Yeah, you're right. I don't know how she'll handle it either."

By the time Larissa was done, Michelle was laughing as

well. "Okay, point made."

"And what does she care if they get hairy once in a while? Your wolves aren't controlled by the moon; they can do it when they want. They retain their humanness when they shift. What's not to love about a man who can keep you extra warm when you just want to cuddle?"

"All right, all right. I give up."

Larissa asked a question that had been bugging her all afternoon. "So are your men anything like the men you write about?"

"Actually, yeah. I couldn't ask for two better men to spend the rest of my life with. They are wonderful fathers, absolutely incredible lovers, and well, just perfect husbands. I guess you can say they inspire me."

* * * * *

Jared stood at the fireplace of his office and watched his sister and Devon discuss the fiasco he and his best friend had made of their courting of Larissa. Michelle wasn't happy with them, and she made no secret of it.

"So what do you pair of Einsteins intend to do now?"

"I don't see why you need to worry about it. We have it

under control.' Devon sat on the couch looking relaxed and without a concern in the world. But Jared knew better. He knew Devon's guts were in as tight a knot as his were.

Michelle rolled her eyes. "Oh, please. If that isn't a load of bullshit. You have a problem, and you know it. You ran this stupid contest, and you met your mate. Now how the hell are you gonna tell her that's what you did?"

"Hey, we weren't the ones who ran it."

Michelle sighed. "You let Mother do it, didn't you?"

Devon put up his hands with a smile. "Hey, she's not my mother. She belongs to you and Jared."

"Do you think she suspects anything?" Jared spoke softly.

"Does she suspect you're a pair of alpha werewolves looking for a mate? Probably not. Does she suspect something else is up? If she doesn't now, give her a little bit and she will. She's too smart not to realize that learning about two different triads in a city the size of Kansas City is more than a coincidence."

Michelle sat down in the comfortable chair opposite Jared's desk. "I wish I'd known you'd told her about Mom and the dads."

"I hadn't intended to, but I needed a good example of a triad. Bringing you up didn't seem the wisest choice either."

Devon shook his head. "You talked to her. Tell us something helpful, Michelle."

"I don't know what to tell you, Devon. You both know her better than I do already. You know she doesn't like lies. And she is gonna feel betrayed. The longer you wait, the worse it's going to be."

"You know the rules. We can't tell her until both the pack is done testing her and we're sure she wants us."

Michelle smirked. "Trust me, she wants you."

Jared sighed. "You know what he means, Michelle. I wouldn't blame her if she walked away once she finds out what's been going on."

"I know." Michelle hugged her brother. "I do think she's stronger than that. But if you wait too long, I can't promise anything."

Chapter Eight

Devon gloated as they walked to the car after their evening out. "I told you you'd love it. I can't believe you've never seen it."

"No, although I've wanted to. I just wish someone had warned me that the nuns come out into the audience."

He snickered. "What, you didn't like being smacked on the knee and told to uncross your legs?"

"I've never been so embarrassed in my life."

Jared growled. "She's lucky I didn't smack her back for touching you."

Larissa smiled and leaned her head against his shoulder as they walked down the street, her arms linked in each of her men's.

"My hero. Although if you'd growled like that when she got me, she probably would have run backstage."

Devon squeezed her arm. "I'm sorry, Larissa. I should have warned you, but I never even thought about it. I've seen *Nunsense* enough times to know anyone in the front row is fair game."

"Oh, don't be silly. I had fun. Anyway, where else can you get a group of fake nuns berating you for not going to

church? I'll just make sure to wear a longer skirt next time."

"Don't even think about it." This time Jared's growl was louder and held more meaning. He glared at her as he helped her into the limousine waiting for them.

Larissa waited for the two men to climb into the car after her before pretending to pout. "Well, I had fun. Didn't you?"

Her innocent tone was belied by her climbing atop Jared's lap and straddling his legs.

"I thought we were going to see something a bit more adult. That's the last time I let Mr. Amusement over here buy the tickets." Jared frowned.

Larissa wiggled her bottom. "But I really did have fun. Shouldn't that count for something?"

Jared grabbed her hips and stopped her wiggling. "Rissa, behave yourself." His words were stern, but his tone and the smile on his face told a different story. Not to mention the hard-on she could feel rising against her crotch.

"Give me a reason to." Her whisper was husky and full of intent. She reached for the button on his pants and began to open them as she talked. "You told the driver earlier that you wanted me to see the lights in the plaza after the show. We won't be back at the hotel for at least an hour. I have

something much more fun in mind than just looking at pretty lights.”

Larissa spread Jared's pants open to allow her better access. Her short skirt was pulled tight across her legs. Devon knelt behind her and inched the material up slowly. The heat of his hands warmed her thighs.

“I want you, Jared. I want both of you. Here. Now.”

“Rissa,” He groaned, obviously still trying to hold back.

“I didn't explain why I was so embarrassed that the actress chose me to pick on, did I? It's because I wasn't wearing any underwear. And I was afraid I'd pulled a Sharon Stone. No undies, Jared. I sat there for the last two hours squirming in my juices every time you or Devon smiled at me or touched me.” She grabbed his hand and placed it on her breast. “I need you, Jared. I'm burning for you.”

“She's soaked, Jared.” Devon had worked her dress up, and it now bunched around her hips. He caressed her pussy with one hand as his other hand stroked her leg. Jared's gaze flickered down, and she heard him suck in his breath at the sight. When Devon slid a finger inside her, Jared's nose flared and his hands tightened on her hips.

Larissa thrust against Devon's hand, rocking on it. “Oh, he feels so good, Jared, but I want more.”

Two more fingers joined the first, and his thumb began to stroke her clit. She felt an orgasm build up quickly, but she really wanted more than just a fingering.

She reached into Jared's pants and stroked his hard, thick cock. "I've always dreamed of having sex in a limo. Only this way, I can get it times two. Are you going to deny me one of my fantasies?"

She knew he wouldn't. Not only would he give her anything she wanted, she knew he wanted it as well. "I want to suck you, and then I want you to fuck me. I want to ride you hard. I want you to make me scream."

She barely felt herself lifted and tilted before she realized she'd been impaled from behind. Devon thrust into her hard, as though reminding her he was there as well.

"What do you want from me, sweetheart?" His voice ran down her body like liquid fire. She leaned back into him as he pushed into her again.

She gasped, trying to get her breath back to answer him. "That. I want that. I want you to fuck me from behind while I suck Jared into my mouth. And then when you both are ready, I want you both to take me at once."

Devon's moan reverberated through her entire body. "Are

you sure?"

She turned her head to look at him and smiled. "Very."

She'd refused it last night, but now, tonight, here, she wanted them both. She wanted Devon in her ass while she was fucking Jared, but first she would take care of her initial fantasy. She kissed Devon, then turned around to face Jared and bent her body forward.

Jared had obviously given up protesting because his cock stood up at attention, waiting for her.

When her lips surrounded his mushroom head, his gasp of pleasure made her heart trip, and she locked her lips around him tightly.

Before the other night, she'd never been with an uncut male and, until last night, had never held one in her mouth. The extra skin moved smoothly against his shaft as she stroked him with her mouth.

She'd never get tired of his taste; she knew that like she knew her name. The two of them reminded her of a freedom she'd only dreamed about but could finally experience with them.

Jared rocked into her mouth much the same as Devon rocked into her pussy, and for a moment she was lost in

the sensation. It was only when Jared lifted her head by the chin that she remembered something much more pleasurable was in store for her.

Devon pulled her up and held her to him with one hand. He tossed a condom to Jared.

“Where the hell did you get that?”

Devon hugged her tight. “It's a full-service limo company, darlin'.”

She could only assume he'd slid one on himself before entering her and was grateful that he was thinking about more than her orgasms.

Devon thrust into her again before he slid out, still hard, dripping liquid onto her inner thigh, and she moaned at the loss. But she wasn't empty for long, as he kept hold of her hips and lifted her straight onto his best friend's cock.

Larissa loved sex in this position. It forced her lover into her hard and deep, making her feel as though he were buried permanently inside her. Her groan of satisfaction was matched by Jared's own.

Devon's fingers, wet from her juices, teased her ass, probing gently for admittance.

“Have you ever done anal before?” Jared asked, adjusting them both to keep himself buried inside her and still allow access for Devon.

“Yes.”

“It will be tighter, more intense with two of us. If it gets to be too much, you tell us, okay?”

Devon pushed a finger into her ass, and she moaned loudly, nodding her head in agreement with Jared. Jared kept her attention on him, rocking his hips gently as Devon added a second and then a third finger, stretching her out.

When he pulled out, she felt herself tense up.

“Sweetheart, are you sure you want this?” He wrapped an arm around her and held her back against him.

Larissa let out her breath with a soft laugh. “Yeah, I do. I guess I’m more nervous than I thought.”

“Then let’s forget it.”

“No. Please, Devon? If it hurts too much, I’ll tell you, okay? I promise.”

“But—”

“Devon, please. I want you both inside me. Please.”

Larissa knew Devon wanted it, and her heart swelled that he would show such concern when they were obviously all so excited. She didn't want to lose the moment to indecision.

“Devon, I want you to take me hard and fast from behind. I want you to fuck my ass as Jared fucks my pussy.” The words that came out of her mouth surprised her a bit, but the fact that they made her hotter than she had been a second before surprised her even more.

She leaned forward against Jared and tried to position herself for Devon. “Take me, Devon, please.”

His groan was the only answer she got as she felt him place his cock at her tight back entrance. He was wet with her juices, and her ass was well stretched thanks to his ministrations.

At the first bit of pressure, she breathed out and pushed back, eager to feel him in her. Jared had her in such a position that she could slowly move down and back and not lose him, and she did so, feeling every centimeter as Devon forced his way past her outer ring of muscles and slid into her back passage.

Once he was fully in, they all stopped a moment. Larissa

gradually became used to the sensation of being filled by both men. She thought Jared and Devon had filled her on their own, but together they were more than she could put words to.

It wasn't just physical either. It was more. Their arms were wrapped around her, and there wasn't a part of her that didn't feel protected or desired.

But she wanted more. She wanted what she'd asked for. She wanted to be fucked.

"Move." Her order was muffled against Jared's shoulder, but they must have heard her because Devon slowly began to slide out. Jared waited until Devon started back in before he moved out.

They alternated strokes, filling her in turn as they made love to her. But they were going too slow; she wanted it harder, faster. She was in the mood for hot sex, and they were giving her loving.

Grabbing hold of Jared's shoulders, she pulled herself up, then forced herself down on both of them at the same time. A cry escaped her mouth at the pleasant pain that shot through her at the feel of them in her so deep.

Devon grabbed hold of her hips and began to pump her in earnest while she rode Jared's cock for all she was worth.

The orgasm built once again as they fucked her. Tension swirled around in her head, her body, getting ready to release. Each fuck, each thrust, strung her tighter and tighter until her insides snapped like a rubber band, sending her screaming, thrusting against both of her men.

Devon yelled her name as he pushed into her ass one more time, and she felt his cock pulse as it released its hot liquid into the latex. Jared slammed against her hard, pulling her into his arms as he shuddered his release.

