

ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



TWOFOLD  
*Desires*

ASHLEIGH  
RAINE

# **Twofold Desires**

**Ashleigh Raine**

Non-Dedication

This story is not in any way dedicated to our best friend Carrie. Nope. Not at all dedicated to her. No way. No how. We wouldn't dedicate this to her. Nuh-uh. Not Carrie. Not the lovable, charismatic, vibrant, wonderful, loud, fan-damn-tastic, electric, hyper, bodacious, awesome, spectacular, intrepid, ballsy, funky-spunky, musical, lyrical, outer-spacial woman we know and love.

So Carrie, now that this story has NOT been dedicated to you, whatcha gonna do about it?

# Chapter One

Can't close early.

Want to close early.

For the two hundredth time in the last five minutes, Jill Evans looked at her wristwatch. Had the hands even moved? She glanced up at the wall clock and sighed. Foiled again. Closing time wasn't for another long, drawn out, painfully frustrating fifteen minutes. Ugh. She fought the temptation to flip the sign on the door to closed. Who was going to shop for flowers at 7:45 at night a few days before Halloween?

No, she couldn't do it. What if a young girl wanted to buy a flower for her first love? Or what if a gentleman needed a corsage for his lovely lady? Or better yet, what if a single handsome stranger wanted a solitary red rose to bring to the party tonight?

Oh crap!

Tossing her pliers back onto the workbench, Jill whipped around the counter to her computer. She'd never printed up her ticket for tonight's *Singles Haunt* at *Silver Twilight*. She typed in her webmail address. While waiting for the site to load through her incredibly slow connection, she skipped over to the sink and attempted to clean some of the orange and black flower dye from under her fingernails.

Three days until Halloween and everyone seemed to be getting in the spirit. Just today, Jill had sprayed a batch of gladiolus black and orange and carved a few pumpkins. But tonight's bash was the highlight of her holiday. She'd always hoped that one day a man would walk through the door of *Jill's Bloomers* and sweep her off her feet. Yet in the five years since she'd opened, the only sweeping going on involved her broom. The

men who came in weren't looking for a woman, they were looking for flowers for the woman they already had. Although that was great for business, it wasn't great for her love life, or even her go-out-on-a-date-once-every-blue-moon life.

So it was time to take the bull by the horns. Time to go out and get noticed, to live a little dangerously and maybe go a little wild.

And hopefully find someone to go a little wild with her in the process.

The party tonight incorporated all of her newest resolutions. Less than a year ago, *Silver Twilight* had been a strip club. Now it was under new management, offering live music and dancing every night. It was *the* place in Talisman Bay to go for fun.

She cast a glance over her shoulder as she scrubbed. It looked like her e-ticket had arrived. Shutting off the water, she grabbed a towel and did the happy dance back to her computer, letting out a giddy giggle.

Before clicking on the *Silver Twilight* confirmation and e-ticket, she skimmed her incoming messages and noticed one of her old college friends had sent her a Halloween funny. Her grin widened. Charlene always sent the best zingers. Jill had learned to never drink while reading Charlene's emails, to avoid spewing soda all over the monitor. After clicking the appropriate button to print her e-ticket, Jill opened the joke email.

She didn't even get to read the first line before her printer jammed.

"No, no, no. Darn it." At least her stupid printer decided to eat something of hers rather than a receipt for a client. But she needed the printout in order to get in. That darn printer would not ruin her plans to finally have some fun!

Jill yanked on the jammed sheet of paper, extracting it as though opening a Chinese fan, fold by fold. "All right, you silly old thing. Are you going to play nice now?" Offering up a prayer to the god of crappy computers, she returned to the e-ticket email, clicked print again and watched. "Thank

heavens.” Her printer appeared to be cooperating.

“Okay. Now then, what good joke did Charlene send me?” She opened the email.

“Top Ten Things to Avoid on Halloween”

Never—

Interrupting yet again, the printer started to eat the page, making a horrendous squeaking sound. “But you were being so good!”

Oh well. There wasn’t enough time to deal with it anymore. She grabbed a knife from her worktable, shut off the printer from hell and slashed the page free. Luckily, the e-ticket and confirmation number were on the top half.

She tucked the ticket into her purse and for the third time, clicked to open Charlene’s email.

Her computer froze.

Jill stuck her tongue out at her computer as she powered down. Okay, obviously she wasn’t supposed to read that email tonight. Too bad. It would’ve been fun to see how many of those so-called rules she could have broken.

She glanced at the wall clock. Only five minutes remaining. She swallowed her grin, reminding herself to stay professional.

Screw it! Closing five minutes early was hardly cause for anyone to be upset. Hurrying about, she pulled the display buckets from the front

sidewalk and began tucking all the necessary delicate blooms into the refrigerators.

The bell on the door jingled merrily behind her. Fudge! She hadn't locked it yet.

Turning to the latecomer, she offered up her best retail smile. Hopefully, the fun at *Silver Twilight* wouldn't run out before she got there.

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By the time Jill had escaped work, showered, dressed up, discovered her nylons had holes instead of feet, rushed to the corner store, put on her new pair while driving, and finally arrived at *Silver Twilight*, the party was in full swing. People were talking, mingling, making a connection. The music was loud, and servers weaved through the crowd handling drink orders. It was the definition of organized chaos.

Devils, pirates and warriors shared the dance floor with vixens, French maids and a few dominatrices. Most everyone was dressed in dark shades, the most common colors vamp red and soulless black.

Her sparkly white fairy costume with tiny silver gossamer wings made her stick out like a sore thumb.

No, she chastised herself, not like a sore thumb. She was unique and original. And so out of place she suddenly wondered what the heck she was doing there.

Butterflies fluttered nervously in her stomach. As much as she'd been anticipating tonight, looking around at the room full of costumed people trying to make a love connection, she realized she had no idea what to do next. Should she just jump in and start dancing? Maybe buy a drink, then walk around hoping someone would talk to her? Paste a smile on her face, hoping it made her look friendly and approachable rather than three sheets to the wind?

She shook her head and sighed. No wonder she was still single. She had

no clue about this kind of stuff.

An overweight vampire, blood smeared on both of his chins, winked at her as he sauntered into the bathroom. She stifled her giggle. Okay, maybe she wouldn't be a complete failure with the men tonight. But should she wait around for another vampire? A pirate maybe? What about one of the knights in rusty armor?

Wait a minute. Why should she wait around for some clown, or cowboy, or whatever that thing in the corner was to come to her? Tonight she was a fairy. And as a fairy, there was no reason she couldn't flit around, grant wishes, flirt profusely and have a darn good time in the process.

Jill took a deep breath and thrust her way into the crowd. She expected to be bounced back out, rejected with a big red "vetoed" stamp on her forehead, but instead the swarm swallowed her up, welcoming her into their midst.

The rest of her worry evaporated as she noticed a familiar face on the dance floor. Jake, who co-owned *Rare and Unusual Imports*, was dancing and laughing, surrounded by a group of women all vying to be the one he took home that night. His eyes met hers and he grinned, gesturing for her to join them.

Not one to turn down an invitation to dance, she smiled and weaved her way toward him, already beginning to move to the music.

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Arden snarled inwardly as he scanned the festive crowd. With the way the women were dressed, it was more like a flashers convention than a costume party. Everywhere he looked, breasts spilled out the top of too-tight spandex. Disgusting. Appreciating beautiful women was one thing, but watching them use their bodies to try to hook some poor fool for a night was almost painful. Was there not a decent woman in the whole place?

An all too familiar voice mentally interrupted his internal tirade. *You're*

*growling again. No wonder you're still sitting by yourself.*

Arden cursed the telepathic, empathic and downright annoying connection he shared with Leo. *Get out of my head, Leo.*

If you're not even going to try, then why are we here?

Through the crowd, Leo shot Arden the usual scowl.

I thought there'd be potential here, not a roomful of women only interested in a quick lay in the back alley.

Oh ye of little faith. You see my following. There's tons of potential.

Arden scanned the group of women surrounding Leo, then turned his back on all of them. *Big deal. We're not here just to get laid.*

Leo's annoyance permeated Arden's consciousness. *Dammit. This was your idea in the first place. "We're running out of time," you said. "We can't give up yet," you said. "We can still find the one." All of this bullshit and now you're backing out?*

Arden downed the rest of his beer and gestured for the bartender to hand him another. *This wasn't what I had in mind.*

You know what, Arden, if you're going to be a dick and give up, maybe you should just pick yourself out a vamp, maid, dominatrix or whatever and at least get laid one last—Leo's spiel came to an abrupt halt.

Wondering what had caused the interruption, Arden glanced back toward Leo, but his gaze was drawn to someone else. A woman, dressed in sparkling white and silver, weaved through the crowd as Leo continued. *Or how about a fairy? Now, she definitely has potential.*

For the first time that night, hope stirred inside of Arden. The beautiful fairy glowed as she moved, unknowingly portraying a bright innocence that made her outshine every other woman in the room. Shoulder-length brown hair framed a heart-shaped face. Wide brown eyes seemed to watch

everything at once, unabashedly soaking in the world around her. She was pure and sweet and exactly what he was looking for.

A moment of guilt slashed through him. Did she deserve to be pulled into their cursed existence?

Did they have a choice?

Leo interrupted his troubled thoughts. *If you're not interested...*

I am, Arden fairly growled.

Good, Leo replied smugly. *Because it looks like our fairy queen is thirsty.*

## Chapter Two

Jill spied an empty barstool and her aching feet turned longingly in that direction. After putting in a full day of standing at work, then dancing nonstop for forty-five minutes, she was ready for the sit, drink and chat-with-whomever-was-nearby part of tonight's festivities.

Breaking from the dance floor, she made her way along a row of small tables, aiming for the short set of stairs leading to the bar. Jill passed table after table of flirting couples, heads pressed close so as not to miss a word the other said. She even saw the double-chinned vampire from earlier, cuddled up with a latex-clad goddess of equally dynamic proportions. She grinned. Love—or at least lust—was in the air tonight.

At the last table next to the stairs, what could only be described as a gaggle of women surrounded someone Jill could not yet see. A few even leaned over the railing from above, smiling and flirting with whoever was seated below. They all laughed in unison and one of them moved, giving Jill an opportunity to see what all the fuss was about.

Wow.

Double wow.

No wonder so many women were hanging around his table. The man had one of those classically beautiful faces, as though a sculptor had taken his time, meticulously carving out every rich detail of expression, the sharp arch of each golden eyebrow, the proud, aristocratic nose, down to the sinful expanse of his mouth. White blond hair disappeared over his shoulders and down his back. As she moved closer to him, she was able to see even more detail. Long, dark blond eyelashes framed almond-shaped amber eyes that sparkled with mirth, as though he knew a secret that all the women were desperate to learn.

He sat crookedly, one arm resting on the table, the other casually lying along the back of his chair. Although clad in dark colors, mostly grays and browns, unlike the rest of the crowd, he would never blend in. Like a royal leader holding court, mesmerizing the women with his mere presence.

Too bad Jill wasn't one to compete. With a bevy of eager babes at his disposal, the man was probably a player anyway.

She turned away from the blond god and, resting her hand on the railing, began to climb the few steps to the bar. For a split second, a warm masculine hand covered hers, fingertips clasping around her wrist almost possessively before retreating.

Who had touched her? Jill looked down, almost expecting to see a red flush where her skin tingled. There was only one man close enough to lay his hand on her. She turned her gaze toward him as he straightened in his chair. Her breath caught as his amber eyes locked with hers. Awareness flooded from where her hand and wrist still tingled, to every cell of her body. His eyes danced, those full lips curling up into a knowing smile. She returned his smile, her heart thumping wildly against her rib cage.

No wonder he had a harem ready to serve him. His smile alone could charm the cheap spandex off any woman in the room.

Too bad she wasn't just any woman. Wanting to avoid temptation, she tried to break from the blond man's stare, afraid if she didn't, she'd launch herself over the railing and into his lap. Instead, she rammed full force into someone at the top of the stairs.

"Whoa, there. I got you." Strong arms wrapped around her waist, pulling her flush against a warm, male body, keeping her from careening backward down the stairs.

Trying to regain her mental balance as well as her physical, she grabbed onto his arms and got a handful of rock-hard muscle.

She squeezed her hands, getting a firmer grasp of his biceps. This man could easily bench-press a truck. He was probably one of *Silver Twilight's*

bouncers, sent to kick her out for excessive levels of drooling.

Prepared to state her case, claiming dehydration and possible chemical reactions from the glitter makeup she was wearing, she lifted her head. Her stomach dropped to the tips of her tired toes as she looked at her rescuer's face.

Holy moly! Two hot men in a row. Where had these two been hiding all night? Although this man was an exact opposite of the blond god. He was dark. Rough-edged. Beautiful in a sexy, dangerous, probably-shouldn't-take-him-home-to-mom kind of way.

Wavy dark brown hair fell raggedly to his shoulders. Dark eyebrows slashed deliciously over black eyes deep as night. Strong cheekbones complimented his sturdy nose and late-night stubble covered his jaw. His mouth tilted up questioningly as he spoke. "You okay?"

She nodded, not quite able to get the words past her lips. His voice was deep, almost more of a growl. He should have scared her, the whole package of dark, rugged male. But she wasn't frightened. Instead, her body reacted to his nearness, heating from the inside out. Between this man, and her brush with the hot blond god earlier, her internal temperature had skyrocketed.

One of his arms slipped from around her waist, brushing her flyaway hair back into place.

Realizing that if she didn't say something soon he'd probably think her an imbecile, she grasped for the comfort of the line she'd been using all night. "Need a wish granted?" she asked, forcing her voice to come out light and flirty.

His mouth widened in a crooked grin but before he could answer, someone bumped into him from behind. His arm circled tighter around her waist, pulling her even closer against the warmth of his body. Now within licking distance of his neck, she indulged her curiosity and inhaled, taking in his scent. He smelled like the outdoors, like the wind on a hot summer day.

Warm lips pressed against her ear, his breath caressing her neck. She suppressed a needy shiver as he spoke. “You grant wishes? Have a drink with me?”

Jill wondered if screaming yes and dancing a jig would be an inappropriate response. She turned her head toward him to answer. His lips were so close, she wanted to trace them with her tongue, to see if he tasted like sunshine, too.

Instead, she licked her own dry lips, and said, “Wish granted.”

Keeping an arm around her, he guided them through the crowd to a small table set up almost as an afterthought in the far corner next to the bar. He gestured for a server, while settling her into a chair.

She finally got a chance to study the man whose body was most definitely worth falling down stairs for. Heavy black boots, black jeans and a gray shirt with a weathered black leather jacket completing the look. Guessing by the way he wore everything so comfortably, it was more normal attire than a costume.

He took a seat across from her, then, resting his forearms on the table, leaned forward, closing the distance between them. “So, just how many wishes are you willing to grant me?”

She matched him, leaning forward and speaking conspiratorially. “Depends on what they are.”

“My first wish is to know your name.”

Sticking with the comfort of her fairy persona she said, “Tonight I’m a fairy, escaped from my world for a few hours of mischief and mayhem. But when my wings disappear tomorrow, I’ll be plain ol’ Jill Evans again.”

“Certainly not plain, Jill.” He shook his head, his gaze sweeping over her before returning to her face. “And tonight I am a great warrior from a strange world, seeking freedom I have long been denied. Tomorrow I’ll

simply be Arden Griffin, graphic designer extraordinaire. Are you in need of a battle won? A website built? Or maybe my warrior can rescue your fairy and we can escape our worlds together?”

“And then what?” Even though she knew this was only a game, she found herself caught up in the fairy tale he was spinning.

“And then we live happily ever after, or so they say...” The tips of his fingers lightly brushed over hers, and her heart rate accelerated, feeling like it would beat its way right out of her chest. Then he winked and gave her a lighthearted grin. “But who really believes that stuff anyway?”