Chapter Nine

Larissa looked out at the beautiful scenery around her. They'd been driving for over five hours, and she was completely lost. "Where are you taking me?" All they'd told her was they were taking her to the Ozarks, and had made her pack clothes for a couple of days. Hell, they'd even made her call Susan on the way down this morning after they'd left, when she couldn't stop them.

Of course, they'd left at six o'clock in the morning. She wasn't about to call Susan then. Other than that, they wouldn't tell her a thing. No hint as to what waited for her

there, other than to just bring casual clothes.

For the last hour they'd been driving through the heart of the Ozark Mountains, and she had to say she was impressed. They weren't as high as what she was used to, but they were absolutely beautiful. She could see why people would settle here, even if they were hours from civilization.

They'd left the last town nearly forty-five minutes ago, and she'd seen few signs of human habitation since then.

Devon was in the backseat and had been letting her know a little bit about the area as they'd been traveling, but Jared had been silent about their destination the entire time, his concentration apparently on the road.

When he started to talk about the area, she was more than shocked. "We're on the outskirts of Mark Twain National Forest right now. You'll find lots of private campsites and families that offer float trips. Our families own over five hundred acres that we've made into a private community of sorts."

"Your families?"

"Mine, Devon's, a group of others. We've owned the land for over a hundred years. That's where we're taking you."

Larissa blinked. She stared at Jared, trying to figure out if he was joking, but he had no hint of a smile on his face. In fact, he looked more serious than he had since she'd met him.

"Did you just say you're taking me home to meet your parents?" She looked to the backseat where Devon sat. "Both of your parents?"

Devon shook his head. "Kind of. My mom lives in Connecticut, and my father passed away when I was a kid. I was raised by Jared's parents, so even though they aren't really my parents, I think of them like they are."

She looked back and forth between the two of them. "And you're just getting around to telling me this now?"

Devon tilted his head. "Which? The place we're going? Or about my parents?"

"Both."

He shrugged.

Larissa growled in frustration. "Don't you think it would have been nice to at least let me know where we were going? Give me a choice?"

Jared looked over at her with a grin. "I didn't want to give

you the chance to say no.”

“Damn straight I would have said no.”

“It's not like we're taking you there as our new bride. We thought you'd like to see the mountains while you were here. Maybe go canoeing with us.”

“And where am I gonna sleep?”

“With us.”

“Don't you think your mother is gonna be freaked out by the fact a woman who you just met is sleeping with both of you?” She held up her hand quickly. “Never mind. Don't answer that.”

Larissa fumed silently for the next few minutes. “The least you could have done was let me pick something up for her as a houseguest present.”

Devon reached into the cooler on the floor of the backseat and took out a box, which he handed her. “A triple chocolate cheesecake from the Cheesecake Factory. You give her that, and you'll have her eating out of your hand.”

Larissa pursed her lips, still angry but slightly mollified.

“What did you tell them about me?”

“They know who you are, how we met, and how long you are going to be here for. Other than that, I didn't tell them much of anything.”

“Sweetheart, I know you're upset with us, but you need to know that we're gonna be in sight of the house in about five minutes.”

Damn them. Piss her off and then not give her enough time to calm down, which knowing them was probably their plan all along. This way she wouldn't be able to bitch at them.

They turned a corner, and the house came into view.

Larissa wasn't sure what she was expecting, maybe a small cabin of some sort. It sure wasn't what she saw, though.

The house may have been called a log cabin, but all similarity to the old-fashioned frontier houses and this one ended at the name. This one was beautiful. It was on a hill with huge picture windows that looked out onto the surrounding forest, giving a nearly three-hundred-sixty-degree view of the mountains.

Solar panels lay across the roof, as well as what looked like a wind turbine in the backyard. Obviously the family believed in conservation, but the house looked to be as comfortable as the hotel she'd just left.

"You are so lucky I brought pajamas. And don't think either of you are getting me out of them tonight."

"What makes you think we'll let you put them on?" The heat in Jared's eyes burned away all her anger and set her blood to boiling for an entirely different reason. Suddenly she wanted nothing more than for him to stop the car and have him—both of them—fuck her senseless.

Oh God. It was bad enough when she was going to meet his parents angry; now she had to meet them horny.

"Just drive, buster."

By the time they'd pulled up to the front door, a small group of people had come out to welcome them.

"Don't worry. They won't bite," Devon whispered to her as he opened the door and she climbed out.

Don't worry. Yeah, right. She was about to meet the woman and men who had raised the two men she had been sleeping with for the past week.

Just because they chose to live in a triad didn't mean they had loose morals. And what kind a person would sleep with two guys she'd just met unless she was worse than loose?

She wouldn't blame them for thinking the worst of her. Hell,

in their place, she'd think the same. It wasn't like she had a reasonable explanation for what she was doing. Not even for herself.

"You must be Larissa." The woman who approached her was elegance personified. Even in jeans and a tank top, she screamed class and sophistication, and Larissa immediately felt like an overweight, frumpy relation. "I am so glad to finally meet you. Jared has told me all about you."

Larissa tried her hardest to not come across as gauche as she felt and smiled as she presented the cheesecake Devon had given her.

"Silly girl, you didn't have to do this." She took the dessert and handed it off to one of the older men standing behind her and then took Larissa in her arms in a welcoming hug. "I really am glad they dragged you down here. Thank you for coming."

"Thank you for having me. It was kind of you to invite me." Oh shit. Larissa realized she had no idea what to call the woman. Mrs. Morrison?

"It's Denise, please." She linked her arm with Larissa's and turned her toward the others. She stopped at the tall man she'd handed the cheesecake to. "This is Mathew, one of

my husbands.'

Mathew was tall with dark hair and rugged good looks. He looked relaxed and like he belonged in the middle of the mountains. There was also no doubt about Jared's parentage when you looked into his face; his skin tone was the same chestnut brown as his son's. He, too, smiled at her in welcome. "The boys definitely steered you right if this is what I think it is." He gestured with the cake box. "You've just become Denise's new best friend."

"Oh, behave yourself, Mathew. You'll scare the poor girl." A large blond man came up beside Mathew and slapped him on the arm before reaching around and pulling Larissa into his arms. "Welcome, darlin'. I promise I'll try to keep the rest of the crew in line. I'm Paul. The other husband." He released her after a quick, tight squeeze.

"Yeah, and the bossy one." Mathew winked at her.

"Well, if you weren't so lackadaisical about things, I wouldn't have to tell you what to do every day." Paul shook his head.

"Dad. Please. Both of you."

The men grinned at each other and then at Larissa. "Don't worry. We don't argue like this often."

“Just every day.” Denise grabbed hold of Larissa's arm once again and pulled her toward the house before yelling to the men over her shoulder, “Get the bags and help the boys get situated. Larissa and I are going to have a girl talk.”

Larissa looked back at her men, who just shrugged and shooed her inside with Denise. *Damn traitors.*

“Don't worry, Larissa. I don't intend to give you the third degree. I just wanted to get you away from them for a while. I know my two boys can be overwhelming after a while, and I'm used to them. I'm sure you can use a breather. Come join me for some lemonade. We'll let them worry about what we're talking about for a little while.”

Larissa allowed Denise to direct her to a seat at the center island in the kitchen. Denise poured them both large glasses of lemonade before joining Larissa.

“How are you? Are the boys treating you right? Did they force you to come down here? Be honest with me.”

Larissa choked on her sip of lemonade. What the hell was it with the women of Missouri and waiting until she had something in her mouth before they asked her these questions?

Once she had herself under control, she looked at the

mother of her lovers and shook her head. What did she tell her? Hell, what did she already know?

Denise smiled. "I'm sorry. I should have given you a few minutes, I know. But I want to know how they are treating you. I assume you are sleeping with both of them?"

Larissa put her lemonade down. That was it. She wasn't drinking anything again until she left the state. "Do you normally ask that of all the women they bring home?"

"Of course not. No, that's not true. You're the only woman either of them has ever brought home. So I guess my answer is yes."

"Would it matter to you if I was sleeping with only one of them?"

"Not if it's what you want. And if the boys are both comfortable with it. It's not like they've shared all their girlfriends. But you strike me as someone special. Someone who can handle both of them. And I don't mean just in bed."

Larissa gazed at the woman in front of her for a moment, unsure what to make of her. Deciding to reserve judgment until later, she answered the earlier questions. "Yes, I'm sleeping with both of them. Yes, they are treating me right. In fact, they make me feel better than any other man I've

ever been with. They are two wonderful men, and you should be proud to have them as sons.”

“I am proud, trust me. And I'm glad to hear they are doing right by you.”

“Denise. I don't know if you're under a misunderstanding about us. We haven't—”

“I know.” Denise shook her head. “Don't worry. But that doesn't mean that I don't want them to be good to you. Okay, enough of that. I am sure you're probably hungry. I know the boys, and they probably stopped a few hours back and got something quick to eat, if you're lucky. I have everything ready for lunch; we just need to set it out. I'm sure Paul and Mathew are done grilling the boys by now and will be in at any minute. Would you care to help?”

Relieved at the subject change, but still confused about the entire conversation, Larissa responded eagerly. “Sure. What can I do?”

Chapter Ten

“So, what kind of pajamas did you bring?” Devon leered at

Larissa as they walked down the path together.

“Unfortunately, not flannel ones. Just cotton pants and a T-shirt. You'll see them tonight, don't worry.”

Jared wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her back against him. “And I'll ask you again. What makes you think we'll even let you put them on tonight?”

“Because I am not going to have sex in your mother's house. No matter what the two of you might be planning.”

“Why ever not?”

“Good Lord, were you two brought up in a sex commune or something? One does not have sex in the house of her boyfriend's parents.”

“Is that what we are? Your boyfriends?” Devon's eyes twinkled with amusement. And intention.

She shook her head and tried to squirm her way out of Jared's grasp. “Oh no. We are so not getting into this discussion right now. You guys promised me a nature walk before dinner. Nothing more.”

“Have you ever had sex outside, Larissa? Under the light of the full moon?” Jared asked.

"It's only five. The moon won't come up for hours yet," Larissa pointed out.

"Well you can't have everything."

"No, guys. Your mother is waiting for us." She laughed.

"She doesn't expect us back for hours. We have plenty of time." As he spoke, Devon was tugging at her T-shirt, baring her belly to his gaze and touch. When he stroked his hand across her waist, she sucked in her breath sharply.

His devilish smile had her stomach turning somersaults as she wondered what they had planned for her.

"Weren't you guys going to show me where the cookout is gonna be tonight or something?"

"Later. Right now we have something more fun planned." Jared's voice was harsh with desire. He grabbed her waist and turned her around quickly. "I learned something about you the other night, love. Something I've wanted to explore ever since." He started walking her backward as he talked.

Wait, where had Devon gone? He'd been right there less than a minute ago. She felt them leave the path as branches and bushes tugged at her clothes.

Her voice trembled in anticipation. "What are you talking about, Jared?"

"The other night. Against the wall. You liked when I ordered you around, didn't you? It excited you, didn't it?"