The moment was interrupted by the appearance of a server. Jill smiled up at the woman and placed her order, then waited for Arden to do the same. She took that moment to catch her breath and regain control of her senses. This man was overwhelming in every meaning of the word. Tall, broad-shouldered, dark and intense, yet with a sense of humor and a way with the fantastical that seemed to contradict his outward appearance. So how much was real and how much was a part of the fantasy character he was portraying for the night?

When the server left, Arden’s gaze returned to Jill. “So, my fairy queen, Jill. What do you do when you’re not granting wishes?”

“I own *Jill’s Bloomers*,” she replied. “It’s a flower shop.”

His eyes lit up. “On the corner of Hayden and Third,” he said as though continuing her sentence. “Your window displays always grab my attention. I think it’s your use of colors and shapes in composition. They beckon to the designer in me. But then I always think to myself, ‘I don’t need any flowers’ and I keep on going. Boy, am I an idiot, huh? Look at what I’ve been missing all this time.” His gaze washed over her face, centering on her eyes.

“You’ve been missing out on the best flower arrangements in town,” she teased, unable to think of anything else to say. It wasn’t like she heard this kind of stuff everyday. At least not about herself. Her shop, yes. But the way he was looking at her led her to believe that flowers were the last

thing on his mind.

“Well, I’ll have to change that in the future.” Arden was about to say something more when their drinks arrived, brought by an incredibly well-built and handsome bald man. The two men exchanged handshakes and grins. “Diesel, I’m surprised you’re getting your hands dirty.”

“Hey, now. I don’t just run the place,” Diesel said, making his point by grabbing a towel from his back pocket and wiping off the table.

“No, you’re a workaholic just like me.” Arden shook his head, a self-deprecating smirk on his face.

“Add me to that list.” Jill laughed. “It sounds like we all need to get out more.”

“*Silver Twilight’s* my mistress and she’s not very forgiving if I take a night off.” Diesel glanced around the club, the pride evident in his demeanor. “And I haven’t found anyone willing to play second fiddle.” He held his hand out to Jill. “I’m Diesel.”

Arden shifted forward. “Shit, I’m sorry. Jill, this is Diesel, he owns this place. And Diesel, this is Jill, she owns *Jill’s Bloomers* .”

Her hand was swallowed up in Diesel’s. “It’s great to meet you,” she said.

“The pleasure’s all mine.” Diesel let go of Jill’s hand and when she lowered it back to the table, Arden moved his hand close to hers.

“So, Diesel, what brings you over here?” Arden asked.

“Actually, I just wanted to thank you again for the website. This whole party never would’ve happened without your redesign and addition of all the online contact stuff that you claim to have thrown in for free.”

“All in a day’s work, man. I’m glad it’s working for you, though. This gig’s a hit.” Arden smiled and purposefully returned his gaze to Jill.

“And that’s my cue to leave,” Diesel grinned. “You both have fun. Drinks are on the house.” He headed back to the bar and the crowd waiting there.

Arden watched Diesel walk away and breathed a sigh of relief. He genuinely liked the man, but he didn’t want to share Jill with Diesel for even a minute.

The clock was ticking and he wanted to make every moment count, wanted to take his time with her, court her, prove himself to her, because after eighteen years of looking, he knew she was the one. But taking his time wouldn’t be possible. There were only three nights left.

Shit. Why couldn’t he have met her before? What he needed from her was too much to expect anyone to give in such a short period of time. Maybe he should just walk away now, give up, let her go to find another man—hell, maybe even Diesel—who could give her a future without sacrifice.

But that thought left emptiness in his gut, and made anger burn across his flesh. Maybe this was his true curse. After so many years of looking, to finally find the one who could make his world right again, only to lose her forever because time had run out.

Jill took a drink from her beer, then cocked her head to the side and gave him a concerned smile. “You okay? You got quiet. Don’t tell me I’m boring you already.”

“No, actually quite the opposite.”

“Uh-oh. Is that good or bad?”

“It’s good. Very good.” He was about to reach for her hand, ask her to dance, something to get his mind off the big picture and focused on just Jill Evans, but she beat him to the punch.

Jill downed the rest of her beer and pushed her chair back. “Do you dance? Or...or...do you want to?” She gave him a glowing smile, but he noticed the nervousness in her eyes.

“You read my mind.” This time he did take her hand as he swept her onto the dance floor. The first slow song of the night was playing, encouraging interested couples to get a little closer. A man crooned a ballad of love lost as Arden pulled Jill into his embrace. She settled against him as though they’d danced this way a thousand times before, one hand curled over his shoulder, the other still clasped in his.

His free hand rested on the small of her back, holding her as tight to him as he dared. She relaxed against him, her face turned into his neck rather than away, her breath a sweet sigh whispering across his skin. A sign of trust he was so afraid to shatter. Her soft hair brushed against his cheek, and he inhaled, breathing in the scent of wild strawberries.

You look enraptured, Leo said. *Is she what we expected?*

Even more so, Arden replied. *She’s the one.*

Right. Sure. We’ve been down this road before, and it always ends with the woman running away from the “crazy freaks of nature”.

Don’t give me shit. I just know, okay? Arden spotted Leo exiting *Silver Twilight*, a tall blonde on his arm. *And the blonde?*

Another option. If the fairy queen isn’t what you claim—

She is.

I hope you’re right.

There was no need to respond. They both knew what would happen if she wasn’t.

Too soon, the last strains of the ballad morphed into a raw techno beat. Couples around them broke apart, adjusting their movements to match the music. The primal pounding of the bass urged him to throw her over his shoulder, to take her away from the masses. All the muscles throughout his body flexed and tightened as he fought against his animal instincts. The mild annoyance he’d felt toward Diesel’s earlier intrusion had heightened

a hundredfold. If he didn't get her alone soon, he knew his control would snap. Although being alone with her would be another trial in and of itself.

Jill lifted her head and graced him with a beautiful smile. "The song's over," she said wistfully.

"And I'm not ready to let you go," he admitted.

A group pushed past them and someone chortled, "Geez, you guys. Get a room."

A blush swiftly covered Jill's face and traveled down her neck beneath her costume. She tried to pull away from him, but instead he kept an arm around her and drew her off the dance floor toward the exit.

"Let's get out of here." It came out as a growl and he cursed the need that had him near crazy, then added in a calmer voice, "Please."

She stopped in her tracks and tipped her head up, meeting his gaze. Her cheeks still glowed pink. "Where?"

Although she seemed willing, he could hear the uncertainty in her voice. Shit. He was scaring her already. "Anywhere," he said softly, hoping to reassure her. "I just... Let's just get away from the crowds and the noise so we can talk. There's an all-night diner I go to sometimes. Can I take you there? Buy you dinner? Coffee? Or where do you want to go? It's up to you."

Jill was quiet for a few moments, long enough for him to convince himself that the asshole with the "get a room" comment had ruined things between them and that she was trying to come up with a good excuse to get as far away from him as possible. Then her lips tilted up in a flirty smile. "You're right. It's time for us to make our escape." She started walking again. "So my warrior, where should we fly away to?"

Her acceptance brought immediate relief. Together they walked out of the club toward the parking lot. "You like to fly?" he asked with a grin as he motioned to his custom motorcycle, parked in front. Now free of *Silver*

*Twilight's* sensory overload, he felt more at ease. The night air was crisp, but not too cool. Perfect night for a ride, but he wasn't sure he should suggest it. Jill looked a little too sweet and innocent. Like asking her if she wanted to go for a ride would give her the wrong idea.

"Wow. This is yours?" Her eyes wide with appreciation, she began circling his bike. Then giving him a pleading look, she asked, "Can I touch it?"

Oh God, she was going to kill him. Those words coming out of that angelic mouth. And the desire in her eyes. Okay, maybe the desire wasn't yet for him, but it was a start. He nodded his approval and she knelt down next to his bike, caressing the green flames on the tank.

"Yeah. My little toy." He knelt next to her. "You've got wings to fly, but have you ever been on one of these?"

"Not one like this. One of my brothers was a bike mechanic back home. He used to take me riding, but I've never thrown a leg over a custom like this. Wow!"

Her hands continued to slide all over his Steed Quarterhorse SE. It was obvious that she knew what she was looking at and he didn't even care that she was getting fingerprints all over the paint. When he'd first gotten the bike, he'd caressed it, too. This motorcycle was no average showroom model. He'd had it custom-made. In fact, there wasn't much on it that hadn't been turned or smoothed by hand. She smiled over at him. "Let me guess. With a bike like this, you don't even own a car, do you?"

"Nope." He shifted his stance, his erection growing larger as he watched every stroke of her graceful hands on the motorcycle.

"Does this thing really have the hidden LED gauges? My brother only told me about them. I've never seen them. Sheesh! It's been ages since I've even been near a motorcycle. And never a machine like this."

"Y-you know about hidden gauges?" Arden put the key in the ignition and turned it, allowing all the gauges in the rearview mirrors and on the tank to

light up.

“You have to take me for a ride,” she blurted out.

“Well, shit, you’re good...granting my wish before I could even speak it. But you’re going to freeze in that sweet costume of yours.”

“Oh yeah. Ummm...” She glanced around the parking lot, her eyes twinkling mischievously. She backed away from him, lifting her hands up reassuringly. “Don’t go anywhere, okay? I’ll be right back. I’m going to grab some jeans from my car.”

Within the time it took him to fantasize about helping her out of her skirt, reminding himself that he shouldn’t be thinking that way, and pulling a spare helmet from his saddlebag, she was already back. And he’d never seen a woman look so good. She’d thrown an oversized purple sweater over her white leotard top, and a pair of jeans replaced the skirt, hugging her thighs and tapering down... Dammit, she’d caught him looking. Her grin widened and she wiggled excitedly, her hips doing a quick side to side. He couldn’t help it, he laughed. She was something else. Something special. And now he wanted her even more.

He forced his attention down to the helmets in his hand, hoping he’d regain control of himself. When he returned his gaze to her, he realized she was missing one thing. He set the helmets down on the seats, took off his leather jacket and held it out to her. “I wouldn’t want you to get too cold. You know how it can get.”

Tentatively, she reached out to take his coat. “But what about you? Won’t you get cold?”

Like that would be possible with her body close to his. “I insist. Besides, this shirt is thicker than it looks.” He plucked the sleeve of his lightweight cotton weave top, hoping she’d believe his lie.

She slid his jacket on over her sweater. It was so large it could probably wrap around her twice. For some reason that turned him on even more, and he had to force himself to get on the bike and out of there or he would end

up throwing her against the bike and consuming her like she was consuming him.

He handed her the emerald green helmet, then put on his dark green one, snapping the clasp into place. “Let me know if you need help adjusting the strap,” he offered but she’d already settled it on her head. “You sure you’re ready for this?”

“Oh heck yeah! I’m always game for a good ride.” She bit her lower lip, her face pinkening in a way he was already becoming addicted to. “I-I mean...yeah...I’ve always wanted to go for a ride on a custom chopper, so let’s go.”

He grinned and shook his head knowingly. “There’s a good diner just up the street. We can get coffee or something. Sound good?”

“Sounds great.”

Arden mounted his bike and she climbed on behind him, her body rocking against his as she situated herself. Her hands settled on his shoulders, then smoothed down to his biceps. Maybe she didn’t know where to put her hands? He had several inappropriate suggestions, but stuck with something more suitable so she wouldn’t think him a pervert. “Sorry, there’s no bar on the back to hold on to, and the tank is—”

“That’s okay. I prefer to hold on to the rider.” Answering his unspoken request, she wrapped her arms around him, resting her hands flat against his abdomen. With her breasts pressed against his back, her thighs surrounding his, and her hands inches from his cock, it was all he could do to start the bike and get it upright. If he hadn’t spent over half his life riding, he probably wouldn’t have made it out of the parking lot without wiping out.

Throughout the short ride, the wind whipping past cooled his fevered body. But all it took was one shift of Jill’s hand, bringing it flush against his cock—a touch he was sure she didn’t even realize she’d done—and his blood was boiling again. His raging erection banged against the tank. He was stuck. Either he could keep banging his cock into the tank, or slide

backward, nestling deeper into Jill's body. Which would probably just make his erection grow impossibly larger and he'd still manage to dent the damn tank and bruise his dick.

He slowed down as the diner came into view, wondering how he'd be able to hide the very prominent bulge in his pants when he got off the bike.

"Arden?" Her voice came from just behind his right ear as he coasted to a stop on the street in front of the diner. "Don't stop. Please. I just want to keep going. If that's okay with you..."

She had no idea. "I'm always game for a ride, too. Is there somewhere in particular you'd like to go?"

"No. Anywhere's fine. On this bike...with you...the diner just wasn't far enough of a ride."

He checked his gas gauge. Still full. Arden wondered what she'd say if he told her he never wanted to stop.

## Chapter Three

Jill couldn't remember the last time she'd felt so free. The Pacific shone dark and beautiful on her left, and she had her arms around a man who had quickly become irresistible. She had no idea what the rest of the night would bring, and she didn't want to know. She just wanted to let go and live.

As he slowed down to make a turn, Jill gathered her courage and gave word to her desires. "Arden, go faster."

"What?" he called over his shoulder.

"I said, faster, Arden."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes! I want to fly with you."

"Your wish is my command. Now hold on tight." He twisted the throttle and let the chopper fly.

Mile after mile whipped past them, exchanging the lights of Talisman Bay for endless coastline. Everything was perfect. The sky was clear, the brilliant stars adding to the magic of the night. This was nothing at all like riding with her brother.

Jill's heart kept pace with the whirring of the engine. She'd never felt this alive—or turned on. The faster he went, the more she wanted him. Was she becoming an adrenaline junkie, or just an Arden junkie? Her entire body vibrated, and she couldn't blame it solely on the ride. It was mostly the rider who made her skin tingle, her body burn, and her insides clench with unfulfilled yearning. The constant vibration between her legs only accelerated the sexual desire that had begun the moment she'd fallen into

Arden's arms at *Silver Twilight* .

When they passed a small hotel, she bit her lip to keep from begging him to stop. How would that look? Don't stop at the café for dinner, but please stop at this hotel for dessert? Because as much as she wanted to have sex with Arden, she didn't want him to think she was a one-night stand kind of woman.

Keeping one arm tight around his waist, she let the other hand wander, stroking up to his chest. The muscles beneath her exploring palm tightened and she shivered at the sign of barely restrained power. The smell of earth and sunshine surrounded her, in the leather jacket she wore, and coming directly from Arden himself. It was heady and addictive and she couldn't inhale deep enough to satisfy her craving for all things Arden.

He slowed down, pulling to the side of the road. Twisting to face her, he said, "Are you afraid of heights?"

"No. Why?"

"There's a really pretty spot off the beaten path that I want to show you."

"Hey, I'm just along for the ride," she teased. "You can take me anywhere."

"Don't tempt me, Jill." He grinned, his teeth shining white in the darkness. He turned back around, but before pulling onto the road, he ran his hand down her leg from thigh to knee. But this wasn't a casual touch; this was a promise of things to come. His fingertips claimed and possessed, his hand circling, kneading, burning through her jeans and making her flesh beg for more of his touch.

Wherever he was taking her, she hoped he got there fast.

A few minutes later, Arden left the main road, slowly weaving along a dirt path. When it became too narrow to continue, Arden drew the bike to a halt, turning off the engine. She expected the sudden silence to surprise her, but the roar of the engine was replaced by the roar of the ocean

somewhere in the distance. Not to mention the roar of blood pulsing anxiously through her veins.

He took off his helmet, hanging it from one of the handlebars before brushing a hand through his hair. She matched his movements, removing hers as well, but unless her arm grew an extra six inches she wouldn't be able to hang her helmet. Still she tried, wrapping herself around him like she was playing a game of Twister.

"Here. Let me," he said, taking the helmet from her outstretched hand. Before she could thank him he mumbled, "Aw, hell," and crushed his lips over hers.

Arden did taste like sunshine. The heat blistered her lips, soaking into her body. But it wasn't enough. Wrapping her arms around him, she slammed their bodies together, opening her mouth, begging for more.

The helmet thumped to the dirt as Arden brought his hand to her cheek, his tongue sweeping recklessly into her mouth. The kiss became a battle as they both fought for more of each other. Tongues tangling, teeth nipping, groans ripping from their very souls. An arm swept beneath her, and in one swift movement, she was lifted off the bike, spun around and lowered, her legs straddling Arden. She didn't know how he kept his balance and the bike from falling. It was all she could do to breathe.

She shrugged off his jacket, no longer needing it to stay warm. Both of his hands trailed underneath her sweater, massaging the middle of her back. She wrapped her legs around his waist, bringing her crotch flush against his erection. He groaned and his hands lowered, cupping her ass, grinding their sexes together. The hot friction made her gasp and squirm, desperately seeking relief. At what point would the denim separating them burst into flame?

Arden stood up, taking her with him. Much to her dismay, the kiss had to end or they'd fall over in a heap of hot flesh and metal. Untangling their legs from the bike and each other, Arden lowered Jill to the ground, then leaned the bike over onto its kickstand. He paused, catching his breath. "Although you probably won't believe this, I didn't bring you here just to

ravish you.”

Trying to hide how her knees were still shaking from their encounter, she bent over and picked the leather jacket off the ground, brushing off some leaves and dirt before hanging it on the bike. “Really? Well that’s disappointing. You’re pretty good at ravishing.”

He chuckled. “Well, we’ll get back to that in a minute. First, there’s something I want to show you.” Taking her hand, they began walking between trees and bushes, the air growing misty with sea breeze.

They broke through the trees and Jill froze in wonder. The earth fell away less than a dozen feet from where she stood. Beyond that, the great Pacific Ocean filled her vision in all its vast glory. It blurred outward and upward, melding with the star-filled sky. Jill crept closer to the edge of the embankment, Arden’s arm wrapped protectively around her waist. There, secluded from the road by trees and high above the crashing waves, the cliff top afforded a view for miles.

“It’s magnificent,” she murmured, almost afraid to speak and break the magic of the night.

“I stumbled across this place a few years ago, right after moving to Talisman Bay. It’s become my favorite secret escape spot. Come here.” He tugged on her hand, taking her closer to the edge, pointing off in the distance. “See those lights over there? That’s the Talisman Bay pier. You should see it at Christmas time.”

“I bet it’s beautiful.”

“From here, all the twinkle lights look like fireworks with the spray distorting them. We’ll have to come back here in a couple months so I can show you.”

“I’d like that.” She smiled up at him, her breath catching when she met his eyes. No one had ever looked at her like that before. Desire...need...yet it was more than that, something deeper. Like she alone could make his world right—or like she was the only person in his world. But that was

crazy. Not yet. Not after only a couple hours together.

“T-thank you,” she whispered. “For tonight. For everything. It’s been amazing.”

“It’s not over yet.” Both his hands cradled her neck, his thumbs framing her face, running up and down, caressing her cheeks.

“Thank God,” she whispered as he leaned in and kissed her. He brushed his lips over hers, back and forth, softly, taking his time. His mouth teased along her jaw, his teeth lightly scraping down her neck. Then he moved back to her mouth and started all over again.

This was more than a seduction. It was a slow, sweet worshipping, making her feel cherished and adored. Yet beneath his tenderness, there was a sense of urgency in the way he kissed her, the way he held her. Like the moment would shatter if he pressed her too close. It was such a contradiction from their frantic entanglement on the motorcycle. Why was he holding back now?

When his lips returned to hers, she opened her mouth, rejoicing when he accepted her invitation and swept his tongue inside.

Arden had mastered the art of kissing. He kissed with his whole body, his mouth like a live wire that filled her from head to toe with electric energy. Unlike the duel of earlier, this time his tongue slowly thrust and retreated, mimicking two bodies in the throes of lovemaking. Her fingers dug into his shoulders and she arched into him. She wanted to melt and explode, to find a way to relieve the pressure building inside.

He growled, sliding his hands down, caressing her. Not breaking the kiss, he lifted her into his arms, taking her down to a small patch of grass beneath a lone tree. His hair brushed against her neck and she wanted to purr, wanted to feel those wayward strands tease down her body. The thought alone had her letting out a strangled moan. She couldn’t remember ever being this hot before, to the point she was ready to rip a man’s clothes off and take advantage of him.

He pulled away, his breath ragged, arms trembling as he held himself just above her body. “Jill...damn, you’re killing me.”

“Sorry,” she whispered, lifting up and kissing his jaw.

“No,” he rasped. “I mean, you deserve better than this.”

“I wouldn’t be here if I didn’t want to be.”

His eyes darkened and he kissed her again, fully lowering his body over hers. She loved the feeling of his weight pressing into her, his heat burning through their clothes. His erection throbbed against her thigh and she shifted her leg, rubbing his cock through the denim.

A low growl of pained desire came from deep inside Arden. He broke from the kiss, his eyes pinpoints of flame in the darkness. Desire. Fear. Regret. Hope. Her heart ached at the mix of emotions visible there. He didn’t outwardly portray vulnerability, but she knew it was there, just beneath the surface. Unsure of what to say, she tried to show that she felt a connection to him, too. She stroked his jaw, his face, tracing along his temples. With a harsh groan he buried his face into her neck and began to love her further.

While his mouth traced along the neckline of her sweater, his hands skimmed down her sides, coming to rest on the slopes of her breasts. He cradled and caressed, his fingertips lightly brushing over her erect nipples. She cried out as a shaft of desire shot from her nipples to deep inside her body. Liquid heat filled her, making her feel like she was being boiled alive.

There was still too much clothing separating them. Jill sat up and pulled the sweater over her head. Arden nodded his approval then lowered his head to her breast. Through the thin fabric of her leotard, his warm mouth suckled, his teeth tugging on the nub of flesh. His other hand slid down her abdomen, stopping when his fingers hit the zipper of her jeans. She whimpered, pushing up against his hands and mouth and body. “Arden...” she moaned, tossing her head back and forth.

There was a rustle in the bushes to her right. Visions of rapists, murderers, and other creepy things from the late night news filled her mind. Could it be the wind? No, the wind had died down. And Arden hadn't noticed anything—was she imagining it? She blinked, trying to focus in the dark.

Glowing lion eyes blinked back at her. Before she could draw breath to scream, a lion jumped back into the brush.

“Oh my God!” Jill scrambled out from underneath Arden, yanking on his arm, trying to pull him with her.

“Jill? What's wrong?”

She pointed a shaking hand in the direction the lion had disappeared. But had it even existed in the first place? It had been so quick...

He lifted her to standing, his arms surrounding her protectively. Arden's concerned face filled her vision. “Jill? What did you see? What's wrong? Was someone there?”

Trying to come to grips with what she'd just seen—or thought she'd seen—Jill looked back into the bushes. Nothing was there. “A lion...I swear I just saw a lion. It was watching us...” She shook her head. “I must be seeing things...”

“We should go just in case,” he said.

“Yeah.” Jill swallowed hard, her eyes still trained on the last location of the lion her mind had most probably fabricated. “I'm sorry.”

“It's okay, Jill.” Grabbing her discarded sweater, Arden tore her away from the cliff and all the fiery passion they'd shared there. She threw one last glance behind her. No lion. Just the undisturbed beauty of coastline.

Arriving back at *Silver Twilight*, Arden parked next to her car. “You going to be okay?” he asked as they dismounted.

“Yes. I'm okay now. More ticked off at myself than anything. A lion? I

mean, what was I thinking?” She sighed. “I’m sorry it ended that way—”

“Shhh...” He pressed a finger to her lips. “Can I see you tomorrow night? To avoid lions, we’ll take it inside this time. My house? Dinner?”

“You cook?”

“And clean.” He winked.

“Then I’ll definitely be there.” She smiled, relieved that he wasn’t taking tonight as a blow off. “I get off work at five. I’m all yours after that.”

He pulled his wallet from his back pocket, then handed her a business card. She traced her finger over the embossed lettering. “Griffin Designs—Arden Griffin—Owner” and a phone number beneath it.

“Call me in the morning and I’ll give you directions to my place.” As though sealing the deal, he placed a hand on her cheek and kissed her so sweetly, her knees weakened. His other hand trailed down, resting on her hip. “I’ll see you then.”

## Chapter Four

Jill's stomach fluttered excitedly as she drove toward Arden's place. Today had felt insufferably long and even though she'd been remarkably busy, the day had dragged by. Especially after she'd spoken with Arden. All she'd wanted to do was close her shop and spend the day remembering the way he had kissed her. The way he used his whole body when he kissed, the strength, heat and power of him melding with her. Every part of her had felt that touch, even though he hadn't touched the parts of her that burned the hottest.

Jill blushed at the memory. She wasn't the type to have sex on the first date, but she'd been more than willing last night. Right there on the cliff overlooking the deep dark ocean. If she hadn't been spooked by the lion, or what she'd thought was a lion, she would've happily gone for it.

"Lions and tigers and bears, oh my," she sang in a high-pitched voice. The stupid thing was that she still couldn't completely convince herself that she hadn't seen a lion. Although she knew it was near impossible that a wildcat would be prowling around the outskirts of Talisman Bay, in that brief moment it had seemed absolutely real.

She turned onto Arden's street and parked in front of his house. No lion was going to screw things up tonight. Grinning, she grabbed the bottle of wine she'd brought as her portion of tonight's dinner and practically skipped up to the house, following the flagstone walkway that led to the front door.

Before knocking she took half a second to assess herself, smoothing the wrinkles out of her pale pink sundress. Did she look too *Little House on the Prairie* ? Darn it, she might as well have put on a bonnet and gone barefoot. She should have gone for a more casual, please-have-sex-with-me outfit. Although she was wearing tiny lace panties and a white lacy bra—not exactly über-vixen but it was the closest she got. But like he was

going to see them underneath her Amish attire! Maybe if she loosened the laces over her breasts, exposed a little skin...

“Arden was right. He lucked out when you bumped into him last night.”

Jill jumped and whipped around to face the man behind the voice, her heart practically beating out of her chest. But the surprise was far from over. “You? But...”

That same knowing smile she remembered from last night covered his face. In fact, he looked much the same, his long blond hair cascading down his back, amber eyes alight with mischief, his arms full of groceries.

Wait a second. Groceries? Just what was he doing here?

He looked pointedly at her arm, his smile widening. “You can lower the wine bottle. I’m just bringing home some stuff to make a salad. I’m not going to hurt you.”

Jill looked over at her arm, realizing that she was hefting the bottle like a weapon. Smirking, she lowered the bottle. “Well, that’s what you get for sneaking up on me.”

He laughed, a rich golden sound that made her insides feel like putty. He shifted the bag of groceries into one arm, held out his hand and winked. “Sorry. We weren’t properly introduced last night. I’m Leo.”

The man’s—Leo’s—charm was just as apparent and appealing as it had been last night at *Silver Twilight*. It was like he immediately drew you inside of him, making you feel like you belonged, even when you were caught off guard by his overwhelming presence.

She mentally kicked herself in the rump, then, promising herself she’d ask about Arden in a second, she took Leo’s offered hand. “I’m Jill.” Her gaze wandered from his eyes to his dark green T-shirt, leather jacket and finally to his faded blue jeans. For those few moments, Jill couldn’t remember why she was there or who she was there to see. She shook it off, returning her gaze to Leo’s face. Perhaps the blond god was more dangerous than

appearances suggested.

“Jill, it’s a pleasure.”

Leo’s hand was warm and firm, swallowing her smaller one. The same tingling sensation she’d felt last night when he touched her wrist assaulted her senses. What the...

The door behind her opened and a familiar deep voice said, “Hey, beautiful.” Feeling like she’d just been rescued from drowning, she turned toward Arden with a smile just in time for his lips to land soundly over hers.

Oh my...

Strong arms—Arden’s arms—surrounded her and she melted against him, tipping her head back to give him better access. His tongue parted her lips and slipped inside. Her whole body reacted to his kiss, the intense longing and desire that had been floating around inside her all day flooding to the surface.

He pulled away and she blinked up at him, his dark eyes staring back down into hers. His hand cupped the back of her neck and he smiled. “I see you met my brother, Leo.”

She blinked again. “Brother?” No wonder she found Leo just as irresistible as Arden. It must run in the genes—or jeans since they both knew how to fill out a pair. She chastised herself for noticing their matching asses—um...assets—then shot her gaze to Leo, who was watching their exchange with interest.

“Brother,” Leo repeated. He squeezed her hand—she was still holding his hand?—then let it fall. “The brother who is wishing he hadn’t let you go last night. Leave it to Arden to rub it in by bringing you home for dinner. Not that it bothers me. Tonight it’s my turn to win you over.” With a vibrant twinkle in his eyes and that telling phrase, he entered the house.

Jill knew her eyes were probably as wide as saucers. She expected Arden

to say something, stake his claim, or even make fun of his brother. Instead he turned her in his arms so she was facing him, then kissed her again before leaning his forehead against hers. "I'm so glad you came tonight, Jill. I haven't stopped thinking about you all day."

"Feeling's mutual," she said breathlessly, her rapidly pounding heart somehow managing to stay inside her chest.

"Good...now do you mind that Leo's here? He'll be on his best behavior—which probably means you'll be flirted with nonstop." He grinned. "Not that I blame him for it, of course. But you just say the word and I'll kick his ass to the curb."

"That won't be necessary," Jill said with a laugh. "I'm sure I can handle the both of you."

Jill waited to be struck down for that lie. What the heck was she thinking? It was one of those moments she wished she could freeze in time, dissect, and figure out exactly what to do next. Two hot men. Two brothers. And she'd be in the same house, spending the evening with both of them. Well, maybe Leo would bow out early. But it was his house, too. How could she expect him to bow out? It was too much to think about. Should she be worried? Nervous? Scared even?

Yeah, right. Try excited and enthusiastic. Truthfully, she had a feeling that Leo flirted with every woman who crossed his path, but the double attention was more than she was used to. Why shouldn't she enjoy it? As long as Arden didn't mind, why should she?

"You sure?" Arden asked.

"I'm sure." She nodded for emphasis. "It'll be fun."

"Well, good," Arden replied with a wicked grin, then took her by the hand and into the house.

Immediately she was hit with the aroma of garlic, herbs and tomato sauce.

“I hope you like spaghetti,” Leo called from somewhere in the back of the house.

“Of course! Only heathens don’t like spaghetti,” she joked as Arden led her toward the kitchen and dining room area, taking the bottle of wine out of her hand. There was something more than just the scent of marinara sauce wafting around her. Like magic sparks were floating in the air, something about being in that house with those two men felt incredibly...well...stimulating.

Arden pulled out a sleek cushioned metal chair at the glass dinner table. “Please, have a seat. Dinner will be ready shortly.”

“And it’ll be good,” Leo added. “Promise.”

Jill wasn’t sure who to reply to so she just smiled. “Thank you.” She watched as Arden joined his brother in the well-equipped kitchen. Swiftly, he grabbed wineglasses from a rack above the counter and proceeded to uncork the wine.

“You got that okay?” Arden motioned to Leo, who had a spoon in each hand, stirring the contents of two different pots on the stove.

“Easy as pie. Salad?”

“Definitely.”

Arden brought Jill a glass of wine, setting it down gently on the glossy black placemat in front of her. He swirled his own liquid-filled glass. “Nice coloring, wouldn’t you say?”

“Everything about her is delightful.” Leo looked up from his stirring and winked. “Oh, you weren’t talking about Jill, were you?”

She couldn’t help but chuckle. What was it about these two guys? Why did she feel so at ease and really in the mood to enjoy everything they had to offer?