Shit. He was right. It had. She knew she didn't want it all the time, but she'd always dreamed of being ordered around by a dominant male. Just a little bit of harmless role-playing. But how had he known? She hadn't said anything.

"Close your eyes, Larissa."

"Jared, I don't know about this."

"Do you trust us, Rissa? Do you trust us not to hurt you? Not to do anything you don't want to do?"

Did she trust them? Yes, with her life. Without another word, she closed her eyes.

Still he continued walking her backward and then stopped short, without a word. Gently he pushed her, and she came up against something hard. Her hands felt around. It was a tree. A very large and very firm tree. Which was only to be expected. They were in the middle of the woods, for goodness' sake. But what the hell was he doing?

Jared held her wrists lightly. Material rasped against her

skin in a sensory tease that had shivers running up and down her body. When it was wrapped around one of her wrists, she realized she was about to be bound. The thought excited her more than it had any right to. Then Jared brought her hands together behind her back. The stroke of silk against her skin once again told her he was tying her hands together.

“Those bindings are loose, Larissa. But only for now.” Jared's voice stroked her body, goose bumps popping up everywhere. Her pussy pulsed at the vision his words evoked. For now. Did that mean they were going to tie her up later? Keep her bound so they could do whatever they wanted to her? Her body heated quickly, her pussy dampening at the thought.

“Open your eyes now, Rissa.”

Larissa did as ordered and stared straight into Jared's beautiful brown ones. They were dark with desire, but there was something else there that she still could not read. Something that made her heart want to weep with happiness.

When he stepped out of her view, she took in their surroundings.

They were in a small circular area of cleared land. The

late-afternoon sun shone through the high trees, creating a dappled effect on the large blanket spread out on the ground. The bright colors of the material seemed to dance as the light shimmered in her eyes. A small creek bubbled off to the east, just visible behind some trees, making this a perfect place for a secret rendezvous.

The little bastards. They'd planned this. This must have been where Devon had disappeared to right after lunch.

Of course they planned it, dummy. Do you think they have silk strips lying in the middle of the woods for just any reason?

Jared tugged at her, and she realized it was time to get moving. He pulled her to the blanket and had her stand in the middle of it.

"You're wearing a bra, Larissa. I thought I told you no more bras?"

Larissa swallowed hard at his words. Had he told her that? Would she have listened if he had? At home she had no problem going without a bra—in fact it was how she would normally relax—but in public she always wore one. Double-D breasts did not lend themselves to no support.

"I don't remember you telling me that." She wanted to be cocky, to tell him off, but something in her loved this part of

him. The demanding, alpha part of him. The part that she knew would protect her at all costs but would always get his way.

He didn't say anything for a moment; instead, he turned her around and checked her bindings. Once he was satisfied, he stepped in front of her. She only had seconds to wonder what he had planned before he took the hem of her T-shirt in his hands. The tug against her body and the sound of ripping material were the first hints she got of his intention. A breeze brushed across her torso before she even had time to look down.

“Jared! That was my shirt.”

His grin sent her heart tripping and her pussy pulsing.

“I'll buy you a new one.”

Luckily her bra was a front-clasp one, because she had no doubt he would have ripped that off her as well. He released the fastening and spread the material apart, staring at her chest without saying a word.

Larissa wanted to move, wanted to walk into his arms and beg him to take her, but she was too fascinated by the look on his face to do more than watch him.

“Jared told me about your reaction to his orders the other

night." Devon was behind her, whispering in her ear. "He wants to tie you staked out to the bed, somewhere he can do anything he wants to you. He wants to see you squirm with pleasure as he orders you to take everything he has to give."

Visions flooded her mind at Devon's words. She moaned and rocked back against him.

Heat licked through her body, setting her aflame, yet no one was touching her. Her oversensitized nipples grew hard as the cool afternoon wind brushed across them, and still no one was suckling them.

"What do you want, Larissa? What do you want from us?" Devon was the only one who spoke, while Jared watched her with those deep eyes of his, waiting for her answer.

Larissa stood there a moment as she contemplated the question. It didn't strike her as strange that he'd be asking her this question in the middle of the woods, her hands tied behind her back and her shirt in tatters. It made perfect sense.

"I want you to take me. To use me any way you want, to let me bring you to satisfaction as you yell my name."

Devon spun her around to face him. "Then get down on your knees and suck me. Suck me well enough to make me

do exactly that.”

Larissa wasted no time dropping to her knees. She positioned her body to take his thick cock into her mouth.

She didn't know when he'd gotten naked, and to be honest, she didn't care. All she cared about right now was the fact his cock was hard and waiting for her attention.

She reached for it and realized her hands were still tied behind her back. A glance toward Devon's face and the slight shake of his head assured her he wasn't going to untie them anytime soon. Instead, he grabbed hold of his cock and pumped it, keeping it just out of her reach.

“Please, Devon. I need your help.”

He leaned into her and rubbed her cheek with the silky head of his cock, and she felt her pussy react. She turned her head and grasped his cock with her lips.

She looked up once again at Devon, to see him staring down at her with eyes full of emotion. Her heart swelled in response. Instead of dwelling on what she was feeling, she put all her concentration on what she was doing.

Larissa had never been a fan of blowjobs, but doing it for Devon or Jared just felt right. She loved giving them pleasure with her mouth or hands, loved making them

squirm with desire.

Lightly she held the tip of his cock between her teeth and used her tongue to stroke as much of his shaft as she could reach. She ached to grab hold of him, to caress his balls, squeeze him tight, but her hands remained fastened behind her, and all she had was her mouth.

Devon's groans of pleasure gave her confidence to continue, and she locked her lips around him and pulled him tight into her mouth. Clean, fresh male scent mingled with the aromas from the forest around her, and she inhaled deeply as she teased his cock with her tongue.

She tasted him, lightly sucking and teasing as she enjoyed the sensation of having him in her mouth. Never spending too long on one action, Larissa varied her movements in an attempt to stretch out her pleasure as long as possible. After a few minutes of that, Devon wrapped his hands in her hair and tugged her head up slightly. "Suck me, Larissa."

Larissa's pulse sped up at his words. Right at this moment she wanted nothing more than to please him. She channeled all the feelings she had for this incredible man into her actions and she sucked and nibbled and licked him. She'd been truthful when she said she wanted him to scream her name. She wanted him thinking of only her

when he came, shooting his cum down her throat.

Devon groaned again and started to push into her mouth. He held her chin up, supporting it with his hand, and fucked her mouth. He was careful not to force himself onto her too hard, but he sped up, pumping faster until she could tell he was close to the edge. Her body tingled with the thought of swallowing all he had to give, his cock vibrating with his coming orgasm.

Just as she was sure he would come, he pulled out, leaving her bereft and empty. But he wasn't done with her, no. Instead, he pumped his cock once, twice, and came, his cum shooting out in a steady, thick stream. Larissa closed her eyes as his cream hit her cheek and jaw, warming her to the core.

Part of her thought she should be grossed out by what he had done, but she wasn't. Instead she reveled in the feel of his hot seed against her skin.

Once he was finished, he dropped to his knees and met her eyes.

"You didn't scream my name." She smiled at him.

"Oh, sweetheart. I'm sorry, but I promise you, you were all I thought of. You are exquisite."

Larissa blushed, the heat rushing to her face as he kissed her gently.

His hand stroked her cheek, rubbing his cum into her jawline and neck. "I got you all sticky."

"It will wash off. I liked it."

"Me too, baby, me too."

She turned her head slightly to suck one of his coated fingers into her mouth. She sucked at it much as she had his cock and enjoyed it when his eyes fluttered closed at the sensation. Her tongue wrapped around it and licked it clean, making sure to taste as much of him as she could.

She felt hands at the ties behind her back, and then fingers massaging her hands and then her arms, as though making sure she had no soreness from her position. She closed her eyes so Devon couldn't see the tears that formed at the corners because of her men's thoughtfulness.

"My turn to mark you, Larissa."

A thrill ran through her at Jared's harsh words. Is that what they were doing? Marking her? It sounded so primitive, and yet so thrilling she could barely contain her excitement. She squeezed her legs tight as she wondered what he had

planned for her.

They removed her shirt and bra, the material scraping against her skin as they bared her upper body to the elements. A strong, warm breeze ran through the clearing, comforting her in its soft embrace.

Gently, her men laid her down before Devon retied her hands above her head. She tugged at them but realized he'd anchored them to something out of her eyesight, because she couldn't move them at all.

"The safe word is candy. If we do anything you don't like, use it. We'll stop immediately." Devon's voice reached her ears as he manipulated her hands.

Comfort, trust, and love, yes, love, ran through her at his words. She had no doubt that they would do as promised.

That she realized she was in love with the two of them while they were in the middle of sex came as no surprise to her. What did come as a surprise was that she'd waited so long to acknowledge it. How could she not love these two wonderful, attentive men? They were everything she'd ever asked for, everything she'd ever hoped for and more.

Larissa forced herself to push her thoughts aside. She'd dwell on her feelings later. Now wasn't the time.

When she felt something under her head, to help her prop her neck up, she realized Devon had rolled his clothing up to create a pillow for her so she didn't have to strain. He had to be cold now that they had changed positions, but his concern was for her, not his own nakedness.

Jared, too, was naked. In fact, she was the only one who wasn't naked. The unfairness of that struck her an instant before Jared cupped her breasts.

"These are a treasure, Rissa. Do you know that? I could bury myself in them and be happy to never come out. The first time I saw them naked, up against the wall, my first thought was to bury my cock between them. To feel your soft skin against me as I came hard."

Larissa squirmed in his hold, rubbing her jean-clad legs together at the rush of liquid that shot out of her pussy at his words.

"Would you like that, Larissa?" He bent down and took one nipple in his mouth and sucked hard. She thrust her chest against him at the sharp stabs of pleasure that shot through her body. From that one quick bit of contact, shafts of excitement permeated her body and brought her to the brink of an orgasm.

"I love the fact you are so responsive when I touch you

here, that your nipples are so sensitive. I've never come close to bringing a woman to orgasm with just nipple stimulation before, Larissa. You're one of a kind."

To hell with what he'd done with other women. Just get on with what he wanted to do to her here and now.

Slowly he straddled her torso and moved his body into place. The tip of his shaft glistened in the afternoon sun with a drop of precum. She licked her lips, eager to taste him as she'd tasted Devon.

Devon's scent and taste still lingered on her face and tongue. She couldn't wait to have Jared's mingle with Devon's. She loved how she felt, how she smelled after she'd been with both of them.

Devon's hands were at her waist and the material at her waist loosened with the rasp of the zipper. When he tugged at the rest of her clothes, she raised her hips slightly to help him remove them completely.

"Jared, whatever the hell you're doing, keep it up. She's so turned on, she's wetting the blanket."

Her eyes met Jared's, and she felt the blush heat her skin. She looked away for a moment, hoping he wouldn't comment on her excitement level as Devon had. He said nothing; instead he just smiled.

Devon stroked up and down her legs, slowly pushing them open wide. Fingers caressed her lower lips, and her hips bucked toward him.

A cold, wet trickle pulled her attention back to Jared again. He'd squeezed lube on her chest and was spreading it around. Coolness permeated her body, her nipples perking up even more at the change in texture and temperature. For a moment he seemed to get lost in his movements, his gaze glued to her breasts as he caressed and stroked with first his palms and then the backs of his hands. Larissa moaned.

He seemed to wake up from his trance and gave her a devastating smile that made her stomach clench. And then, finally, he began to move.

His hands held her breasts tight against his cock, and he began to pump her breasts as he would her pussy. The look of ecstasy on his face filled her with satisfaction that her body could do this for him.

Every time the head of his cock came close to her lips, she lapped her tongue out to taste the bit of him she could. Oh, how she wanted him to just thrust his cock in her mouth, but he didn't. He just continued to make love to her breasts.

"Now this is heaven." Jared caressed her breasts, kneading as he pushed between them. "Feeling your skin against my cock, seeing the wild look of excitement in your eyes. Your body is flushed with desire and so hot to the touch, Larissa. I won't last long."

Devon thrust a finger into her pussy, and she whimpered at the feel of it between her lower lips. She wanted more than just that, and she wiggled her hips, eager for Devon to get the hint.

Instead of giving her his cock, though, he slid two more fingers inside her and buried his face in her pussy. He teased her with his tongue, flicking at and circling her throbbing clit, refusing to give her the true attention she craved. Spikes of desire shot through her body, but he held back, not giving her what she needed.

With each stroke of his hand on her legs, each thrust of his fingers, waves swept through her, building in intensity, driving her insane with need. When his lips finally latched onto her clit and sucked, she came hard.

The sharp sting of her nipples being pinched brought her gaze up to meet Jared's once again and stretched the orgasm out even further. Who knew pain could be such a pleasure creator? Jared's eyes were dark, almost black, as he rode her chest.

“I’m gonna come, Larissa. I’m gonna shoot my seed all over you. Mark you as mine, as well as Devon’s. Are you ready for it, honey?”

Devon took that moment to crook the fingers inside her in a “come here” motion, and her “yes” came out louder than intended as her body crested again.

The orgasm rolled through her so intensely, she saw bright lights behind her now-closed eyelids as Devon moved his fingers inside her and rubbed against her sweet spot. Wave after wave of ecstasy enveloped her.

When Jared’s hot fluid splashed against her chest and her face, she turned her head and eagerly opened her mouth to taste as much as she could even while gasping through her own orgasm.

Jared’s yelled “Larissa!” sent a thrill shooting through her system that prolonged her orgasm until she was panting and close to passing out.

Oh God. She was never going to survive loving them.

Chapter Eleven

"No. I can't go out there like this. Go bring me something back." Larissa hung at the edge of the woods, refusing to step into the clearing behind the house.

"Sweetheart, don't you think they'll know something is up if one of us strides in there and gets you a new shirt?"

Larissa crossed her arms and glared at Devon. He'd graciously taken off his own shirt, and she now wore it, her old one in pieces rolled in a ball.

"If she sees me, she'll *know* something happened, Devon. At least this way she'll only suspect."

Jared chuckled against the back of her neck. She shivered. "She'll know no matter what, honey. Stop being a chicken and move. She's an adult; she knows we're adults and things happen. You don't think she and my dads have never done anything similar?"

Larissa knew they probably had, but it didn't make matters any better.

Jared's hands tightened on her waist. "You'd better get a move on, Rissa, because I hear a car coming up the drive. If you want to be in the shower before my sister gets out of the car, I'd move now if I were you."

A frustrated groan escaped her lips as she listened and

heard the car approaching as well. That's all she needed, his sister to meet her for the first time, covered in dirt, grass, and her brothers' semen.

"Fine, but you distract your parents." She glared at both of them, Jared first, then Devon. "And you come upstairs and put a shirt on before they see you."

Devon's jaunty little salute and his "yes, ma'am" did nothing to calm her mood.

Quickly they moved to the house and up the back stairs, Jared veering off to the front room to make sure they weren't interrupted. When they got upstairs and into their room without any interference, Larissa breathed a sigh of relief.

"Go greet your sister. Jared's sister. Whoever. I'll be down in a little bit."

Devon pulled her into his arms and inhaled. "I don't want to leave you. I love the scent of us on your skin."

Larissa enjoyed it as well. What she did not enjoy was the sticky feeling covering her. The guys had helped her wash some of it off in the creek, but it wasn't enough.

"Go. Now." She pushed him toward his bag and then walked into the bathroom, firmly closing the door behind

her.

She turned on the water and stripped off her clothes before climbing under the hot spray. Taking a deep breath, she let the water run over and wash the tension away.

This unexpected visit to their family was taking more out of her than she would have expected. Between the guys and their parents, she hadn't been alone since she woke up this morning. This time by herself was a blessed reprieve.

At least it gave her a few minutes to face the realization she'd had in the clearing.

She'd known she was falling for them, that she was getting much more attracted to the two of them than she should have been, but she'd thought she could keep it from getting worse. Going home with a broken heart was bad enough when you were just experiencing infatuation. With love, it would be a killer.

And she had no doubt in her mind it was love. She couldn't think about them without getting horny, true, but it was more than that. She was happy when she thought of them or was with them. They made her feel good, protected, wanted. She felt as though she could tell them anything and they'd never judge her, that they would accept her no matter what.

She wanted to be with them. She enjoyed them. And her heart broke every time she envisioned a future without them.

But no promises had been made. None asked.

She didn't know what they wanted. This had started as a fun roll in the hay. She had no right to expect it had turned into more for them as well. Despite them having taken her home to meet their parents.

And why the hell had they done that anyway? It made no sense. Yeah, once they got here they'd explained it was a family get-together they hadn't felt they could miss, but they could have come alone. She'd have been heartbroken and lonely in the city, but she'd have survived.

Denise said that they'd never brought a girlfriend home before. What did that mean? Should she believe them that they wanted to show her more of the state?

That was the problem. She didn't know what to believe. After all that talk earlier in the week about something more being there, nothing had been said since.

And part of her had been glad. But now she wasn't so sure.

Larissa climbed out of the shower and got dressed once again. The guys had said something about going to the fire

pit as soon as everyone arrived for dinner. Apparently the entire family, including extended family members, were going to be here tonight.

She wasn't sure if she should hope the rest of the family was or wasn't like Denise. Not that she didn't like the woman; she loved her already, but she—hell, all of them—was intense.

Larissa snorted. Intense. That was one way of putting it. At least they weren't insane like her own relatives. One meeting with her family and Jared and Devon would go running in the opposite direction. A couple of hours every few months were just about all she could handle with her own mother. She couldn't imagine a family as close as theirs.

Her world was different from theirs in so many ways. She knew this, but she also knew it wouldn't be difficult to meld them together. She could be an accountant anywhere. It wasn't like she had any real ties back in Pennsylvania. But again, no one had asked her to change. And she wasn't about to offer it. No matter how much she thought they wanted her, she wasn't up to opening herself to that kind of rejection.

“Come on, slowpoke. Everyone is waiting for you.”

Larissa looked up at Devon standing in the doorway and felt like weeping. Despair washed over her in a wave so strong she felt her stomach wrench. The pain was so real, she wrapped her hands around her waist tightly. Oh, shit, leaving was going to be harder than she thought.

“Larissa? Sweetheart, what's wrong?” He turned at the door and yelled, “Jared, get up here, now!” before coming into the room and taking her into his arms.

She couldn't help it; the tears started down her face, and she couldn't stop them.

“Baby, come on, tell us. What's got you all upset?”

“Rissa? Talk to us, honey.” Jared's voice came from behind her as his arms wrapped around her as well. A fleeting thought, wondering how the hell he had gotten here so fast, was gone before she could process it. The two of them cuddled her in their arms, stroking her as she tried to calm herself. Damn her and her emotions.

Larissa sniffed and shook her head. “Stop it. Both of you. I'm fine.”

“No, you aren't fine. If you were fine, you wouldn't be crying in the middle of the bedroom.”

“That look on your face told me you aren't fine at all,

woman. Now tell us what the hell has gotten you so upset.”

Larissa broke out of their hold and reached for a tissue on the side of the bed. How the hell could she tell them that she was crying because she didn't want to leave? No, out of the question.

She shook her head again. “It's nothing. I'm sorry. Hormones. That time of the month. I always get emotional like this a few days before I start my period.”

“Bullshit.” Jared wasn't going to accept her excuse. “Was it earlier? Did we scare you? Did we go too far?”

Larissa looked up at him with a watery smile. “No, you fool.” She reached out and cupped his face in her hand. “Earlier was beautiful. Exciting, creative, and a hell of a lot of fun. It isn't anything you've done. I promise.”

Please let them believe her. She didn't have it in her to tell them what she was really feeling.

“Come on, let's go. I don't want your family to be kept waiting.” She started to move away, but his hand held her back.

“I don't know what you're trying to hide, Larissa, so I'll let it go this time. If you insist you're okay, I'll drop it. But don't lie to us again.” He let go of her arm and walked out the door.

Larissa's mouth opened in shock. Jared was angry at her. And she had no idea why. One minute he was all concerned, and the next, well, damn.

"He's worried about you, Larissa. And we both know you're not telling the truth." Devon gently took her in his arms again. "The last thing in the world either one of us wants is to cause you pain. And if anything we did hurt you, it would tear us apart."

How much could a heart break from loving someone? Two someones? She was wrong; it wasn't going to break when she left them. It was breaking now.

"Believe me when I tell you that you did nothing wrong. Nothing at all. This week has been perfect. Even today, coming here without warning, has been a pleasure. I wouldn't trade a minute of my time with either of you for anything in the world."

Devon nodded, seemingly accepting her explanation. She could only hope Jared would accept it as well. She didn't want their last days to be marred. She would need all the good memories she could store up for the long, lonely nights ahead.

Jared watched Larissa laugh as she walked by his sister Caroline's side down the pathway that led to the fire pit. She seemed fine now, but earlier there was something seriously wrong with her, and he couldn't help but think it was them.

He knew she'd enjoyed their afternoon; it couldn't have been that. He would have smelled fear or uncertainty on her, but she'd only smelled of arousal and excitement. She'd enjoyed what they had done.

Then what was it? Was it meeting his family? Had his mother said something to her earlier to upset her? No, it couldn't be that either. His mother knew what was at stake here. She wouldn't jeopardize the future of the pack. Or her sons' hearts.

Devon walked beside him, both of them far enough away from the women to keep from being overheard.

"Did she tell you anything?" Jared felt like cursing.

"Nothing. It's possible she was telling the truth, but there's something more to it; there has to be."

"Are we gonna scare her off tonight, Dev? Are we wrong about her?"

Devon didn't say anything for a long moment. "I don't think

so. But does it matter? I'm not willing to let her go through any more, and I know you aren't."

Jared nodded. "It ends tonight. Have they all agreed to give us the time?"

"Mom's not overly happy about it, but she's agreed to wait until we're ready for her and the others."

Jared and Devon increased their pace until they had Larissa bracketed between them. The nervous look she shot Jared had his stomach coiling with acid over his reaction to her in the bedroom. He'd almost lost it earlier, but his beast hadn't liked being lied to. Hadn't liked not being able to make it all better for his mate.