Everything? her inner slut taunted. She gulped, barely avoiding choking on her wine. Her libido could easily go into overdrive around these two. She had to remember that “everything” only included dinner and conversation. The rest was for Arden alone.

“Well, of course everything about her is wonderful, but shouldn’t you pay more attention to what you’re cooking?” Arden swallowed some wine before heading back into the kitchen.

“Only if you do. I’m nearly done and yet there’s nary a scrap of lettuce chopped or carrot peeled. Just how do you intend on serving the first course before the main?” Leo tossed a tomato to Arden, which he caught in one hand.

He set his glass down and rolled his eyes. “Back to work.” In moments, Arden had the salad ingredients sprawled over the countertop. Chopping, shredding, dicing, slicing, the man was an expert with a knife, taking care with the tomatoes, sloshing just enough dressing, shaking just the right amount of herbs into his masterpiece.

Swishing the contents of one of the pots, Leo produced a spaghetti noodle and walked over to Jill. “Tell me. How do you like your pasta? Is this al dente enough for you?” He leaned his fork close to her lips and she retrieved the noodle with a little slurp.

“I wish I was on the other end of that noodle.” Leo grinned. “Good?”

“Yes.” Jill laughed. “Perfect, actually. But would you be on the other end of the noodle or have me whipping you with it?”

“Hey now. There’ll be no noodle-whipping without me involved.” Arden chuckled as he tossed a radish at Leo who adeptly caught it while returning to the kitchen.

“I’ll whip the both of you. I’m an equal opportunity noodle-whipper.”

The two of them stopped and gave her identical looks of interest. She laughed and took another swig of wine. Her shoulders were finally starting

to unknot from the day spent leaning over her worktable. She hoped they'd completely quit aching within another few sips. Tonight held tons more potential than her average humdrum evening and she didn't want tight muscles interfering with any of the fun to be had.

Leo moved the spaghetti pot to a back burner, then glanced toward Arden and watched him put the finishing touches on the salad. "Not bad, brother."

"You've never expected anything less, have you?"

"True. Very true, Arden. But the real test will be on the palate, won't it?" Leo looked at Jill and playfully raised an eyebrow. "Don't mind him. He's just showing off."

Arden slid his brother a look of amusement. "Let's just see how that sauce of yours turns out, huh? Then we'll see who's showing off." He plucked a cherry tomato out of the salad bowl and walked over to Jill. The tomato glistened with oil from the salad dressing and with a sensual grin, Arden traced it along her sealed lips. "It's all in the presentation," he said huskily. "Then when the time is right, you can fully indulge."

Entranced, her mouth opened beneath the tomato. The burst of flavor startled her, but it tasted even better when Arden placed his mouth over hers. His tongue flicked out, stealing the oil from her lips. She shivered under the onslaught of taste and touch and knew she'd never eat a tomato again without thinking of this moment.

Arden had only just backed away when Leo stepped in his place, this time with a spoonful of sauce, his other hand ready to catch any stray drips. "The secret's in the sauce." He stared at her lips as she reached for the spoonful of what smelled like herbed tomato heaven.

"Tangy enough, I hope?" he asked.

She nodded, but then a drip escaped the corner of her mouth.

Leo wiped it away as though it never happened, but his eyes told another

story. Their eyes met as they shared the intimate tingle of his skin grazing hers.

Jill looked away and licked her lips, tasting salad dressing and sauce, Leo and Arden. She wanted to close her eyes and moan, to get lost in the feast of the senses. Her body physically ached, her nipples tight, her inner thighs awash with yearning heat. This desire for both of them wasn't healthy, and she needed to calm her raging hormones and not let herself ruin the relationship she wanted with Arden. He may have said he was okay with his brother flirting with her, but she couldn't imagine he'd be okay with the thoughts running rampant through her head.

She spoke carefully, trying to keep her voice light and flirty so they wouldn't suspect her inner turmoil. "This is incredible. But you both should probably stop feeding me or I won't be hungry when dinner is ready."

"Don't lose interest yet," Arden said, refilling her wineglass as Leo retreated back to the stove. "If you like his concoctions so far, dessert's going to be heaven."

If she survived until dessert. At this point, it wouldn't surprise her if she spontaneously combusted halfway through dinner.

Arden returned to the kitchen and the men gathered plates and silverware, moving as though they were choreographed. When Arden dropped a fork, Leo's hand was right underneath it to capture the stray flatware as though it was second nature. They moved fluidly, almost in unison, Arden finding a spare hand to grab his wine as he followed Leo to the table.

The presentation of the fully loaded salad and hearty spaghetti marinara had Jill's mouth watering. Or was that because of the company? She wasn't sure, but their light dinner conversation kept her laughing and smiling, while each bite was a taste of heaven. The thought of dessert had her wondering how it could top such a dinner. Okay, maybe just hand her a can of whipped cream and let her coat the nearest male specimen. Either way, the dish would be delicious.

And she really should stop thinking like that. She was there for Arden. One man was enough for her, no matter how much she was enjoying the attentions of two.

“So, Jill, I already know you’ve got one motorcycling brother. Any other brothers or sisters?” Arden asked before taking another sip of wine.

“There are eight of us, actually. I’ve got four brothers and three sisters.”

“Must be nice. All I’ve got is Tweedledum over here.” Leo gestured at Arden with his fork before taking the last bite of his salad.

Arden tossed him a sideways glance as he wrangled up another forkful of spaghetti.

The way these two acted around each other was a fond reminder of home. Jill grinned at the brotherly...umm...affection. “Don’t get me wrong, I love my family, but there’s a reason I moved across the country. When you’re a part of a group like that, you never get to do anything on your own.” She paused, struggling to put her feelings into words. “Sometimes that’s a blessing. But I needed to prove to myself that I could succeed with no outside, well-meaning family help. That’s why I moved here after college and opened *Jill’s Bloomers*.”

Arden nodded as he cleaned the last bite of spaghetti off his plate. “Well, I for one am glad you got here.”

“And I’m sure I don’t really need to second that, do I?” Leo charmed her with a grin while reaching for the nearly empty bottle of wine.

Jill caught a glimpse of the bottom edges of a tattoo peeking from beneath one shirtsleeve. He retracted his arm, hiding the four catlike legs. “You have a tattoo? What is it?”

After setting the bottle back down, Leo lifted his sleeve to reveal a lion proudly ready to pounce.

“Leo, the lion.” Arden smirked, then lifted his sleeve to reveal an eagle in

much the same vein, soaring while searching for its prey.

“And Arden, the eagle,” Leo finished.

“Wow, they’re beautiful. So lifelike.” She leaned forward, tracing her finger over the lion on Leo’s arm. “Did Arden tell you I saw a lion...well, thought I saw a lion last night?”

“Maybe you were just thinking of me while you were with my brother.” Leo wiggled two perfectly arched golden eyebrows.

“Don’t get your hopes up, Leo.” Jill laughed. “Besides, I didn’t know you had a lion tattoo until just now.”

Leo’s gaze remained intent on hers. “Maybe you just recognized—”

“So Jill,” Arden interrupted. “Do you have any tattoos?”

“Um, that would be a big no. Needle phobia.” She rolled her eyes. “But yours are so beautiful it makes me wish I wasn’t a scaredy-cat.” She traced her fingers along the eagle’s wings, spread wide in flight. “Let me guess, you designed them yourself, right?”

“Actually, we both did,” Leo answered. “We co-own Griffin Designs.”

“Wait a second. A lion and an eagle. The two animals together make up the mythological creature gryphon. So am I right? Is that how you two got your first names? Your parents had too much fun when they named you.” Jill sat back in her seat, proud of her deductive skills.

Arden and Leo were quiet for longer than Jill expected, yet she had a feeling they were somehow communicating. She could feel tension rising between them. But why? What had she done? “What? Am I wrong? Did I screw up my mythology?”

“No. You’re right.” Arden grinned, but it looked forced. “You just surprised us. No one’s made the connection before.”

“At least not until we told them,” Leo leaned over the table, taking Jill’s hand. “But you’re more understanding, more open-minded than everyone else.”

More understanding? Confused, Jill looked to Arden for some type of clarification.

Arden shot his brother an irate glare before taking Jill’s other hand and helping her to her feet. “Let’s go into the living room while Leo perfects dessert.”

Leo stood up, his body tight and angry. He grabbed the spaghetti platter, and strode into the kitchen. But Jill couldn’t let him clear the table all by himself, didn’t want the night to go downhill because of a dispute between the brothers she’d somehow unknowingly caused. “Where I come from, we all help.” She began stacking up the salad bowls.

“But you’re our guest, Jill,” Arden argued half-heartedly, but he followed her lead, stacking up the plates. They both filed into the kitchen, depositing tableware in the sink and dishwasher.

“Jill? What are you doing?” Leo took the last few bowls out of her hands. “Arden, don’t let her—”

“She insisted and I just can’t look her in the eye and say no.” Arden threw out the used napkins.

“I don’t blame you,” Leo agreed. “I just didn’t want the guest to see the dessert before it’s perfect.”

“Look, you two. If I’m the guest, I can do whatever I want, right?” She smiled at both of the unsuspecting brothers. They appeared startled, or unsure of themselves. She couldn’t quite put her finger on it. But at least the tension between them seemed to have dissipated. “You look like you’ve never seen a person help before.”

Arden regained himself first. “That’s probably because we haven’t.” He leaned down and touched his lips to hers. “Thank you.” His smile warmed

her from the inside out, making her heart soar.

A cork popped from a wine bottle and she turned to see Leo pouring pink liquid into three glasses. “Okay, if our dear guest still wants to be helpful, she can take one glass and bring it into the living room. But if she grabs a second, Arden and I might have to tackle her.” Leo winked as he handed the glass to Jill.

“Oh, all right. It’s killin’ me, though.” She playfully reached for a second glass, only to have Arden snatch it out of her grasp.

He laughed and looked toward Leo. “Then again, maybe I should’ve let her take it, huh?”

Jill swatted at Arden as she headed into the living room. “So, what’s this amazing dessert you two have planned?”

“An old favorite of mine. You’ll see.” Arden waited for Jill to sit down on the couch before sitting next to her, his thigh pressed against hers. He took her hand. “Are you having fun tonight? We aren’t scaring you away, right?”

“I’m having the time of my life.”

“Good,” he said as he leaned in closer. “Because I’m hoping to convince you to make this a nightly event.”

“Mmm...yes, please,” she breathed against his lips. In seconds the kiss had deepened, Arden’s body coming to rest over hers. Jill welcomed the urgency, wrapping her fingers in his hair, grinding her lips, her body, all of her against him.

“Ready?” Leo called out, footfalls entering the room.

Arden lifted himself off of Jill and gave Leo an annoyed smirk.

“Well, it looks like you two were skipping to another kind of dessert,” Leo said shamelessly.

Jill thought about being embarrassed, then changed her mind as she noticed what Leo was carrying. A silver tray full of big luscious strawberries, each dipped in chocolate. Some dark, some milk, some white and some in a combination of all three. “Oh wow, wow, wow, wow, wow...”

Leo knelt in front of her, holding the tray like an offering. “My lady.”

It was almost impossible to select only one. But a dark chocolate one had started to melt, making it look even more delicious and sinful. Unable to resist temptation, she lifted the strawberry to Arden’s lips.

He took hold of her wrist, and proceeded to eat the luscious treat from her hand. When he’d finished the fruit, he suckled each of her fingers into his mouth, then moved to her palm, licking in ever widening circles. Jill watched, awestruck, wondering if her panties were flame retardant.

“Delicious, dear brother.” Arden grinned.

“No need to brag,” Leo said. “I have no doubt Jill’s flavor surpassed that of the berries.”

Feeling a blush coming on again, Jill pulled a small white chocolate strawberry from the tray and put it in her mouth, savoring the smoothness of the chocolate and the sweetness of the berry. “Yes, Leo, the berries are absolutely delicious.” She picked up her wineglass and held it high in tribute before taking a sip. “Everything here is phenomenal.”

“Just you, Jill.” Arden sipped his wine.

She looked from brother to brother and chuckled in spite of herself. “Wow. If my mom ever found out I was alone in a house with two men, she’d run to church and beg for her daughter’s sins to be forgiven.”

Arden and Leo looked at each other for a moment and Jill couldn’t keep the words from coming out of her mouth. “Wait. Do you guys do this all the time?”

Leo answered first. “Well, we’ve both dated the same woman—”

“I just thought you might enjoy meeting my brother,” Arden interrupted, as though trying to change the subject. “And his culinary skills are the easiest thing about him to swallow.”

“Wait a second. You guys dated the same woman? At the same time?”

“Yes,” Leo replied simply.

Arden gave her an embarrassed grin. “We have the same taste in women. So, yeah, it has happened a few times.”

“And it doesn’t bother you? You two don’t get jealous of each other?”

“If the woman is happy and enjoying herself, then why should it bother us?” Leo shrugged.

Jill looked between the two of them, torn between shock and absolute fascination. They watched her expectantly, as though waiting for her to say or do something. “Well...um...that’s definitely...um...different.”

The sound of a cell phone ringing somewhere deep in the house interrupted the awkward moment. Arden set down his glass and stood up. “Sorry. That’s got to be a client. I promise I’ll be right back.” He headed down the hallway.

Jill’s gaze followed Arden until he disappeared, leaving her alone with Leo. Small talk...small talk...what could she say? “So, uh, are you guys on call all the time?” She rolled her neck, trying to loosen her muscles and avoid looking Leo in the eyes.

“It often seems that way. People get inspired at the craziest moments and forget that it’s better to email.” Leo finished his ice wine.

“Yeah, they get excited and just can’t wait to tell someone. I’ve had people leave me messages on my shop answering machine at all hours of

the night. Some people forget that you might have a life away from work.” Jill rubbed her shoulder. The wine was definitely helping, but there was still one stubborn muscle that wouldn’t relent.

“Life away from work. What a dream that would be.” Leo set his glass on a side table and walked behind Jill. She wasn’t sure where he was going until she felt a warm hand slide under where her own hand had been. “If you don’t mind, I can help you a little bit.”

Both of his hands pushed and soothed her neck and shoulders to the point where all she could do was nod and breathily reply, “Yes. I mean, no, I don’t mind.”

Maybe he had a second job as a masseuse. Jill was so lost in his touch that she couldn’t gather the words to inquire about his incredible skill. She was putty in his hands. Truly. And then her mind starting thinking sinfully again, causing wetness to pool between her thighs. She wanted Arden to come back so they could continue what they’d started last night. She wanted Leo’s hands to move from her neck and stroke every inch of her body. Closing her eyes, she lost herself in a fantasy that no good girl from West Virginia would ever think about having.

She smelled sunshine seconds before Arden’s mouth covered hers. Fantasy became reality as his tongue demanded then claimed, and she willingly opened for him. He lowered onto the couch, knees pinning her thighs, hands framing her face while he dove deeper and deeper into her mouth. And still Leo’s hands continued to work their magic, her muscles liquid beneath his palms.

A mix of contradictory emotions filled her, relaxed and comfortable, needy and desperate. It was so confusing, she didn’t know how to react, relying on instinct alone to guide her. And instinct told her she wanted to be touched by these men or her arousal would rage out of control.

Moaning her acquiescence, she tangled her fingers into Arden’s hair, holding him to her. His lips sought her neck, and his tender bites burned the skin that Leo had so recently soothed. Leo’s hands moved to the middle of her back, rubbing beneath the clasp of her bra. At some point the

top buttons on the back of her dress had been undone, and now it gaped in the front, offering Arden a view of her white lacy bra. His hands followed his eyes, cradling her breasts.

But it wasn't only Arden's fingers caressing there. Leo's hand skimmed over the lace-covered flesh, while Arden slipped her other breast from the fabric shell. Two matching growls of approval filled the air before Arden took her rigid nipple into his mouth.