He knew how hypocritical he was being too. He and Devon had spent the last week lying to Larissa on one level or another. But this seemed different. This time she'd prevented them from helping her. And he found that hard to handle.

"Are we okay?" Her soft words sent a shaft of pain through his chest as she reached for his hand.

He squeezed her fingers slightly and pulled her hand to his lips. "We're fine."

Her smile convinced him that maybe they were right. Maybe

this would work after all. He noticed Caroline had disappeared into the shadows, and the three of them were alone on the path. When they came upon the clearing where the fire pit was, he waited for Larissa's reaction.

Michelle had described this area in each of her books. The area where the pack met to celebrate, discuss, and decide on pack politics. Every mating ceremony for the last hundred years and more had been performed here, as well as the less important events in a werewolf's life. She'd described it in minute detail. There was no way Larissa wouldn't recognize it.

From the stone benches around the outside, to the unique statuary and nearly ancient drawings on the far cliff wall, there was no mistaking this place for anything other than what it was.

"Larissa, we have something to tell you, and we need you to really listen to us." Devon tugged her toward the middle of the clearing, where a trio of chairs awaited them. Once she was seated, he and Jared sat facing her.

Jared stood up almost immediately and started pacing before he turned and faced her. "We've been lying to you the past week about who and what we are."

"Lying to me?" She looked from him to Devon.

“Don't get Jared wrong, we *are* Devon Caldano and Jared Morrison, but we're more than that.”

“Our parents own Canid Publishing.”

Larissa sat there for a moment as though processing the information. When it finally registered, she scooted away from Devon as far as she could go. “Oh my God. This was all a setup? All part of the contest? Come, have the time of your life, get fucked by two gorgeous men, and go home a happy camper?”

“No! It's not like that.” Devon's raised voice surprised even Jared. Devon reached for her hand, but she pulled away. She stood up fast enough to knock her chair down and took a couple of quick steps back. Shock and pain ran across her face.

Devon stood up just as quickly. “Larissa, hear us out, please. If the time we've shared means anything to you, please let us explain.”

She looked at him for a long moment before turning to Jared and then back to Devon. “Fine, explain, but don't come near me. You both stay over there, and I'll stay here.” She hugged her body tightly, much as she had in the bedroom earlier. Jared felt a shaft of pain pierce his heart at the sight.

Devon nodded and moved to stand beside Jared.

Jared spoke first. "Before we go further, I need you to know that I love you, Larissa."

Her sharp bark of laughter interrupted him. It was no more than he'd expected. But he needed to tell her that up front. Before he tore her heart apart any further.

"It's true, my parents own Canid Publishing, and I knew you were the winner of the contest before I even met you. But what happened between us wasn't part of the contest."

She snorted.

"My mother vetted the entries for the contest and picked the winner based on a number of factors. Mostly who she thought would be my mate." He glanced at Devon. "Our mate."

"Your mate? Come again?"

Devon took up the explanation. "Larissa, you've read Michelle's books. You know all about the Ozark wolf pack and how they mate. Look around you. You've seen this place before. Michelle has described it countless times."

"What the hell does that have to do with the price of rice in China?"

“Think about it, Larissa. Two men who fall for the same woman. Men who will do anything to protect her, who love her no matter what she does or who she is. Don't you think that's kind of unusual?”

“Yeah, well, of course it is. But they're freaking heroes in romance novels. Of course they'll do all that.”

Jared nodded. “You're right. Where else would you find a pair of men who fall in love with a woman at first sight? Who not only want to share the woman but will do anything in their power to keep her, even if that means one of them has to give her up?”

Larissa took a minute to respond. “And you're werewolves too? Jesus Christ! What is this, some kind of torture for the sappy, fat chick who reads erotic romances? Who the hell came up with this?”

“It's not torture. It's the truth. We never intended to hurt you.” Jared tried to explain. “Michelle started writing about our pack years ago as a way for us to find mates who would accept us and our world.”

“Really? And you both believe this?”

Jared smelled her fear, sharp and bitter it was so strong. But even without that, he could see the way her gaze

darted around the clearing, trying to find an exit. He thought quickly. He needed to keep her from bolting. He stopped himself from taking a step forward in entreaty. "Larissa, you trusted us five minutes ago, just trust us for a bit longer."

"Five minutes ago you weren't telling me that you are a pair of creatures that don't exist."

Jared said nothing. He realized that nothing he could say would convince her. In fact, he knew it coming into this. He moved a few feet away from Devon, trying to keep her attention on him as Devon moved closer to her. "I have something to show you, Larissa. I promise you I won't hurt you, but I need you to see this."

Larissa backed away as he removed his shirt. Her fear increased exponentially, coming off her skin in rapid waves. It hurt to know he was the reason behind her near panic. He cursed and glanced at his best friend. It would be up to Devon to stop her from running.

He had to trust Devon to do what was needed. He had other things to concentrate on. Quicker than he was sure Larissa's mind could process, he was as naked as the day he was born.

"I love you, Larissa." He said it once again.

And then he shifted.

He'd been asked once before what it was like to shift. He hadn't been able to describe it, other than it felt incredible. Liberating was the best word he could come up with for shedding his human form and becoming a two-hundred-pound black wolf.

The change was almost instantaneous, at least to anyone watching. But he felt his bones and muscles shift, changing shape from an upright human male to the four-legged animal that lived inside of him always.

This was the part of him that he was afraid that Larissa would not be able to accept.

"Holy shit!" Larissa yelled and stepped back quickly. Devon was behind her and caught her when she stumbled.

Jared approached her slowly in his wolf form.

Devon's arms were still wrapped around her. "It's true, Larissa. We're both werewolves."

"No, that's not possible." Larissa shook her head even as Jared nudged her hand with his head. She snapped her hand back, but the sharp stench of her fear wasn't as strong as it had been seconds ago.

"You can touch him, Larissa. It's still Jared, only in a different form."

"Can he understand us?"

"Yes. We retain who and what we are when we shift. The only changes are physical. We can see farther, hear better, run faster. Things like that."

"But why? How?"

Devon shrugged. "I'm not the best person to ask. We have a pack historian who can answer more of your questions. I can tell you the pack has been around for thousands of years. We came to America a few hundred years ago and settled here in the Ozarks."

"We?" Larissa's voice rose a notch, and Jared moved closer to her in hopes of comforting her. When he nudged her hand again, this time she didn't take it away, but he didn't think she realized he was there either.

"The pack. Not we as in me and Jared. We aren't immortal, Larissa, just something different than human. Our life spans are pretty much the same as yours."

Jared hadn't taken his gaze off Larissa the entire time Devon explained who and what they were. He could hear her heart beating faster than normal, her breath more

rapid than it should have been, but the fear continued to recede.

He whimpered softly, needing a conscious recognition of his presence. She looked down at him with confusion-filled eyes.

She looked back to Devon. "You too?"

He nodded his head. "Yup. But I'm brown." He tugged a lock of his own hair.

"This is impossible, you know."

Devon smiled and shook his head. "Sorry. It is possible. You have the evidence right there."

"Jared?" She looked down again before dropping to her knees and taking his head in her hands. For long moments she stared into his eyes, as though trying to divine the truth. "It really is you?"

He sat on the ground and nodded. He pushed through her hold and licked at her face, eager to reassure her. She leaned back from him and laughed, although it was half forced. Even so, it still lightened the pain in his heart just a bit.

His shift back was just as quick as it had been the first time.

“Yes. It's me.”

“Shit.” She looked around. “I need to sit down.”

“You are.”

She looked down at the ground. “Oh, I am.”

“That's not all, Larissa.” Devon sat with them on the ground and laid a hand on her leg.

* * * * *

“There's more?” Larissa shook her head, more confused than she'd ever been in her life. What more could they possibly tell her after the bombshell they'd just dropped?

“What do you remember about Michelle's wolves' mating habits?”

Larissa sighed and thought. Michelle's wolves mated in triads, especially the alphas. Legend had it that an alpha male had been killed in an ambush during a time of conflict with another pack, and it had thrown their pack into chaos.

There had been no true ruler, no one beta who was trained or able to take over the pack. After years of problems, two alpha males emerged, ready to share the responsibility of running the pack. And the woman they both loved. It had

been tradition ever since.

"They tend to mate in triads, they are always faithful, and they mate for life."

Devon nodded, turning her hand in his to hold it securely. "When a male werewolf falls in love, he's in love till the day he dies. And I have to say that I am most definitely in love with you."

Jared squeezed the hand he held and repeated the statement he'd made earlier. "I love you, Larissa Myles."

"No. That's not possible."

Devon chuckled. "You keep saying that, but you've seen it's very possible. You can accept that we're werewolves, but you can't accept that we're in love with you?"

Larissa's heart contracted at his words. Could she accept that they were werewolves? Despite the fact it defied all common sense? Well, who was she to doubt based on that? Nothing about this entire week had made sense.

So there were werewolves in the world. Was that really so far-fetched? She believed in ghosts. Why not werewolves and vampires and the other things that went bump in the night? The legends had to have some basis in fact.

The evidence was right here in front of her. Or it had been two minutes ago. Now she had a very naked Jared in front of her. She knew she should be more freaked out by it all, but for some reason, she wasn't.

She didn't know if it was because of the conversation she and Michelle had earlier, or if it was something more. Something about the men themselves, perhaps, or how she felt for them. Whatever it was, she seemed to have accepted she was talking to a pair of werewolves.

But the other issue was another matter entirely.

“Love doesn't happen in a week.”

Jared sat back. “Says who? Why can't it happen in a week? In a day? In an hour? No one has ever been able to dissect what love truly is. How the hell are they gonna tell us how long it takes to experience it?”

Larissa looked at the two men in disbelief. How could they be in love with her? They barely knew her.

But then how could she be in love with them? She barely knew them.

But in love with them she was. She knew it in every fiber of her being. She was in love with these two men and would always be.

"Wait. You said your mother ran the contest, that she picked me out. What if she'd picked someone else? Wouldn't you be just as in love with her?"

Jared gave her a look as though to say *don't be stupid*, but instead of that, he answered her gently. "No. Not at all. My mother may think she rules the world, but she's been known to be wrong a time or two."

Devon chuckled. "Denise got lucky, plain and simple. Hell, we're the ones who got lucky."

Jared smiled. "If you ask her, she'll tell you she never had any doubt, but knowing her like I do, she was worried this wouldn't work."

"And you two agreed to this? To have a woman be paraded in front of you like a slab of meat?" Larissa wasn't sure how to handle this entire situation, so concentrating on one thing at a time seemed the wisest choice.

"Not really. She planned the entire thing and only then told us about it. In fact, when I saw you the first time at the hotel I didn't even know it was you, the winner. All I knew was that I was attracted to you immediately. And I couldn't follow up on it because I had dinner planned. With her, in fact, now that I think about it."

Devon shook his head. "And she was the reason I was in the lobby waiting for Jared when you came in last Sunday."

"Damn, she's more manipulative than even I gave her credit for." Jared's voice was full of respect for his mother despite his words.

Jared turned and took Larissa's face in his hands. "Larissa, I've said it twice already, and you haven't responded. Well, at least not in a way I want to hear. I love you, and I will love you as long as I live. I love your sense of humor, your intelligence, your inner strength. I love everything about you. Is there a chance you feel the same way?"

Larissa swallowed the lump in her throat.

"Before you answer him, Larissa, hear me out as well. I love you. I love your courage, your ability to accept people for who and what they are, and I love your self-confidence which is so beautifully mixed with your insecurities that rear their heads at the strangest times. There is nothing about you I would ever change."

Larissa felt tears at the corners of her eyes once again as her heart filled to almost bursting. There was no way to doubt the sincerity in their voices. They truly were in love with her. All the rest could be handled later. Right now all she wanted to do was bask in that love.

“Well?” Devon's voice was impatient.

“Well what?”

“How do you feel, woman?”

“Oh.”

“Yes, oh.”

“Do you have to ask?”

Devon looked at Jared before answering her. “If you would just say the words, then we wouldn't keep asking.”

“Oh, okay, then. Well, I love you too.”

“That's it? You love us too?”

Larissa smiled. “Yup.”

The sound of someone clapping made the three of them get to their feet, as people emerged from the forest on the east side of the clearing. Denise, Paul, and Mathew walked into the clearing, followed by Michelle and two other men. “Well, it's about time the three of you declared yourselves. You took long enough.”

Larissa stood there in shock long enough for Jared to dress before rejoining her and Devon. And then the fact

that his and Devon's entire family was approaching penetrated her brain. What the hell were they all doing here?

And had Denise really been clapping? What business was it of hers if and when they told each other they were in love? Dammit, this was a private conversation, and Larissa didn't appreciate sharing it with whoever else was in the woods.

Just in case, she looked around and realized that there were more people coming into the clearing. From the north, Susan came through the trees, followed by Jeffrey and —Larissa gasped—Philip. Instinctively she moved closer to her men. Jared's arms went around her and held her tight, but he growled at the man who approached them. Philip smiled and held his hands up, but stopped moving.

Denise frowned at her son. "Don't even think of starting anything, Jared. You knew it had to happen."

"Had to happen? What had to happen?" Larissa tried to look back at Jared and Devon but was held too tight in Jared's grasp. What the fuck was everyone doing here? Why had Denise been clapping? And what the hell was she talking about?

"I'll explain in a minute, honey, I promise." Jared kissed the

top of her head before handing her over to Devon to face Denise alone. "Before this goes any further, Mother, be aware that we've called an end to it. No more."

Paul shook his head before speaking. "You know what that means, son."

What the hell were they talking about? Were the men in trouble for telling her the truth? But dammit, they said Michelle had written the books to find people accepting of them. How the hell could she accept them without knowing the truth?

And what did Jared mean they were calling an end to it? An end to what?

She wanted to grab Jared, but he was out of her reach. Instead, she turned to Devon and asked through gritted teeth, "Devon, what's going on?"

Devon smiled almost sadly and kissed the tip of her nose. "Something that needs to be done, sweetheart. Don't worry. Stay here," he told her before stepping the few feet to stand beside Jared. They stood there in front of her, almost like an impenetrable wall protecting her from something.

But the only thing on the other side of them was their family. Why would she need protection from them?

Devon addressed the others assembled.

"We both know what it means, and we're willing to accept the repercussions."

"Have you told Larissa? Given her the chance to say how she feels?" Denise asked, her hands on her hips, her lips pursed in disapproval.

Larissa didn't give herself the chance to think about it; all she knew was they were talking about her future, and she'd be damned if she was going to stand there behind the men while they talked about it without her. She wouldn't cower behind them either. She walked up and pushed her way between Jared and Devon before facing the others.

"Excuse me, but would someone please tell me what the hell is going on here?"

Denise gave her a long, hard look before answering.

"Devon and Jared are next in line to be leaders of the pack. By revealing themselves to you before approval was given, they've jeopardized their standing."

"What? What the hell are you talking about? You were just clapping when they told me they loved me."

Jared wrapped his arm around Larissa and rubbed her shoulder with his thumb. "Devon and I already discussed it,

Mother. It's not worth the price."

"What price?" Larissa turned and looked at Jared. "What price, Jared? And how does it involve me?"

"Don't worry about it, Larissa. It's a moot point."

"Don't you dare do that to me, Jared. And you either, Devon. I've put up with a lot of shit from you two, but I will not put up with that."

Larissa knew she was butting in on something that probably had no bearing on her whatsoever—something she probably wouldn't even understand—but it didn't matter. What mattered right now was the fact they were keeping even more secrets from her. She was not going to allow that.

She ground out her words between gritted teeth. "If you two expect me to share my life with you, to be part of your lives, then you had damn well better be prepared to include me as a full partner, and that includes all decisions that affect me. Or you. And if you can't give that to me, then I will walk out of this clearing right now, and you will never see me again."

Jared looked at her with pain in his eyes. "I won't let them cause you any more pain, Larissa. Nothing is worth that."

“What pain? What are you talking about?”

“They've been testing you, Larissa, ever since you got to Kansas City.” Devon answered her, his voice almost too low for her to hear. “All the shit you've gone through has been a test.”

“What? What shit? What the hell are you talking about?”

Denise answered from behind her. “From the time your plane landed on the ground until you met the two of them, every little obstacle that's been put in front of you has been a test, Larissa. Your suitability as a future mate for my sons had to be judged.”

Larissa whipped around to look at Denise almost before the words were out of her mouth. “What did you say? My suitability?” Larissa felt her temper begin to rise as her heart sped up and her breathing quickly became labored. She knew she should keep herself in check, especially given the fact the woman she was yelling at was the mother of her lovers, but it didn't matter. Her patience had worn thin, and she damn well was going to get some answers.

“What the hell gives you the right to judge me? You were the one who picked me, lady, not the other way around. You have no right to test my suitability for anything, least of all how good I'd be for your sons.”

Larissa hadn't realized it, but she'd been walking closer to Denise with every word. When Devon's arms wrapped around her once again and pulled her back, the fact that she'd halved the distance between the two of them finally registered. What the hell had she been planning on doing? Starting a slapping fight with a werewolf?

"Larissa, she did it for the pack." Jared's voice came from behind Devon.

Larissa fought her way out of Devon's grasp and turned around to face him and Jared. "For the pack? And you let her?"

"They didn't have a choice, Larissa. Not if they wanted you to be accepted as a full member." Mathew's softly spoken words sunk in as nothing else could have.

Larissa looked behind her and then back to the men. "No, this is crazy."

Mathew came up behind her and put his hand on her shoulder. "It's the way we've always done things, Larissa. If we want to keep the pack strong, we have to make sure that the leaders can handle whatever comes their way."

Larissa closed her eyes and put her head down. It all made a sick kind of sense if she thought about it. Why would they want their leaders to be with a weak human female?

“What kind of tests?”

“It doesn't matter, Larissa. They called an end to the tests days ago. And they sealed their fate today.”

Larissa turned around and faced Denise. She was really beginning to dislike this woman. “I said, what kind of tests?”

Mathew sighed. “A variety. Your compassion, your fidelity, your view of self, your willingness to defend yourself or others when needed.”

Larissa shook her head. “I don't understand. I haven't been tested on any of that.”

Jeffrey spoke up for the first time. “Yes, you were. From the way you handled the traffic jam to the way you handled the information about your dates being canceled, it was all presented to see how you would react.”

“You mean Tony's mother-in-law didn't really have a heart attack? And my other date's girlfriend didn't go into labor?”

“No. It was all made up.”

Her eyes narrowed, and she turned her gaze to Philip.

“And you? You were trying to be that offensive?”

He hung his head for a moment and then met her gaze. "I'm sorry, Larissa. I didn't want to hurt you, but I had to do it. Orders."

Larissa already had enough ammo against Denise. She decided to let that one slide.

Larissa turned and looked at Denise. "These are your idea of tests?"

"Yes. The way you handled the news about Tony's mother-in-law tested not only your compassion but also your acceptance of those who choose a style of life different from your own. And Philip was a test of your inner strength, your confidence in who and what you are. We all have an inner core of strength, but for some it's weaker than in others. It's not easy being in a triad; society often spurns us, treating us like pariahs. We needed to know how you would handle disapproval."

"Just wonderful. I hope I passed them, then, because they didn't even register on my radar as a blip worth remembering."

"You did."

"Great. Then I guess I'll just leave now."

"What about your men, Larissa? They, too, were being

tested at the same time.”

Larissa threw up her hands in frustration. The politics and machinations of these people were getting old fast. “Would you please just get to the point, Denise? It's been a long day, and I'm tired. I don't know if I can handle much more of this.”

The smiles that ran across Michelle's and Susan's faces suddenly had her feeling a bit less dejected and more confident.

“Jared stopped the tests days ago. The first day you two spent together he was supposed to take you somewhere else where we had something planned for you. He refused and took you to the museum.” Denise glared at her son. “With no explanation, I may add.”

“So you're telling me they failed too. Because they didn't want me to be hurt any more than they thought I had been?” Before Denise could answer, Larissa turned back to her men. “Did you know they were testing you as well?”

Devon shook his head. “No. We were told if we interfered or told you what was going on or revealed our secret to you that it was grounds for banishment from the pack.”

Larissa felt all the anger that had built up over the last few minutes rush out of her body as a wave of love pushed it

out.

"So what you did earlier? Telling me who you really were? You were facing banishment to do that?"

Jared reached out and stroked her cheek. "Life in the pack wouldn't have been worth anything without you. And we weren't going to let them continue hurting you."

Larissa bit her lip as tears ran down her face. "You fools. They weren't hurting me. I told the truth, I didn't even realize what they were doing. None of it matters to me. And it definitely didn't matter to me once I met you."

"Philip said some cruel things, yes. And I was disappointed that I wasn't going to have my dates. But it wasn't important. I subscribed a long time ago to Eleanor Roosevelt's belief. No one can make me feel inferior without my consent. And although they might have disappointed me, no one here has actually done anything that hurt me."

"That's not true. Earlier today, we did something to hurt you. You were crying in the bedroom," Devon pointed out.

Larissa sniffed and shook her head. For a brief second she worried about coming completely clean in front of everyone else, but she realized it didn't matter. Yes, they already knew more than they had any right to know, but if

she wanted a future with Devon and Jared, it was beyond time to be shy. "No. That's not it at all. I realized I'd come to love you, and I knew I had to leave in a couple days. That I would never see you again. That's why I was crying. I didn't want to lose you."

The men pulled her into their arms and held her tight for a long moment, none of them wanting to let go. Finally, someone coughed behind them.

They separated and turned to face the others, together as a single unit for the first time.

Larissa saw the glitter of what looked like tears in the corners of Denise's eyes, and became even more confused. Why was the woman crying? She was the one who was banishing her children.

"Larissa, Jared, Devon. I am sorry. Truly sorry for what I have done to you all, but please believe me when I tell you I had no choice. I never meant to hurt any of you." Paul and Mathew were behind her, each with an arm wrapped around her, as though supporting her, giving her strength.