Jill cried out as Arden suckled her flesh. The tiny nub was a power center of nerve endings, eliciting sensations in her clit, between her legs, down her spine...everywhere. From behind her, Leo kissed the back of her neck, one hand kneading the base of her spine. His other hand cupped and massaged, tugging on the nipple opposite Arden. With both breasts being touched, she felt like lightning bolts were striking all over her body. Each touch caused her body to shudder, her toes to curl, her fingers to wrap tighter in Arden's hair.

"Beautiful," Arden said, barely above a whisper.

So many hands, mouths, touches, her body was on overload. She gasped, lost, not knowing what to do, how to react.

The dress hung off her body, the buttons along the back now completely undone. But still, the sudden release of her bra surprised her, as both breasts spilled completely from their constraints. Two sets of hands undressed her, smoothly sliding her dress and bra down her arms, leaving her naked from the waist up.

Then Leo's hands were gone, and for a moment it was just her and Arden, his dark hair brushing against her nipples as he kissed her stomach.

Like tiny butterflies, need rippled across her skin. Everything became brilliantly clear. It was Arden she wanted. He was the reason she'd come here tonight. He was the only reason. She couldn't make it more than that.

Leo knelt next to her, fingertips tenderly brushing across her cheek then down along her collarbone. "It's too much," she whispered.

All motion stopped as both men looked at her for confirmation. She couldn't tear her gaze from Arden, his eyes full of all the emotions she remembered from last night. Jill laced her fingers with Arden's, then forced herself to meet Leo's gaze. Embarrassed at her wanton behavior, she grabbed her dress, lifting it to cover her breasts. "I-I'm sorry."

Leo nodded, a slight smile forming on his lips. "Enjoy my brother as I know he'll enjoy you." He kissed her forehead before standing up and moving away from the couch.

Jill watched Leo walk down the hall, surprised when a flicker of guilt and sorrow made her tremble. Why did she feel like she'd just made the wrong decision?

Blinking back tears, she struggled with the conflicting emotions that hadn't disappeared with Leo's exit. How could she care so deeply about both brothers already?

Bringing her attention back to just the two of them, Arden lifted their linked hands above her head and pressed his lips to hers. She saw and felt nothing but his earthy sunshine. Her senses reeled again and she let the dress drop to her waist, surrendering herself to Arden.

The dress fell to the carpet as he lifted her to her feet. Wearing nothing but sandals and a tiny scrap of white fabric, Jill felt strangely empowered. The liquid heat of Arden's gaze as he took her in from head to toe made her legs tremble, but she forced herself to remain upright as she returned his stare.

Arden pulled his shirt over his head while Jill kicked off her sandals and shimmied out of the tiny piece of lace passing as underwear. She kept an eye on Arden, admiring as each bit of flesh was revealed. Bronze skin sprinkled with dark brown curls, powerful muscles, every bit of him firm and tight. When he lowered his jeans, she sucked in a deep breath. God how she loved a man in black briefs. It was better than presents at Christmas time—and oh how she wanted to unwrap him.

As though reading her mind, he raised an eyebrow and gestured for her to approach. She'd thought she would take her time, smoothing her hands down his body, tracing each muscle, tasting him all over, but the moment she pressed her nipples against his bare flesh, they both went into a frenzy. She didn't know if Arden lifted her or if she'd climbed him, but her legs were now around his waist, her back arching as he rasped his teeth over her nipples.

They weren't speaking with words now, only desires. Too much wanting, too much need—Jill knew their first time would be as fast and furious as the feelings ripping through her. She needed that violent outlet—slow sex would probably drive her insane.

Jill slid his briefs down enough to free his cock. She couldn't see it, only feel its heat wedged between their bodies, throbbing against her clit. It was enough to make her cry out and squirm against him.

Arden groaned, his hands clamping down on her ass to keep her from moving. But that just shoved him tighter against her clit. Already over the edge, she sobbed as an orgasm shot through her body.

Unable to stop herself, she rocked against him as the tremors burst through her.

“Oh, fuck, Jill,” Arden cursed through gritted teeth. “You’re gonna make me come.”

They dropped to the couch, Jill still trembling. She needed him inside her so she could come again and again and again. This was crazy. It had never been like this before. She'd never climaxed so quickly—and never without having to help herself get there after the guy was finished.

Arden slid his briefs off completely then knelt over her. Sweat dripped down his chest, his arms trembling. “This time is gonna be fast. I’m sorry.” And in one easy thrust he was sheathed inside her.

It felt fantastic. Beyond fantastic. Out of this world. His cock slammed in and out, faster and faster, his breath coming in rapid pants against her

neck. “I want you. I can’t get enough, Jill. I just want more. More.”

His words drove her unbelievably higher and she stifled a scream. He buried his face into her neck, teeth scraping as he thrust even faster. Tilting her head to the side, she found herself staring into Leo’s eyes.

He stood in the hallway, eyes locked on their writhing bodies. She wanted to be shocked, offended, upset, but his eyes...in his eyes she saw every bare emotion she’d seen in Arden. Need, desire, and lust twisted inexplicably with fading hope. She knew that all she had to do was hold out her hand and Leo would come back and somehow, everything would be all right.

Arden trembled beneath her hands, his whole body arching as he made one final thrust. His seed shot hard and hot inside her, each liquid pulse taking her higher and higher, making her fly. With Leo filling her vision, Jill began to come, her pussy rippling, keeping Arden deep inside.

Jill shattered, her eyes slamming shut, her cries mingling with Arden’s moans. She threw out her arm, reaching for Leo.

But when she opened her eyes, he was gone.

## Chapter Five

Leo pushed open the door of *Jill's Bloomers* , silencing the welcome bells with his palm before they could chime.

Behind the counter, Jill was hard at work, her fingers wrestling with wire and green tape, a floral masterpiece in progress. She hummed along with the radio, her hips swinging from side to side. With her back to him, he was able to watch unnoticed as she continued to dance, occasionally singing along with the music.

So she was in a good mood after her late night with Arden. No surprises there. The two of them had fucked until the early hours of the morning.

Leo had watched then without her knowing, too. Well, she'd noticed once, her eyes focusing on him only while Arden rutted away inside of her. But Leo'd made sure to be out of view when her eyes opened post-climax.

Call him a detached bastard, but adding emotion into the mix right now would only fuck things up. Arden was already so wrapped up in Jill, Leo had no choice but to be the balance. The charming seducer, the guilt-free pleasure, the clinical half who could show Jill that it wasn't a competition, but a cooperative venture.

And if he gave up now, there wasn't a chance in hell of survival.

He gave the bells on the door a gentle swing, ready to announce his arrival.

Without turning, Jill called out, "I'll be right with you." She held up the stem wire she'd just attached an artsy twig to, nodded and laid it down next to a pile of purple chrysanthemums, then spun around, a welcoming smile wide on her face.

“Leo...” Her smile wavered, and she averted her gaze, a blush covering her face. “Um...so...so what brings you here?”

“I’m not exactly sure what I need. No, check that. I know what I need. Flowers.” He gestured around the store, giving her an open smile. “And your advice on everything about them.”

Wiping her hands on her apron, she lifted her gaze back to his face. “Everything?” Her lips curled upward teasingly, the blush fading to a rosy glow on each cheek. “You might want to be a bit more specific or we could be here for a while.”

“I don’t have any plans.” He chuckled when she smirked. “Okay, okay. Well, I want to impress a lady. Show my honest sincerity with the right flowers and an apology.”

“An apology? What did you do?” Jill stepped from behind the counter, but as though realizing she no longer had a barrier between them, she drew to a halt several feet away from him.

He smiled, trying to find the best angle of approach. “Hmmm... Let’s just say I may have gone too far, too fast.”

“All right then.” Her eyes narrowed. Had she figured out the real reason behind his visit, or was she being the good salesperson and trying to decide which flowers would do the trick?

In any case, he knew he couldn’t screw this up. “I know you probably get this question all the time from guys like me, but what kind of flowers would you want someone to get for you?”

She crossed her arms over her chest. “That depends who’s giving them.”

“Really?”

“Well, yeah. Any guy who buys me flowers knows going in that I own a flower shop. How can he get me something that I haven’t seen before? I don’t get flowers. I get chocolates.” She laughed. “But we’re not talking

about me, are we?” She unabashedly looked him straight in the eye.

Damn, she was quite a challenge, keeping him on his toes. “But would that mean you’d want the most beautiful blossom in the store or...”

“A pot of dirt? A wilted lilac?” she quipped.

“You’re not helping,” he sang.

“And make your job easier? Now why would I do that?” She cocked an eyebrow, her eyes sparkling mischievously.

“Because that’s *your* job.” He lifted his eyebrow and matched her stance.

“Okay, okay.” She laughed. “Does this...*mystery* lady...like you?”

“Well, that remains to be seen.”

She nodded. “Okay...does she think whatever you did was so awful?”

“I hope not.” In spite of himself, he moved closer, nearly towering over her. He stepped back. Crowding her now would be a big mistake.

In a surprising turn, she regained the space he’d put between them and placed one finger dead center of his chest. “Then I think you should pick out the flower or flowers that most remind you of her. Women like that kind of stuff, you know.”

“Wow. Tall order.” Leo swallowed and his mind raced for a winning response. “I think I’m going to have to buy the whole store because in each flower, I can find something that reminds me of her.”

Jill made a muffled snort, and started to pull away. “You’re so full of...”

He pinned her retreating hand between both of his. “Okay, you want the truth? There isn’t a flower here that touches on what I feel for this woman. I’m completely in awe. She’s got me mesmerized by the look in her eyes when she laughs, the way she turns pink from head to toe when she’s

embarrassed. I'm absolutely addicted." He brought her hand to his lips and kissed it before continuing in a whisper, "She's so damn special and if I don't get a chance to make things right, I'll lose my mind."

"I think you just did," she whispered, her fingers curling around his hand.

"So am I forgiven for overstaying my welcome last night?"

The door behind him jingled and he swallowed a curse as Jill jumped away from him. So damn close! He turned to see a woman with pink and purple spiked hair striding into the shop, her eyes widening as she looked between the two of them.

"Carrie!" Jill exclaimed. "Umm...done with the early deliveries already?"

"Sure am, boss lady," the multicolored Carrie replied. "I'm ready for the afternoon run. That is if I'm not interrupting any—"

"Nope. Everything's ready," Jill said overly cheery, dashing behind the counter, handing Carrie a stack of papers.

While Jill was occupied, Leo glanced around the shop, compelled to locate the perfect flower. A single peach daisy—the only one of its kind he could see—called out to him. He plucked it from its display vase and stepped up to the register where Jill and Carrie were going through orders.

Carrie looked up at his approach. "Well, I'll just be in the back room...taking my time...getting the flowers...doing my job...not bothering you..." Grinning, she disappeared through a swinging door.

Jill turned back to Leo and paused when she saw the flower in his hand. He pulled out his wallet, and as she wrapped up the flower and rang him up he said casually, "You know, I think this might be the one. At first glance, you're struck by its simple beauty. Then the more you hold it, you realize that it's exactly what you're looking for."

She handed the flower to him with a gentle smile. "I hope it is, too."

He took the flower. "Seeing as how I somewhat overstayed my welcome last night...and I'm sorry about that." He handed the flower right back to her. "I'm hoping it won't keep you from coming over tonight."

In an unconscious gesture, she lifted the flower to her face and inhaled. Her eyes met his calculatingly over the peach bloom. "Okay, I'll be there. But I'm bringing dinner this time."

"Ouch!" He grabbed at his heart. "You didn't like our cooking?"

She laughed, her carefree attitude returning. "You know I loved it. But tonight it's my turn."

"If you insist."

"I do."

"Then I'll be waiting anxiously." Caught up in the moment, he leaned down to kiss her, but just before their lips met he changed his mind, not wanting to scare her away. When she didn't retreat, the urge to kiss her grew stronger, but he held back, knowing the anticipation would make tonight more memorable. "Thank you."

"You're welcome." She breathed the words against his mouth before pulling away. "I'll see you tonight."

He nodded and headed out of the store, a grin creeping over his face. Hot damn, that had been a bigger thrill than he'd expected. There was more to Jill than appearances implied. Shutting him down, making him really work to win her over...the chase was always better when they put up a fight. The blood raced through his veins at the challenge that awaited him tonight.

Leo glanced up at the eagle flying overhead. *One step closer...*

\* \* \* \* \*

The moment Leo walked out the front door, Carrie erupted from the

backroom. Not that this was unusual for her. Carrie was a walking entertainment center—approaching everything in life with a through-the-roof level of energy and enthusiasm. She hiked herself onto the counter, next to where Jill stood. “Hello! He was good. Smooth as buttah! And not that crappy diet stuff I’ve been eatin’ lately. I mean, I was gonna get up on him, all flowers and apology hottie, if you didn’t—and you know I don’t do dick.” Turning her head sideways and using her hand, she mimed a blowjob. “So I take it Mr. Blond and Beautiful is the reason you’ve been bouncing around here the last couple days?”

Jill nodded absentmindedly, watching as Leo paused outside her door and looked into the sky. He tipped his head, his white blond hair shining like spun gold in the sunlight. Then he was gone, disappearing around the corner.

“That’s it. My boss has finally found a man who makes her cream. Fuck yeah! You get him, girl. Make him show you a real good time. I’ll just go home to my vibrator...alone...and jealous.” Carrie hopped off the counter and swept Jill into the air, smashing her in a bear hug. “I’ll be out doing deliveries, but if you decide you want to leave early to do the horizontal mambo, I’ll cover for ya.” Carrie danced into the backroom, preparing to load the delivery van.

Jill took a shaky breath, inhaling the light scent of the Gerbera daisy. There could be no misconstruing what she’d just agreed to. She wasn’t only dating Arden anymore—she was dating both brothers.

Obviously she’d lost her mind sometime in the last ten minutes. Why would she agree to a situation so far beyond the boundaries of a normal relationship?

Five hours later as she walked up to their house, Jill still didn’t have an answer to that question. But being around Arden and Leo made her happy. Since they’d never once tried to force her into something she didn’t want, she felt safe to explore this twofold relationship.

Arms full of three large sodas and Chinese food, Jill leaned over precariously and rang the doorbell. The door swung open, Leo coming to

her rescue.

“Whoa! Jill, you under there somewhere? Let me get that for you.” He chuckled as he gathered the bags from her.

“Hey, when I say I’m bringing food, I bring food. No one goes hungry under my watch.” She closed the door and followed Leo into the kitchen. He looked incredible tonight, wearing a long-sleeve button-down maroon shirt that emphasized his beautiful blond hair and blue jeans that had a comfortable worn appeal to them. He was barefoot, and for some bizarre reason Jill found that incredibly endearing—maybe Leo would finally stop putting on airs trying to impress her.

He set the bags down and dug through them. “Which army are we feeding? Or did you just bring a ton of food so you never have to leave?”

Jill grinned sheepishly. “Okay, the truth is when I ordered the family-size meal, I had no idea it would feed a family of twenty.”

“Dammit. I was hoping you were staying indefinitely.” Leo pouted.

Laughing, she glanced around the room. “Where’s Arden?”

“M.I.A.” At her quick look, he shrugged. “It’s coming down to the wire on an important project.”

“Oh.” Which would explain why Arden hadn’t been the one to make the date with her tonight. It felt strange though, like she was cheating on him. Did he even know she was here?

“Hey, there.” Leo swiped his thumb across her lip, and she realized she’d been nervously biting it. “He has to come home sometime.”

His thumb continued to smooth over her lip, back and forth, back and forth. It was hypnotic, the glide of flesh over flesh. She swallowed hard, trying to regain some control over the situation. It didn’t work. The heat from his gaze, his touch, blazed a path of reckless need through her body, making her breasts tingle. How could she fight these traitorous desires?

She didn't need to look down to know that her nipples were straining to break through her turtleneck. Geesh! She hadn't even been in the house for two minutes and she was already horny.

Forcing an unaffected smile, she said, "I hope he'll be hungry."

Leo's amber eyes darkened. "I'm sure that won't be a problem." He withdrew his hand, and his behavior returned to that of the gracious host. "I thought we could eat outside, if that's okay with you."

"Sounds fantastic." Jill grabbed the sodas while Leo picked up the bag of food and they exited to the backyard.

A table was already set up, a bottle of wine chilling in an ice bucket, a dozen candles under glass hurricane shades lighting up the darkness. There were three place settings. Relief skittered down her spine. Obviously, Leo expected Arden to be home any minute.

They dug into their food, the earlier awkwardness disappearing. Leo was the charmer she knew he could be, but she still couldn't help but miss Arden. Last night had been so memorable—the unbelievable dinner combined with the brothers' flirting and antics—tonight seemed almost solemn in comparison. It made her appreciate how well the brothers worked together.

"This food is delicious. Good choice, Jill." Leo raised his soda in a mock toast. "Too bad my brother's missing it."

"Yeah, it is too bad, isn't it? Tons of food and this incredible wine. Is he working with a client on a website?"

"Honestly, I'm not sure on all the details. This one's his pet. Usually, I reel people in and get them started and then Arden irons out the details and we start doing whatever's necessary. This time, I'm on the outside anxiously looking in. It's a big project and I don't want to sabotage all the work he's put into it."

"Does he work late a lot?"

“We both do.”

“On the same projects?”

“Sometimes. We tend to switch jobs from creative to technical all the time.” Leo poured himself another glass of wine. “But I usually do the ads and he does the web stuff.”

“That’s good. Maybe I could hire him to redo my website. It’s pretty boring. He could probably add some real life to it.”

“I’m sure he could.” Leo took a long drink of his wine. “I’d be happy to help, too.” He grinned. “Maybe we could trade. You teach me more about flowers, I’ll help you with your website.”

“I don’t know,” she teased. “Sounds like I’m getting a raw deal. You don’t seem like someone who could easily be taught. Arden, however—”

“Ouch! You wound me!” He shook his head, a self-deprecating smirk on his face.

“Sorry.” She bit her lip to keep from laughing out loud and raised her wineglass. “To friends and flowers.”

Leo clinked his glass against hers and they both took a drink.

When the phone inside the house rang, Jill was stunned to see that an hour had passed since they’d started eating. She could’ve spent all night talking to Leo. He’d captivated her, made her laugh and even surprised her. There was a lot more to him than just a pretty face, broad shoulders and a tight ass. A lot more...and she was infatuated with the whole package.

Leo pushed out of his chair. “Maybe that’s my brother.” He strode into the house, returning seconds later with the phone, holding it out to her. “Arden, wanting to beg your forgiveness, I’m sure.” When she took the phone, Leo began clearing the table.

“Hey, beautiful,” Arden said. “Turns out I’m missing a really good time, huh?”

“Hey yourself.” Jill smiled. “‘Bout time we heard from you. I thought maybe I’d scared you away.”

“Never,” he stated emphatically. “Never. I mean that. You have no idea how badly I want to be there with you right now. This damn...” He paused and Jill could envision him running his hand through his hair. “Is Leo being good to you?”

Jill met Leo’s eyes and smiled. “Perfect host.”

“He’ll take care of you. I promise. You can trust him...with everything.”

Jill shivered involuntarily. Interesting word choice. “So will I see you tonight?” she asked.

“Tell me you’ll be there waiting and I’ll be there as soon as I can.”

“I’ll be here,” she whispered and Leo nodded his approval.

“Good,” Arden replied, sounding relieved. “Until then, have fun with my brother.”

“Yeah...okay. See you soon.” Awareness rippled over her flesh as they said their goodbyes.

“Everything okay?” Leo covered her hand with his as he took the phone.

She studied him in the soft glow of the candlelight. Something in his demeanor had changed in the last hour. His expression was open and honest...and a little bit resigned. Like he’d finally let down his guard and was willing to let her see the real Leo. Without his charmer façade, he bewitched her mind, body and soul.

“Yeah. Everything’s great.” She smiled up at him. “Ready to go inside?”

He grinned, offering his arm. “Sounds like a plan.”

She threaded her arm through his. Clutching his forearm, she stood up, walking with him into the house.

## Chapter Six

Now Leo knew what it was like to be a death row prisoner starting his walk to the execution chamber. Helpless. Hopeless. Resigned to his fate.

Even though he'd hoped for a stay of execution, time was drawing to a close, and he had yet to win Jill over.

He'd thought it would be easy, charm her like he'd charmed all the others. Hell, none of those women had come through in the end either—so who was to say it hadn't been his fault all along? He'd always found women willing to offer their bodies. Now he and Arden had found one who would offer her heart—but only to one of them. Second place had never felt so fucking horrible.

You better be good to her. Arden's voice forced its way into Leo's head.

Like he needed this now. *I can't work if you're going to fuck with me. You're forgetting I need this as much as you do.* He shoved all doubt to the back of his mind. He couldn't lose. To Jill he said, "We've got a little time to kill before Arden gets here. Care to watch a movie in the meantime? There's a home theater upstairs."

"Sure. But are you an action adventure guy, or are you comfortable enough in your masculinity to watch a chick flick without getting embarrassed?" She headed toward the stairway.

Leo grinned as they climbed the stairs to the black box room. "I refuse to answer your question on the basis that it could incriminate me later." Jill laughed out loud and Leo continued, pointing at the DVD collection. "But I'll let you choose the movie anyway."

"You're in trouble now," Jill teased as she began going through the DVDs.

Arden was restless, it was too obvious. Leo felt the tension, adding to his own. *I'm coming home* ,Arden declared.

No, you're not. If you don't get your emotions in check, we could lose her. Let's not do that.

Leo, this is not some kind of game. Don't you dare hurt her. If you're just going to fuck her and—

Give me a little credit. If you want this to work, you won't barge in here. You won't screw this up.

“Wow! Your collection's not half bad. I've heard great things about *The Color of Rain* . That okay with you?” Jill asked.

Dammit Leo. If you can't treat her with respect, then we need to end this charade now and let her go.

Arden, hear me well. I'm not gonna discuss this. I only needed you to call her because it looked like she was still uneasy about us. Now let me do what I need to do and stay out of it. Leo hid his rage and nodded at Jill. “Yeah, *The Color of Rain* sounds great. I haven't watched it yet so it'll be new for both of us.”

Jill stood up and playfully tossed the DVD case at him. “I'm gonna get comfortable while you do the manly job of starting up the player.” She brushed past him and bounced over to the curved theater-style couch.

Arden refused to let go. *I'd rather you sent her home than let her get hurt.*

You've made that pretty damn clear. Now listen to me. I will not *hurt her*, Arden. *Let me work*. Leo terminated their telepathic connection. He couldn't deal with two conversations at once. Especially not where Jill was concerned. He needed to focus on her completely. Hell, he wanted to focus on her completely and skip the movie, but that would make his intentions too obvious.

She was quiet as he put in the DVD and set it to play. Too quiet. He turned to see what she was doing and caught her watching him. Smiling, she patted the sofa next to her.

Jill had taken off her shoes and socks, curling her legs up underneath her. She looked completely comfortable, as if she were where she belonged. Like he could come home from work every day and see her sitting there in her faded blue jeans and light blue turtleneck, smiling at him, making him feel like a million bucks.

God, he was thinking like Arden now. When he sat down next to her, he placed a hand over hers. “I guess I’m practically the consolation prize, huh? Sorry about that.” He kept his tone light, wishing he’d thought more clearly before opening his big dumb mouth. Too many of Arden’s words were echoing in his head. Too much pressure. Too much fucking pressure. Did Arden have any idea how much extra pressure he’d introduced? As if there wasn’t already a ton.

“No, Leo, I—”

“It’s okay, Jill. Really. Just like last night, I understand.”

“But last night, I wasn’t sure.”

“It’s okay. You don’t need to explain.”

She continued slightly above a whisper. “Tonight, I’m sure.”

The movie opened with a silhouette of lovers on a beach in the surf underneath a brilliant twilight sky. The credits ended and the lovers walked from the water, still caressing each other, into a house on the beach. The scene cut to them in a large shower, washing each other, loving each other with their hands and lips.

It took those few minutes for Leo to process what Jill had said. Thinking he must have misunderstood, he faced her, and was further surprised to see that she wasn’t watching the movie. She was turned sideways, elbow resting on the back of the couch, an amused smile on her face, watching

him. He tried to get his mouth working, but the only thing that came out was a lame, “I had no idea.”

“I know.” She let out a carefree laugh then reached out and began playing with his hair, her fingers twisting and tangling in the long strands. She looked like an angel—no make that a nymph—enjoying the simple pleasure of stroking his hair. His cock, already stirring because of the love play on the screen, surged to life.

And that’s when he noticed all the subtle nuances he’d somehow been blind to before now. Her eyes were stormy, mouth parted, breath coming in soft pants. Even in the darkened room her nipples were visible, rigid beneath the tight cotton.

He’d never felt so absorbed with a woman before, and still the only place they touched was her hand in his hair. He wanted to hold onto the moment, study it, try to understand what made this—her—different, but on a soft sigh of need, she closed the distance between them and pressed her lips to his.

It was the sweetest damn kiss he’d ever received. Full soft lips tenderly brushing his. There was no demand, no rush to get past the necessary first step of the kiss and on to the fucking. She breathed hope into him, the final chance he’d thought most likely lost. It was like she was awakening him from a nightmare, pulling him from a dark place into her sweetness and light. He wrapped his arms around her, holding her to him, not wanting to ever let go.

Sinking back into the couch, he kept her with him, wanting to feel her weight above him, covering him, their scents mingling before they mated. He slid a hand under her turtleneck, fingers running up and down her spine. She arched and purred, completely malleable to his touch. With his other hand he cradled her neck, holding her in place so he could delve deeper into her mouth.

When her lips parted and her tongue danced with his, he drank his first taste of pure joy and it made him want to laugh out loud. He knew he was thinking like a lunatic, but it didn’t matter. Arden had been right. Jill was

the one they'd waited their lifetime for.

Leo couldn't get enough of her flavor; it was a drug, a need so pure he couldn't deny himself. And she kept providing him with more things to get addicted to. Soft moans, ragged sighs, the press of her flesh against his. It could never be enough.

She maneuvered her hands between their bodies, and within a minute his shirt was unbuttoned and spread open, baring his chest. She tried to pull her mouth from his, and when he wouldn't relent, she lightly bit his lip. He grunted and let her go, and she laughed.

"Minx."

Laughing again, she lowered her mouth to his chest. All he could do was moan. So fucking sweet. Her hands, fingers and lips slowly traced over every muscle, every contour of flesh. His dick was so hard it would take hours for him to lose his erection. Hours he planned to spend buried deep inside her body. Anywhere, everywhere, wherever she would take him.

Maybe he'd let Arden join them. Maybe not. He wanted time to pleasure her alone. At least a little time, he knew they couldn't spare much, but he wanted to know when she moaned, that those sounds were his alone to enjoy.

"My turn, Jill."

She lifted her head from his chest, her lips swollen, eyes smoky with desire. When his hands grasped the bottom of her turtleneck, she nodded in agreement and lifted her arms. He tugged the tight fabric over her head, then stared in awe at what was revealed. Beautiful opalescent skin, luscious curves...a true feminine beauty. As he stared, her skin grew pink, but as though denying her embarrassment she reached behind her and undid her bra, sliding it down her arms and tossing it to the floor.

Bared from the waist up, she was truly glorious. Her breasts were slightly larger than he usually liked, but on her, he couldn't imagine wanting anything different. He instinctually reached out to possess one of them.

She inhaled sharply as he thumbed her tight bud. Her dusky rose areola darkened to deep plum at her nipple, her generous breast spilling over his palm. He wanted to take all night to learn, taste, touch all of her soft curves. He'd seen her nude the night before, but now that she wanted him in return, he found it difficult to restrain himself, to make the night last rather than burn up in a fiery flash.

They both turned toward the forgotten movie as the moans of the onscreen lovers became more than they could ignore. The woman was on her knees in front of the man, taking his dick deep into her mouth. Leo's cock jumped as he imagined Jill taking him that way. He cursed. "I had no idea this was a porno marketed as an art film."

"I did," Jill whispered.

Surprised, Leo looked back at Jill. Her eyes were still focused on the screen, her breath coming faster and faster. Damn, she had picked this one on purpose. He would use it to his advantage.

Shrugging off his shirt, he moved behind her and murmured into her ear. "Stand up."

Her feet fell to the floor and she stood up, facing away from him. He moved to the edge of the couch, and from behind unbuttoned her jeans, lowering the zipper, sliding his hands between denim and hot flesh. When the curve of her ass was revealed, he leaned in, kissing the base of her spine. She shivered, legs trembling. As he pushed her jeans to the floor, he knelt behind her trailing kisses along the backs of her legs, taking special care in the sensitive spot behind her knees. She laughed and moaned, swaying beneath his touch. Finally the jeans were removed and she stepped out of them. She started to turn, but he stopped her, steadying her by placing his hands on her thighs. "Stay right there."

God, now he knew why some men became submissives. Kneeling behind this woman, staring up at her naked flesh, he knew he'd do whatever she commanded. He slid his hands from the outside of her thighs inward, one hand tracing her folds, landing over her clit. She let out a quiet moan and shifted her legs, inviting him to further claim her. Oh dear God, did Jill

have any idea what she was doing to him?

Her gaze strayed over to the movie. The woman lay spread-eagle on a bed, the man's head buried between her legs.

"Like what you see, sweet Jill?" Leo kissed the back of her thigh as he caressed her swollen bud with his finger.

Her only answer was a moan.

"Lean forward, sweetheart, and brace yourself on the couch. Just like that. Good girl. Now spread your legs. God, you're so damn beautiful."

She did what he asked, her gaze flitting from him to the screen and back again. Bending over with legs splayed, she gave him access to her beautiful pink pussy, wetness coating her swollen lips.

With tender care he placed his hands just above her knees, running upward, then back over her ass. Damn, she was gorgeous. He moved closer, inhaling deeply of her arousal. Pure, sweet honey. He had to have a taste.

Slowly, he outlined her lips with his tongue, then explored between them, the entrance to her cunt. Absolutely divine. He'd never tasted such lustful candy.

Swirling his tongue, drawing her juices into his mouth, he dove deeper. She gasped and fell to her elbows, her legs threatening to bend. He grasped her knees, supporting her weight and holding her to him. She was like a drug. The more he tasted her, the more she consumed him, the more he wanted to give her everything he had. A strange euphoria washed over him as she writhed and mewled under his exploration of her canal. He'd never found himself so wanting to please a woman that he felt his control waning. He could vaguely hear the onscreen lovers, the woman's moans had turned to screams.

Or wait. Was that Jill?

“Leo!” His name fluttered from deep within her throat as her pussy began spasming around his tongue, drenching it in delicious drops of her wetness.

How he wished his cock was tight inside her sheath as it contracted. He continued to drown in her flavor as the waves of orgasm hit her, renewing the frenzy in her cunt.

Dammit. He needed her. He needed her now.

As he began moving his body up her legs, she took her weight back onto her feet and elbows. In the blink of an eye, he managed to yank down his jeans, free himself from his briefs. He slid his cock along her inner thigh slick with sweat and juices, burning in her heat, desperate to lose himself in her liquid velvet. As soon as his shaft reached her drenched folds, he moaned. She responded by rocking her ass against his hips and tilting downward. He buried himself to the hilt, her luscious pussy rippling and tightening around him. They both cried out at the sudden overwhelming pleasure.

She was his now—theirs now. God willing, they’d convince her to stay with them when everything about them changed.