Paul cleared his throat. "Jared, Devon, we've lied to you. We've all lied to you. I only hope that someday you can forgive us."

"Are you going to banish them just for loving me?" Larissa

asked, beyond tact.

"No. Not at all."

Denise, Paul, and Mathew stepped forward until they were mere feet from Larissa, Devon, and Jared. Denise reached out and held Larissa's hands in her own. "I have never been prouder of my boys than I am right now, in fact. They have shown they are wonderful men capable of all the finer emotions and will be excellent leaders."

"I don't understand." Larissa's gaze bounced among the three alphas.

"That was the test." Devon's voice was cold.

"You were testing how long we'd let you hurt the woman we'd come to love." Jared's voice sounded surprised. And angry.

Larissa pulled her hands from Denise's grasp and reached back to her mates. Whatever it was that Denise had to say, Larissa had the feeling it was going to hurt them more than anything else had done to this point. And she was determined to give them as much support as they had her.

Denise looked at the men behind Larissa. "From the moment you met her, you've done nothing but protect her, keep her from harm. Even when you thought it would mean

banishment from all you knew, you didn't stop. You even came down here to say good-bye without knowing how she felt for you, because you loved her so much."

Paul put his hand on Devon's arm. "You both have made us proud to be your parents, proud to call you ours."

Mathew mirrored Paul's stance with his own hand on Jared. "Your love for Larissa is strong, as is your devotion to each other. It will be an honor to have the pack led by three such as you."

Chapter Twelve

Larissa looked out across the fire pit at her two men talking to their fathers, and she felt a rush of love and pride for them. And shame for herself. They'd been willing to give up everything they knew for her. And she'd been willing to give them up without a fight.

Thank God it hadn't come to that.

"Do you think you can ever forgive us?" Michelle and Susan stood in front of her looking guilty.

“Did you have to go through this as well?”

The two women sat down as Susan answered her. “Yes, we did. And like you, Devon, and Jared, none of us knew the true reasons behind the tests. Even though our men aren't intended to be leaders, all males are tested in similar ways before they are allowed to take a mate.”

“Only our tests didn't all come in the span of a couple of days.”

“What are the rest of the tests? Won't there be a problem if I didn't pass all of them?”

“Not at all,” Susan assured her. “The tests really aren't for us, anyway. They're really for them.”

“Why, though? I still don't understand.”

Michelle looked in the fire for a few moments before answering. “In case you didn't pick up on it earlier, we don't have one pack leader, or even two. The three of them—Denise, Paul, and Mathew—share that responsibility equally.

“In many ways, Denise is the glue that holds us all together, the one who makes sure we grow up secure in who and what we are. Paul and Mathew are more of authoritarian figures. Years ago, their role would have been to protect

and truly rule the pack, but all things change. Now they keep peace within the pack and keep us from being discovered by outsiders.

“You know the story of the first triad of alphas from reading my books?”

Larissa nodded her head.

“The three of them saved the pack from destruction. After that, it was recognized that with two alpha males leading, the pack would never be without a leader or thrown into such chaos again.”

“No one's sure when habit became the biological drive it is now, but for the most part, our men are driven to find one mate who two of them can protect together.”

“But that still doesn't explain the testing.”

Michelle shrugged. “Early on, the alpha males were based solely on physical strength, which a thousand years ago was probably acceptable, but as the pack came into contact with more outsiders, it was acknowledged that something else was needed. The pack had always been very matriarchal in a lot of ways, so the decision was made to test the alpha female, and at the same time test her potential mates.

“Somehow that evolved into the testing we now have today.”

“But I'm not part of your pack. I can't shift into wolf form. How am I an acceptable alpha female?”

Susan explained, “It isn't a matter of being able to shift. It's a matter of being able to rule. To do what is needed to be done to take care of the community.”

“Hell, a quarter of the people in the pack have married in; they can't shift. But it's not important. What's important is they are now family.”

“I don't know; I've never considered myself an alpha anything.”

“Trust me, you have the qualities needed, or Denise never would have picked you. And you further demonstrated her right, not only the way you responded to the tests but the way you jumped to defend—and defy—Jared and Devon.”

“So everything you wrote about the pack, Michelle? It's all true?”

“Pretty much.”

“Including the facts about mated males?”

Michelle smiled. "You mean the guaranteed fidelity and the loving you till they die? The protecting you almost to the point of suffocating you? Those kinds of things? Yeah, all true."

"But doesn't writing it all down just create a risk of unnecessary exposure? Why would the alphas let you write about the pack?"

"It wasn't really a risk, if you think about it. People are willing to believe almost anything about authors—after all, it can't all be in our imagination, right? Every single erotic author has to have done the things she writes about, the paranormal authors have to have some inside knowledge. This is just an example of that. If anyone stumbled across this area, they'd either think I set it up for research purposes, or that I had bought into my own mythology and was slightly off my rocker. It actually is probably the best cover there is. As to why we even started it, well, that's not my story to tell."

"It's mine." Devon's voice startled her, coming from the shadows behind her. He and Jared slowly approached the three women.

"Why don't we take a walk?" Devon asked, holding his hand out to her. Larissa placed hers in his without any hesitation at all and eagerly joined them down another path

she hadn't seen before.

The light of the full moon flittered through the leaves on the trees, giving them ample light to see where they were going.

"It was my mother. My biological mother." Devon's response was so long in coming, she'd almost forgotten the question.

"My mother wasn't part of our pack. She met my father when they were in college, and they fell in love. She meant the world to him, but he was afraid to tell her the truth; he was afraid she'd reject him and what he was.

"He thought he could hide what he was, but it was too much a part of him. When he finally told her about the pack, she was already pregnant with me."

Devon ran his fingers through his hair. "Being in love, she was willing to give living here a shot, but according to Jared's mother, she was never truly happy. She loved my father, but she could never completely accept what he was. They even tried living in the city, but that didn't help. Whatever it is that makes us, well, us, was too much for her.

"Long story short, when Dad died, she left the pack. She left me here with Jared's family because she didn't want to deny me that part of my life. We see each other regularly,

but she doesn't like to hear anything about the pack or Missouri in general.

"Michelle thought that if we let the world know about us, people would be more willing to accept us. Even if it was in fiction."

"That only works for the people who read her books."

"Yeah, well, to her it was a start. She didn't want any other child growing up with the pain of being without a parent. She saw what it did to me, and she decided a long time ago that she'd do everything she could to prevent it. I guess she figured that if she could seduce women into realizing how great it would be to be mated to one, or two, of us, it would be easier for the males of the pack to find women."

"Really?" Larissa bit her lip to keep from laughing at the pride that laced his voice. It was an interesting idea, even if a little crazy. But she had to admit Michelle was right. Having "met" them through books, it was a bit easier to accept them for what they were. If even half the things Michelle had written about them were true, the men really were perfect partners.

"Her words, not mine, woman."

Jared spoke for the first time. "Men outnumber the women in the pack by almost three to one. My family is an

anomaly, Mom having two girls and just me.”

“I’m sure she had more than she could handle with the two of you growing up.”

“Woman, you wound me.” Devon put his hand on his chest, feigning pain.

“Please. Like you two didn’t drive her crazy on a regular basis?”

The men obviously had a destination in mind when they had started this trek, and Larissa saw it in the light of the moon. In front of them stood a small house, guesthouse really, very similar in design to their parents’, but in a smaller, more intimate size.

“Confession time again,” Devon said.

Larissa was beginning to wonder if the lies would ever end, if all their confessions would ever be told. But she realized she was being unfair. They were trying to make up for it. And if they had been honest from the very beginning, she couldn’t guarantee she’d be here with them.

“Yes?”

Jared tugged at her hand, pulling her up the steps. “We told you earlier that this land belonged to all of us. Well,

this area here belongs to me and Devon. We built this house years ago, once we realized that we would share a mate. It's small, for now. But there is room for expansion and updating. It has two bedrooms. A large master bedroom and a smaller guest room.

"There are a couple of other areas for things like a home office or a craft room or something. Despite the small size, there's plenty of room for three people to each have at least one private spot."

Devon opened the door, and they ushered her in. "We decided a long time ago that we were going to give the woman we love as many options as possible.

"Even as alphas we don't have to live down here full-time. But we do have to be here often, and there's no reason why we should bunk with the parents."

Larissa looked around at the high ceilings and open floor plan in amazement. The place was absolutely beautiful. She could see the kitchen to the back of the house, and through to the outside beyond that. The front wall was made up of windows as well, and she could just imagine how it would look on a bright, sunshiny day.

A large staircase led upstairs to where she assumed the bedrooms and offices lay.

Devon waved his arm toward the sitting area and large stone fireplace that sat in the middle of the room. "We didn't show it to you earlier, well, because we didn't want to freak you out."

"And if there is anything you don't like, we can change it." Jared stroked her hair. "But we wanted you, our mate, to have a place to call her own from the very beginning."

Once again Larissa found herself at a loss for what to say.

Apparently they didn't suffer from the same problem, because Devon turned to her and spoke before she could come up with anything intelligent to say.

"We've done a lot of explaining our position in this relationship, our reasoning, our feelings. You know a lot about us, not only from having been with us, but also from having read Michelle's books.

"But you don't know everything. My mother knew very little, and even as she grew to know more, it still wasn't enough for her. Everything was too different. Love doesn't solve everything, despite what the poets and romance authors lead you to believe.

"It's not going to be easy, but are you willing to give it a try? Will you consent to marry us? To stay with us? To be our mate?"

Larissa knew the last week of her life had been an emotional roller coaster, full of highs and lows that she would never be able to explain to anyone else.

But what she could say was all the highs were related to the two men in front of her. And she couldn't imagine a future without those kinds of highs again. A future without them. Whether that future was here or in Kansas City, it didn't matter to her. All that mattered was a future together, with them.

Instead of answering, however, she turned and walked to the main room, where she started to turn on every light she could find. From the small reading lamps beside the leather chairs, to the large chandelier that hung over the room. She even walked toward the kitchen and turned on the lights in there. By the time she was done, the room was lit up as bright as if it were noon outside.

She turned to see the men hadn't moved from where she had left them. Confusion marred both of their beautiful faces, and she wanted to go up to them to wipe it off. But instead, she continued what she started.

When she started to unbutton her shirt, their expressions lightened, and they quickly followed suit, naked before she even managed to get to her pants.

Devon watched the woman he loved as she first turned on the lights and then began to remove her clothing. His heart expanded with love and pride for his mate. She had come so far in such a short time; he wondered if she realized it.

Two days ago, hell, last night, she would have insisted they leave the lights off and make love under only the light of the moon. She never would have allowed them, and anyone who might pass by, to see her naked body in its entirety like this.

No matter how confident and self-assured she was, this would have been beyond her. For her to be doing this for him and Jared made his love grow just that much deeper, a feat he hadn't thought possible until this moment.

It was then that he realized that the love he had for this woman wasn't a static thing. It would always change with the mood, the situation, the way things were going in life. But he also realized that it would always be there, that it was up to them to nurture it, share it, make sure that it was always strong enough to see them through.