## Chapter Seven

Jill curled her fingers into the soft leather of the couch. It was the only thing she could grasp onto as the world spun beautifully around her. Everything felt so good, the pleasure near violent in its intensity. Part of her felt disconnected from her body, floating on pure ecstasy while the rest of her reveled in every thrust of Leo's shaft deep into her pussy, his sharp groans when he seated himself completely inside, and the sound his testicles made as they rhythmically slapped against her.

She had only a few seconds to comprehend the pounding of footsteps running up the stairs. Throwing her gaze toward the doorway, she saw Arden round the corner into the room, completely naked. And very aroused. His cock towered straight out from the dark curls covering his groin. But there was also an air of wild desperation about him. The minimal light coming from the movie didn't allow her to see his eyes. Was he angry? Hurt?

Leo must have sensed her worry because he slowed his thrusts until he was barely moving within her, letting go of her hip with one hand and soothing down her spine. She shivered as Arden stalked toward them. Had she made the wrong decision?

Arden knelt next to her, his strong hands brushing sweat soaked strands of hair off her face. He ran kisses over her forehead, eyes, cheeks, murmuring, "Sweet beautiful Jill. God how I want you." He stopped kissing her, looking deep into her eyes. "Will you take us both tonight? Let us take care of you?"

"Yes," she gasped, nodding her head in case he didn't understand. "Yes."

Relief and lust shone in Arden's dark eyes as he leaned in and kissed her, his tongue claiming her mouth with the same possessiveness that Leo laid claim to her pussy. She was pinned, unable to move forward or back, left

only to accept and enjoy every blast of pleasure their touches evoked.

Arden's hands cupped her breasts, his thumbs lightly stroking her erect nipples. It was like adding flame to the fire already burning so hot inside her. She whimpered into his mouth, her body trembling. All of her muscles quivered. She wouldn't be able to hold herself up much longer.

Leo groaned, his fingers digging into her hips. "Fuck Jill, you feel too damn good. Dammit, I can't—" With a ragged moan, Leo spurted hot seed into her channel.

Pulling her mouth from Arden's, she cried out at the liquid invasion. The stream of Leo's come shooting hard against her womb created a ripple effect throughout her body, tearing another orgasm from her soul.

Unable to hold herself up any longer, she crumpled onto the couch, her head landing on Arden's chest. Leo slumped over her, their bodies still attached.

"I just need to pass out for a couple minutes," she mumbled between deep gulps of air. She closed her eyes, listening to the rapid beat of Arden's heart.

Jill didn't think she'd slept, at least not for more than a few minutes. Somewhere in the back of her consciousness she heard Leo get up and the sound of a door sliding open. Arden shifted her into his arms and stood up, carrying her with him. She snuggled against his chest, loving his familiar scent.

Cool air washed over her, awakening her completely from her orgasm-induced daze. She opened her eyes as Arden stepped outside onto a balcony.

"Um, Arden. Naked. Outside. People..." Feeling even more nude than she had just moments ago in the house, she tried to cover all her pertinent parts.

"It's okay. No one can see us. Well, not unless they're really trying," Leo

answered.

Jill turned her head in the direction of Leo's voice, finding him sprawled comfortably in a spa. Steam rose from the hot water, misting in the air around them. The spa was surrounded on three sides by wood paneling, sheltering it from the wind and any neighbors with voyeuristic tendencies. Although somehow she had a feeling the brothers didn't have the paneling to protect their virtue. Being naked outside didn't seem to bother them in the slightest.

"Give me the word and we'll go back inside," Arden said. "I just thought—"

"No, it's fine. Really. It just surprised me." She smiled up at him. "And by the way, I feel ridiculous holding a conversation with you while you're carrying me and standing naked on the balcony for all the world to see."

"It doesn't bother me." Arden winked. "Besides, I like carrying you, especially when you're like this...all sleepy-eyed and sated."

She stuck out her tongue at him and he laughed. "Okay, fine, he-man. I'll admit it. I was kinda out of it post...um...coitus." She felt the heat of a blush staining her cheeks. Sheesh! After what she'd just done, how could she still feel embarrassed? "But I'm all back to normal now and fully capable of walking."

"Damn Leo, you must have been lacking if she's already back to normal." Arden smirked as he climbed the steps to the spa.

"Well, shit, I guess we'll just have to try harder then." Leo stood up and for a second Jill was entranced by the water sluicing down his very nice body. Just like the first time she'd seen him, he mesmerized her with his overwhelming and commanding presence. Leo continued, "Wouldn't want her walking away from us before morning."

"Ha ha, very funny," Jill intoned. "You can put me down now, Arden."

"Okay." With an impious grin, Arden pretended to toss her into the spa,

making her shriek. Instead, he handed her off to Leo who lowered her onto his lap under the water. He was already erect, his cock nudging her thigh. The stamina of these men.

“Oh...” she sighed as the hot water coaxed her into submission. “I was going to be mad at you two for teasing me, but now I don’t even have the energy to care.”

“You don’t need energy,” Arden said. “We’ll take care of you.”

Between lowered eyelids she watched Arden begin to climb into the spa. His erection looked almost painful. She shook her head and slid off Leo’s lap. “Stop right there.”

Arden looked at her questioningly as he stood half-in, half-out of the water. He was truly a work of art, chiseled muscles, dark curls sprinkled over his chest, down his stomach, trailing to the masterpiece below. With the steam rising around him he looked like something out of a dream. But it wasn’t a dream—tonight, both of these men were hers.

A drop of pre-ejaculate glistened at the tip of Arden’s cock. Just the thought of taking him orally made her pussy clench longingly and a shiver race down her spine. It surprised her just how sexually open she was with these men. It was a side of herself she’d never known existed.

“I want to take care of you now,” she said, kneeling on a small shelf in front of Arden.

He looked down at her, those gorgeous dark eyes of his so full of lustful adoration she could barely breathe. He didn’t say a word, just sat down on the edge, his feet dangling in the water, spreading his legs so she could settle between them.

Keeping her balance by grasping the powerful muscles of Arden’s thighs, she wrapped her mouth around the head of his cock. Her tongue circled the tip, tasting his essence. Expecting to find it bitter, she was surprised that the salty taste didn’t bother her and in fact, she enjoyed it. She suckled him deeper into her mouth, wanting to taste all of him at once. His low rumble

of approval urged her on, as did his hand weaving through her hair, encouraging her to continue. She could feel the tension in his body, the tremble of muscles tight and desperate for release as he fought the urge to thrust into her.

She loved his texture, smooth velvet over hard steel. Using her tongue, she traced along the engorged veins of his shaft until she'd reached the base. Wanting to explore even further, she curled her fingers through his coarse, dark hair, then followed it lower to his sac, rolling the flesh over her palm. His breath hissed out between clenched teeth as she took his cock deep into her mouth again, while her hands caressed his balls. Arden's musky smell—that enticing mix of male, desire, sex, power—surrounded her, and she felt the evidence of her arousal building inside like a dam waiting to burst.

Desperation growing, her ass thrashed in and out of the water as she worked Arden harder, her body searching for a way to ease her ache. Fingers gripped her hips, stilling her frantic motions. Leo smoothed his hands over her rear, spreading her cheeks. She didn't have any time to comprehend what was happening before something warm and wet soothed her tiny hole. Oh dear God, Leo was licking her *there*. And it felt good. So unbelievably good. How could something so immoral feel so fantastic? She couldn't hold back her moan of absolute pleasure. It vibrated up Arden's length, and he reacted instantly.

Groaning, Arden stopped holding back, beginning to plunge in and out of her mouth with short, quick jabs. Leo continued to circle her anus with his tongue. Jill didn't know what would happen next; her skin felt too tight for her body, her ears buzzing, body trembling. Not an orgasm, at least not like she was used to. This didn't end; it just kept building, growing stronger and stronger.

Arden's whole body grew rigid and he shouted, his seed shooting into her mouth. It came so fast she almost choked, but she carefully swallowed, continuing to manipulate his flesh until he finished. Arden stroked her hair, finally lifting her face from his shaft. He dropped from the edge of the spa and into the water, gifting her with a tender kiss. "Thank you," he murmured against her lips.

Jill couldn't answer, strung tight on the edge of something unexplainable. Replacing his tongue with his finger, Leo began a gentle massage, one finger pressing into her hole. Involuntarily she tightened up, offering resistance against the foreign invasion. He calmed her, making soothing noises while layering kisses along her spine. He kept up the light touches against her anus, while Arden joined his brother, his hand beginning a similar massage around her clit. It felt so good, those matching touches, she could barely breathe. If Leo and Arden weren't holding her, she probably would have sunk beneath the water.

She almost did fall when Leo's finger slipped past the barrier and entered her tight hole. Whimpering, she rocked back and forth, wanting more, wanting less, needing an explanation for all the contradicting waves of pain and pleasure that felt too good to ignore. Leo pressed his finger deeper, then retreated, a cautious in and out. The more he moved, the better it felt as her body adjusted to the intrusion.

Arden reached out of the tub, handing a bottle to Leo. Warm oil trickled down her crack, and Leo rubbed the oil over and into her sensitive flesh. He retreated completely and for a moment she felt bereft and empty. Then something larger nudged against her opening. Even though she'd known this was coming, his girth scared her. How could she take him that way?

He must have covered his cock with the same oil, because he was slick against her anus. Slowly, cautiously, he pressed forward, gently invading her. She gasped as her muscles fought against his presence, while the rest of her welcomed it. Forcing herself to relax, Leo pushed deeper with small, digging thrusts. Her arms trembled, body shuddering as he seated himself all the way in.

Once there he didn't move, giving her time to adjust. It burned and ached, being stretched so tight. She shifted, trying to acclimate herself. The longer he was there, the more intense her desire grew. Her skin was hot, sensitive, needy.

"Leo...Arden...please..." Jill didn't recognize the husky, ragged voice as her own, didn't even know what she was begging for, only knowing that if

they didn't do something her body was going to explode or implode or burst into flames—whatever happened, with all the pressure building inside, she figured she was going to take out half of Talisman Bay with her.

Arden sank two fingers into her pussy and began thrusting in and out, Leo matching the motions. Desperately she reached out, her hand circling Arden's shaft. He was still semi-hard, even after his orgasm. "Now...Arden, I want you now. Both of you..."

He kissed her again, this time delving into her mouth. His hands cradled her cheeks, holding her still so he could sink deeper and deeper inside of her. While he kissed her, their sexes found each other beneath the water and she lowered herself onto his cock, her pussy stretching to accommodate him. The two brothers moved in unison, taking her, breaking her down. It was an assault on her heart, a discovery that she craved forever with these men. Tears ran down her cheeks as she kissed Arden back, wishing she could kiss Leo too, wishing there was some way she could explain to them that she somehow, inexplicably had fallen in love with them both.

Reaching up and behind her, she wrapped one arm around Leo, the other around Arden. She was a conduit; every movement made felt by all three of them.

Leo kissed her neck, nibbling and loving her skin. She broke from Arden's kiss, turning her head to kiss Leo. He worshiped her just as possessively, claiming her mouth with as much ardor as he claimed her ass. Arden's teeth scraped down her exposed neck, suckling the skin where it met her shoulders.

Everything became a blur of feeling, motion, friction. The orgasm surged from deep inside her, shimmering outward like a great blast of light, ricocheting through her and into Leo and Arden. As though merging into one, they came together, hot liquid pulsing fire. She was trembling, soaring, flying, bound to the men she loved.

\* \* \* \* \*

They lay in euphoric silence, the only sound the gentle lap of water stirred up by their desperate lovemaking. Arden's heart returned to its normal steady rhythm, but the rest of him felt different...content...complete. He caressed Jill's shoulder, never wanting to be separated from her, but the water's flow created an easy disengagement. She sweetly sighed, lowering her head to his shoulder. One of her hands tangled with Leo's, keeping the three of them connected.

Leo's voice slammed into Arden's head, shattering the blissful afterglow. *Do you feel different? Is the change happening?*

Arden forced his thoughts away from how Jill made him feel and focused inward. Muscles rhythmically tightened and released, contracting of their own accord, making concentration difficult. It felt similar to the moments just before he shifted form. Had Jill broken the curse? He met Leo's intent gaze. *I feel different...better...more alive.*

We need to tell her, Leo warned, his eyes fierce. A muscle ticked in his jaw, and his teeth clenched. Whatever was happening to them, Leo was feeling it, too. *We're in too deep now. She needs to know.*

I know. Arden kissed the top of Jill's head. Her breathing had deepened, her warm exhalations caressing his neck. She was asleep, or close to it, oblivious to the damning situation brewing around her. God, more than anything, he didn't want to disrupt what might be their last peaceful moments together.

But Leo broke the silence. "Jill, you're amazing. We knew you were the one."

She let out a muffled sigh, rubbing her face against Arden's neck.

Giving Leo a quelling look, Arden stroked down her spine, hoping his touches could gentle the blow their confession would impart. "I've never felt like this before." He paused to take a breath, to gather his thoughts, to find a way of easing into the heart of the matter. "We've never felt like this before."

“And that’s exactly why we need to tell you something,” Leo finished.

Lifting her head from Arden’s shoulder, Jill blinked away grogginess. She stretched languorously and gave them a sheepish grin. “I’m sorry. I guess my lack of sleep over the past few nights is finally getting to me. What did you need to tell me?”

So sweet, so beautiful, so innocent. He didn’t want what he loved about her to become fractured when the truth surfaced. “Something we should have told you before things went this far...”

“We’ve got a secret we’ve been keeping for eighteen years,” Leo offered, softening his words by stroking her arm from shoulder to wrist.

Arden took a deep breath, shouldering the burden of revealing their first lie. “We’re not brothers.”

“You aren’t brothers?” She scrutinized Leo, then Arden, her eyes growing wide. “Are you...are you lovers?”

“No. We’re not lovers...we’re not brothers. It’s confusing.” Leo gripped her hand and met her worried gaze. “We’re cursed.”

“C-cursed?” Jill repeated. Although she didn’t move, Arden could see the subtle change in her demeanor, the beginning of an emotional retreat. His heart rate accelerated, a rocky cadence of fear thudding angrily through every vein.

Back off, he demanded. *We’re scaring her.*

We’re out of time, Leo argued. *Would you rather she has no warning if we change?* To Jill, he asked, “Do you believe in magic?”

“Magic?” She paused, teasing her bottom lip between her front teeth. “Like hocus-pocus, saw-a-lady-in-half magic?” Her gaze darted between the two of them, uneasiness weighing down her smile.

“I wish it was that simple.” Arden took her hand, finding it unnaturally cold. Her body’s reaction to fear, he guessed. Grasping her fingers between his palms, he gently massaged each digit. He needed more time to ease her into the truth, but the muscle contractions were growing in strength, a ticking time bomb waiting to explode. “When we were eighteen, we were rather open in our love interests.”

“We dated multiple women,” Leo revealed.

“But that’s normal,” Jill laughed, although confusion still tempered her expression. “What’s not normal is two men dating the same woman at the same time. Like this...us...” Her voice trailed off. “But that’s not what you’re trying to tell me, is it?”

Arden’s guilt hit him with hammer-like ferocity. They were making a mess of this. “Two of the women we dated were witches—powerful witches—and when they discovered our tendencies, they cursed us. Telling us if we wanted to be with multiple women, then we should be two.”

Glancing from man to man, Jill shook her head. “What is that supposed to mean? You should be two? You are two!”

“We weren’t then.” Leo ran a hand over his damp hair. “We were born one man. Now we’re two halves of that same man.”

“A man you might be meeting in a moment or two here,” Arden finished.

“What? There’s three of you?” Jill’s eyes widened. She jerked her hand from his grasp, crossing her arms protectively over her exposed breasts. “Ummm, I’d really rather not meet him like this.”

“No. It’s not like that.” Arden paused, unsure of how to continue. “I just don’t want to scare you.”