Maybe that had been his parents' problem. Maybe despite their love, they hadn't been willing to go the extra mile for each other. Oh, they'd tried, but had they tried hard

enough? Perhaps they'd been too selfish to truly give of themselves. He made a silent vow to his partner and his lover that he'd never let that happen to them. He'd give them all he had and then some.

Losing the feeling he was experiencing right now was never going to be an option.

"Devon, bro, you okay?" Jared was looking at him in concern.

Larissa faced the two of them, her hand lying on Devon's arm.

He looked at them both and swallowed hard. He wanted to tell them everything he was feeling, but he knew he'd never find the words to express it. Instead, he kept it simple.

"Yeah. I'm great. I love you, Jared, Larissa, and I will always do my best by both of you."

Larissa smiled. "Well, then, I need some of that best right now. I ache for the two of you like you wouldn't believe."

Devon had the urge to pick her up and take her to their bed, make love to her properly, but he wanted, needed, to honor her gift to them. So instead, he placed her hand in his and allowed her to drag him and Jared to the soft rug in front of the fireplace.

Jared leaned over and grabbed a long match to light the already laid-out fire. It was warm out, but who cared?

When she knelt in front of them, he remembered the need for protection. "Wait, condoms."

"Not necessary," she said, shaking her head. "I'm on the Pill."

"But—"

"Are you clean?"

"Yes. Of course."

She turned to Jared. "And you?"

"Definitely."

"And so am I. I don't know if I'm ready for kids, but the Pill will take care of that. Unless werewolf sperm does something to it?"

"No. It should work."

She smiled up at both of them. "Fine. You have just asked me to spend my life with you, I think we can dispense with the extra protection, don't you?" She didn't wait for an answer; instead, she reached for each of them, grabbing

their cocks in her hands and squeezing gently.

Devon threw his head back at the sensation, and Jared moaned as she caressed the two of them at the same time.

"I love looking at the two of you. The same equipment, but so different in so many ways."

Larissa stroked her lovers, reveling in their differences. The way Jared's skin moved more easily across his erection, and the tightness of Devon's, the greater amount of hair on Devon and the darker tone of Jared's skin.

She leaned forward and took Devon into her mouth. Her wild man, the one who seemed so lighthearted, but whose emotions ran so deep, it made her heart hurt. She suckled him, gently sucking him deep into her mouth, swallowing down the precum that leaked out of his tip.

As slowly as she had taken him into her mouth, she released him, feeling each ridge, each bump, each centimeter of his cock as she squeezed it between her lips.

She turned her attention to Jared, then, still keeping hold of Devon's cock as she had Jared's. For Jared, she darted her tongue out to lick that drop of seed from his tip, and she let it run down her tongue to the back of her throat,

savoring his essence all the while.

She allowed herself a few seconds of selfish play, enjoying his extra skin as she moved it back and forth, eliciting a groan that thrilled her to the core. When she took him completely into her mouth and moaned around him, she felt his balance give for a moment before he steadied himself.

She used her hand to stroke Devon much the same way she stroked Jared with her lips, enjoying the twinges of excitement that ran through his cock at her touch. When she finally released them, she was sure they were both close to the edge.

Before she could say a word, Jared dropped to his knees in front of her and Devon walked behind her. Jared pulled her head in for a kiss, and she forgot everything but the taste of his mouth as he teased and played with her. She didn't know how the man could express such feelings with only a kiss, but he left her in no doubt that he loved her and wanted her, now and forever.

When he pulled back, she searched his face, but all she found was love.

Dimly she was aware of Devon having knelt behind her. When he placed his hands on her shoulders and began to

massage her, the moan that escaped her throat was unpreventable.

Devon continued to rub and squeeze her shoulders and the back of her neck, massaging away the tension of the day. When he started to lay gentle kisses on her nape, the relaxing touch become much more exciting as tiny sparks shot through her body.

Jared held a hand in his, making his presence known by kissing, nibbling, and sucking each individual finger. He worked his way up her hand and arm to her shoulder, where he began to nip at her skin.

She remembered his sharp white teeth when he changed form, and the thought of him being so gentle with her when he had such power sent shivers up and down her spine.

She squeezed the hand he still had entwined with hers. It reminded her of the first time they'd been together, and the memory warmed her completely.

Tingles ran from her fingers, up her arms, and from her shoulders back down to her fingers, crashing together to envelop her completely.

The two of them moved to opposite sides of her neck and began to suck at her skin. Suddenly she could see the attraction for a vampire lover as her pussy pulsed in

response to their mouths. She realized she was going to have matching hickeys, but decided she really didn't care as waves of pleasure ran through her.

Devon cupped a breast from behind, much as Jared did from the front, and she moaned in satisfaction as they played with her body.

Devon tugged her back to lie on the rug, repositioning himself on the opposite side of her as Jared.

They both leaned down to take a nipple into their mouths, and she sighed, relaxing into their ministrations. They were simultaneous in their motions, almost as if choreographed, and Larissa caught hold of the thought that raced through her brain before she could lose it.

"Wait, did you guys plot this, or are you psychic?"

They both looked up with guilty expressions on their faces.

"Never mind, I don't want to know. Not now, later. You may proceed." She waved her hand weakly and laid her head back again to let them continue.

By the time they reached her hips, she was a quivering mass of Jell-O, unable to do more than feel. She thrust her hips toward them, eager for something more, but they ignored her, instead working their way down her legs.

They massaged and caressed each and every muscle in her thighs and calves, and then gave her a foot massage that she swore she felt straight to her core. Finally they started working their way back up her thighs, and two hands reached for the tight curls between her legs and separated her lips.

She was soaked; she knew she was. And she knew she was ready for whatever it was they had planned for her.

When fingers entered her, she breathed a sigh of relief. Now she would get some real action. She looked down to see who was doing what and realized that they each had a pair of fingers in her pussy. Her walls clenched at the sight, and slight tremors rocked her to the core.

They pushed into her and pulled out again and again, and finally a thumb flicked at her clit. Now she knew why bad romances treated it like a magic button, because all it took was one of them to play with it and she was gone. And tonight was no exception.

Tiny explosions detonated throughout her body as the orgasm thundered through her. She couldn't decide where to concentrate, every molecule shouting its completion at once. When it was over, her body was limp in satiated pleasure.

But Jared's words quickly turned her satiated state into one of anticipation and need. "Tonight we're gonna take you as our wife, Larissa. Both of us. One at a time, staring into your eyes as we vow our love for you."

They'd already done so much, swore so much to her, that one more promise seemed almost too much. And exactly right.

They pulled their hands out of her, and without a word, Jared moved to her side and Devon positioned himself between her legs.

"From the first moment I laid eyes on you, I knew there was something about you. Something in you called to me." He slowly pushed his way past her outer lips. "My cock jerked to full attention and screamed for me to go after you. It wanted this." He thrust into her fast. "It wanted to be with you, be in you, mark you as belonging to it."

He pulled out of her slowly then. "It took all I had within me to wait, to give you time. To get to know you, when all I wanted was to claim you as mine."

He continued making love to her, pushing in and pulling out as he told her how he felt, what she did to him, what he would do for her for the rest of her life. "I vow to always be here for you, to listen and try to be what you need me to

be, always.”

Larissa felt tears build in her eyes at his words as the tension built in her body at his actions. She could no more stop the orgasm from taking her over than she could stop the moon revolving around the earth. When it crashed through her body, she yelled out Devon's name as he thrust into her one more time and shot his cum deep into her body.

Her inner walls sucked and pulsed at him, as though eager to stretch every second of his orgasm longer. When he shuddered against her, pushing even deeper, she smiled into his shoulder in satisfaction.

After what seemed like too short a time, he readjusted himself and her against him, kissing her gently and vowing his love to her before slowly sliding out of her and rolling to her side.

Jared moved quickly to replace Devon and leaned over her on his arms as he spoke. “Larissa Myles, you are my mate, my life, my everything. I love you with all of my heart and soul. My spirit cries for you when you are not in the room, and my skin pines for you when you are not touching me. I can't imagine a future without you and I bear my past only because it brought me to this present.”

He slid into her softly, gently, filling more than her body, filling her heart and soul as well. Slowly he made love to her, stroking her heart, her skin, her very being with each and every action.

She didn't know what to say. Instead she just let it wash over her, through her, become her. Never in her wildest dreams had she expected something like this, and nothing in existence could top it.

Jared began to move, and she sucked in a deep breath as he filled her. She bent her legs, bracing her feet against the floor as she pushed against him, eager to feel him go as deep as possible.

Her pussy was throbbing, still vibrating with aftershocks from her orgasm with Devon, and she feared Jared wouldn't last long. She wanted this night, this moment, to last forever, but she knew that they had forever ahead of them.

"I love you," she whispered to man inside her. "I love you both." She turned to the man beside her.

"My heart is so full of love for and from the both of you, I feel as though it will burst any second. I, too, vow to try to be all that either of you will ever need, all that you deserve. I vow to always be here for you, to never leave you in body

or spirit. I love you.”

The looks on both of their faces filled her with such joy that she knew she was going to come again. Pleasure—physical and emotional—built in her so quickly, she had no choice but to let it release itself in another orgasm.

When Jared came, she went with him, her body exploding in beautiful ecstasy that had her seeing fireworks exploding in her head as the love the three of them shared rolled over her once again, holding her in its warm embrace.

* * * * *

Larissa lay there, watching the stars twinkle through the large skylight above them. One of them had long ago gotten up and shut off all the lights before grabbing a blanket to cover them all as they continued to lie in front of the fireplace, too content to move to a bedroom.

“You know, you have this really annoying habit of not answering questions until you are ready to.” The teasing note in Devon's voice pulled her from the edge of sleep.

“I do? What do you mean?” Larissa turned to play with the hair on Devon's chest, swirling her fingers lazily through the curls.

She hid her giggle at Jared's growl behind her. When he

grabbed her by the shoulder and forced her to lie down on her back again, she let it go in a peal of laughter.

The two of them hovered over her, menacing in a completely harmless way.

Jared asked the question once again. “Larissa Myles, will you marry us? Will you live with us, be our mate?”

She reached up to cup their faces in her hands. They were so beautiful, so intense, so wonderful. How had she ever lived without them?

“Jared Morrison, Devon Caldano, I love you both with all of my heart. It will be my honor to be your mate, your lover, your wife.”



Other Loose Id® Titles by Talya Bosco

Talya Bosco

Talya is an avid fan of all forms of the printed word. She has been reading for as long as she can remember, and has dreamed of being an author for almost as long. On any given day, when she's not working, you can find her at the computer or curled up somewhere in her house writing or reading whatever has caught her fancy that week. She has been known to push the limits of her deadlines, or go to work on little to no sleep, only so she can finish a book she is reading.

Her reading habit was the bane of her family's existence while growing up, but she has found a wonderful man that shares her evil inclination. They live quietly, reading books, playing on computers, practicing martial arts and enjoying one another's company.

Talya feels all that reading has helped her to become a better author. She has devoted her professional life to writing fun, erotic stories that make you believe in second chances and happily-ever-afters.