“Well, you are,” she whispered. “You *are* scaring me. Nothing you’re saying makes any sense.”

Leo stepped between Arden and Jill. “We don’t want to scare you, Jill, but we’re running out of time and there’s more we have to tell you. Even before we were cursed and split into two, there was a duality to our nature. We’re shape-shifters.”

“This isn’t funny.” Jill jolted to her feet and grabbed a towel from the shelf nearby. Climbing from the spa, she wrapped the fabric around herself tightly and rushed inside the house.

Arden chased after her, ignoring the towels. “No. Jill, please listen. The curse had a time limit. We were eighteen when we were split, so we had eighteen years as separate halves to find someone to make us whole again. And now our time is up.”

“So what next?” Jill plucked her jeans from the floor and stepped into them, struggling to pull them up over her damp skin. “Please tell me there’s a punch line coming.”

“It’s no joke,” Leo replied from behind Arden. He crossed the room and stood naked in front of Jill. “Without your love, we’re dead.”

“So let me get this straight.” Jill dragged her turtleneck down over her wet hair. “You two are cursed shape-shifters who have spent years screwing the same women in the hopes one of them would be gullible enough to fall in love with both of you, thereby solving all your problems. Did I miss anything?” Her words were laced with sarcasm, hurt and betrayal.

Frustration and fear surged through Arden. She didn’t believe them. His muscles contracted to the point of pain and he swallowed a groan. Everything was spiraling out of control and he was helpless to stop it.

“I’m sorry I have to do this, Jill, but you need to understand.” In a blur of flesh and fur, Leo shifted to his lion form.

Jill’s shocked gasp echoed in the sudden quiet. Arden cursed his other, impulsive half and stepped in front of the animal, blocking Jill’s view.

But it was too late. Jill stared past Arden. “Oh God. A lion...a lion. Leo’s

a lion.” She backed away in fright, grasping her shoes and socks like a lifeline. “Leo the lion...Arden the eagle.” She spoke the words softly as tears began to fall. Her liquid gaze accusatorily locked on Arden, like a dagger stabbing into his heart. “You’re an eagle.”

“Yes,” he replied simply.

“I want to see it,” she demanded, shivers racking her tiny frame.

“Jill—”

“Do it.” Her voice was eerily calm...distant.

The normal pain of shifting was dull in comparison to the pain of facing the withdrawal of the woman he loved. Arms became wings, hair became feathers as the shift to eagle worked toward completion. Before the urge to fly free took over, he returned to human again, rippling from one form to another with practiced ease. He held an arm out to her, but she backed away, turning toward the stairs. His last hope died with her retreat.

One foot on the top step, she paused, her voice so quiet he had to strain to hear her. “You got what you wanted. I did love you both.” She pounded down the stairs.

Leo returned to human form and started after Jill. Arden grabbed him, pulling him back. “We lost her.” Arden felt a blow as the front door slammed shut. “Just let her go.”

“No!” Leo roared, eyes flashing angrily as he tried to disengage Arden’s grasp. Muscles rippled violently beneath flesh. “I love her.”

“Nice of you to finally make the goddamn admission, but it’s too late. No matter how much we love her, we can’t make her stay.”

Leo’s fingers dug into Arden’s hand, urging it to unshackle. “We can convince her. I won’t let her leave us. I’d rather die than live without her.”

“So you’re going to force her to stay?” Arden shook his head. “You

shouldn't have shifted.”

Leo swiped at Arden and growled. “If you had just told her the truth the other night at dinner—”

“She would’ve run away then. Can you blame her?” Arden released him and turned toward the open sliding glass door. He could fly away, leave the racking, burning pain behind. His vision blurred as another round of rapid muscle contractions surged through him. He gritted his teeth, refusing to fall to his knees. Maybe the curse hadn’t been broken and death waited just around the corner. He couldn’t summon the energy to care.

“If you fly away, we are dead.” Leo’s words echoed both in Arden’s mind and in the room around him.

Arden gripped his head as the world blurred around him again. “Yeah, well you said it yourself.” He began his shift. “Without her...”

An explosion of pain knocked him off his feet as a million bursts of bright, furious light blasted from every cell of his body, ripping him apart.

## Chapter Eight

A cold fist squeezed Jill's heart, draining all happiness from its depths. Fear kept her moving forward and into her car, when she would've rather sunk to her knees and let the tears run dry. But then everything she'd lost when her reality catapulted into fantasy would crash through her mind, furthering her torment.

What had happened back there? Jill had a death grip on the steering wheel as she drove away from their house. Jesus, she'd thought falling in love with two men was crazy—but this...this was straitjacket, need-to-be-heavily-medicated insanity. The men she loved were animals. Raw, powerful, beautiful...beasts.

Hot tears scalded her cheeks. She brushed them away with the back of her hand, but more fell in their place. Love had never hurt so badly.

Looking through the windshield, she realized in her daze she'd turned down a street that dead-ended overlooking the ocean. Her tires crunched over gravel as she slowed to a halt, parking near the cement embankment. She rolled down the window, and closed her eyes, letting the chill ocean breeze wash over her. Salty air mingled with tears washing down her face.

Leo the lion...Arden the eagle. The wordplay they'd exchanged last night over dinner when she'd noticed their tattoos held all-new meaning now. Plus the oddity of seeing a lion on the cliffs of Talisman Bay had been explained. Leo watching her with his brother...other half...whatever their relationship was.

How could they be the same man split into two? Heck, how could they be animals? Magic...curses...it was too much to take in. Jill's head pounded, the ache spreading from her heart throughout her body.

Leo had stood before her, naked and beautiful, water dotting his skin.

Then he blurred, his shape losing focus. It wasn't a mist, and it wasn't like he'd melted. The air had stirred around him and one moment he was man, the next, lion. Water droplets clung to his fur, the same luscious gold as his hair. Even in lion form he was regal, mesmerizing...the same characteristics that had drawn her to his human half.

And Arden...his change had been almost too quick for her to comprehend. Man, eagle, man. A flash of dark feathers, wings, and then he was human again. Although his eyes had remained the same through the change. Human, emotional, full of love, fear and regret.

Leo, too, had watched her while the lion paced. Begging her to understand, to accept them in all their forms. Begging her to stay.

Without your love, we're dead.

God, what had she done? Would Leo and Arden cease to exist because she'd run away from them?

Starting the car, Jill slammed into reverse, desperate to get back to their house. She felt the clock ticking with every beat of her heart. Ice-cold fear made her teeth chatter and her fingers clench tighter on the steering wheel. How could she have feared them? They would never hurt her. She *knew* that, just like she knew they loved her, too. The moment the three of them came together in the spa, a deeper connection had been born, their love a tangible presence in the water around them. No one else could ever make her feel the way Leo and Arden did. Emotionally, physically, sexually...they completed her.

The three minutes it took to get back to their house felt like an eternity. She bolted from the car, scared at what she might find inside. The door was closed but unlocked.

"Arden! Leo!" she called as she threw the door open, already moving toward the stairs.

There was no response.

Darting up the stairs, she entered the home theater. The room was empty...dark. The movie had come to an end, reverting to the DVD menu screen. Behind the options, two lovers were locked in an embrace. The movie's theme music, sad, longing, beautiful, poured from the speakers.

Leo's clothes were scattered throughout the room, marking the path of their lovemaking. The sliding door was still open, cold air filling the room, numbing her heart, freezing the tears on her cheeks.

They were gone.

She felt as though she were moving in slow motion as she canvassed the rest of the house. Their bedrooms, office, the living room, kitchen, backyard, everything was as before, beds made, dishes left over from dinner stacked haphazardly in the sink. Yet the house was an empty shell all the same, lacking the life brought to it by its inhabitants.

A pile of clothes was stacked on the floor in the living room—Arden's clothes, which explained his nudity when he'd come upstairs earlier. His leather jacket was draped over the back of the couch. It was as though the two men had just disappeared, leaving everything behind undisturbed.

A sob froze in her throat. She was so cold...couldn't think...couldn't breathe. Picking up Arden's jacket, she fingered the butter soft leather, lifting it to her face and inhaling his sunshine. She smelled Arden and Leo, their combined scents a heavy musk on her skin. The evidence of their lovemaking lingered in every aching muscle, their fluids mingling with hers. She could still taste them on her lips. A small spark of hope flickered to life inside her numb heart.

They couldn't be dead. She loved them. Had never stopped loving them. If her love was the only key to keeping them alive, they would not die tonight.

Wrapping Arden's jacket around her, she ran to her car. In her haste to get in the house, she'd left the engine running. Sliding behind the wheel, she murmured a prayer, hoping she was right and that they were still within reach.

Finding the coastal road she and Arden had ridden on two nights ago was easy, finding the cliff was not. Two hours passed as she made stop after stop, hoping she'd found the spot, feeling more disappointed each time she returned to her car alone.

Pushing the growing weariness and fear from her mind, she pulled over again at yet another familiar-looking location. Unfortunately, almost everything appeared familiar under the glow of the full moon.

Pocketing her keys, she closed the car door and headed down a dirt path, too narrow for her car. Her hands and face were scratched, her clothing muddied from an earlier fall. To avoid a repeat performance, she studied the ground as she walked.

Her heart tumbled erratically as she noticed a slight groove in the dirt, resembling a tire track. Frantically she surveyed the area. Yes! This was it.

Energy surged through her and she ran through bushes and trees, ignoring the pain of branches whipping against her body, snagging her hair and skin. Rejoicing, she broke through the trees and onto the cliff, the Pacific Ocean filling her vision.

There was no one here.

Spinning in a circle, she studied the bushes where she'd first seen Leo in lion form, glanced beneath the tree where she and Arden had lain, even looked to the sky, praying for a glimpse of wings.

Nothing...no one...she was alone.

The final spark of hope winked out. She'd lost.

Time passed as she stood there, grief numbing her to the bone. The roar of the ocean continued unhampered, a strange occurrence when everything else felt beyond repair. She crept to the edge, watching the waves crash against the rocks below. Nature in all its violent beauty.

Wind whipped the air as the night sky grew darker, clouds drawing over the moon like curtains at the end of a performance. She lifted her face, surveying for evidence of a storm.

A shaft of moonlight reflected off something in the distance. She narrowed her eyes, searching the night.

A shadow split from the darkness, leveling downward. Joy ricocheted through her as the black crown of an eagle's head became visible. Arden was alive!

His wings spanned the night as he flew toward her, black feathers melding downward into a lighter golden shade. But the gold didn't look like feathers, it looked like fur...

This wasn't Arden...this wasn't an eagle.

This was mythology come to life.

Fantasy converged with reality as the gryphon stretched out its claws, gracefully landing on the cliff in front of her.

The creature lifted its head, and in a blur of motion, the gryphon was gone. A nude man stood in its place.

Golden brown hair brushed his wide shoulders. He was lean, muscular, beautiful, a body built for flight. A tattoo of a gryphon in vibrant shades of black, brown and gray graced his upper arm. A sprinkling of bronze hair began at his chest and arched downward converging at the vee of his thighs. His cock was magnificent even at rest, lying in its bed of curls. Under her steady perusal, his shaft grew larger.

Physically, everything about him was familiar, yet different, a confusing combination that made her stomach twist in anxious longing.

His arm flexed as he reached out to her, making the tattoo of the gryphon appear as if it were jumping into flight. "Jill..."

The voice was familiar, part growl, part smooth seduction. She lifted her gaze, studying his face. Full lips, craggy jaw, strong cheekbones, the face of a leader, a lover, a friend. Finally, she met his golden gaze, and in his eyes she saw the souls of the men she loved.

A cry ripped from her throat and she threw herself into his arms.

She tried to touch him everywhere at once, her hands taking inventory, basking in his vitality. As though he was waiting for her full acceptance, he remained still, letting her explore the new man he'd become. His muscles flexed beneath her fingertips, straining to respond. Rubbing her face against his chest, she listened to the steady, reassuring beat of his heart. Leo and Arden had come back to her. They weren't dead, just in renewed flesh.

Sighing, she pulled his mouth down to hers. Their first kiss, a tender recognition evolving into frenzied reunion.

"My love. Mine. Forever," he murmured, his lips laying claim to her neck.

"Yes...forever..." She gasped as he tugged her fabric-covered nipple between his teeth. "I thought I'd lost you."

She shrugged off the jacket, needing to feel his flesh against hers. As she tugged her shirt up, he lowered her pants, pausing to kiss just below her belly button. "Jill, you never need to worry again." He kissed lower as she ran her hands through his soft locks of hair. "You've already seen the worst of my oddities." After laving her clitoris with tender wet kisses, he turned his head sideways and hugged her to him. "I love you."

"I love you, too." The words erupted from her throat as her body began to tingle. Giddy, alive, in love. The man holding her was more than twice the man she'd ever dreamed of.

He gazed up at her and with mischievous fire in his eyes breathed, "Show me."

"Mmmm..." Jill smiled and wiggled out of his grasp. Her darn shoes and

socks were still on, preventing her from stepping out of her pants. Once down on the grass, she removed every last stitch of fabric. As he watched her disrobe, a droplet grew on the tip of his cock, glistening in the moonlight.

She had every intention of teasing him, learning his new shape, but as soon as her hand touched his thigh, she couldn't hold back. All of her need, welling to the surface, pooling between her legs, all of her love shimmering along her skin. Touching him magnified every sensation. A thigh brushed his, her knee swept to his hip. Using her fingernails, she traced from his hip up to his shoulder letting her lips continue the path, laving his neck, tasting his stubble, losing herself in his sunshine.

As she shifted her body weight, she ground her hips against his just to feel his heat, his hardness. Jill buried a hand in the locks tumbling to his shoulder and he grabbed her ass, his fingers kneading. Her juices coating his shaft, she raised and lowered her hips, rocking her clit against him.

As she continued stroking toward heaven, he brought his hands to her breasts, cupping them, toying with her nipples. Another moan escaped her lips as she spread her legs, straddling him, nudging his shaft until finally impaling herself on his throbbing length.

They both cried out. She was complete with him buried inside. Her cunt squeezed tightly as they rocked together, matching each other's motions. She sat up straight, riding him deeper and deeper against her womb. He seized her hips, grinding, combining sex and love as their bodies became one.

A dynamic frenzy built with each thrust, each rub, each stirring thrill. Their fervor equal in every action, their gazes locked. Jill needed this man more than she'd ever needed anyone. She needed his seed planted within her. Needed his sunshine, his magic, his everything.

Her orgasm erupted from somewhere deep inside, urging him to join her on the primal, beautiful bonding of two souls in love. She collapsed on his chest, their bodies still attached, writhing gently. His arms enclosed her tightly as she cuddled into him, lost in pleasure, lost in lust, lost in love.

And somewhere in the fog of completion, she discovered the one question that hadn't occurred to her sooner. "What should I call you?"

She felt his smile against her forehead. "Leonard. My name is Leonard."

\* \* \* \* \*

Jill woke to the first rays of morning sun caressing her flesh. The dawn was cool and crisp, and she inhaled, filling her lungs with fresh sea breeze.

They'd never left the cliff last night. Leonard's tight embrace kept her warm, and she'd fallen into a deep, peaceful sleep.

Eyes still closed to avoid the sun's glare, she stretched, awakening muscles sore from yesterday's many activities. Behind her, Leonard shifted in sleep, his hand lifting to cup her breast. Something warm and soft caressed up her bare leg, brushing over her flesh. Fur teased the back of her knee and she giggled.

Wait a second? Fur?

Jill's eyes shot open.

A golden pelt shone brilliant in the sunlight, nearly blinding her. A lion slept peacefully in front of her, his tail curling around her legs. A lion...not a gryphon.

But how? Who?

Jill sat upright with a jolt, the male hand cradling her breast falling into her lap. She faced the man who until moments ago had been spooning her. Dark curls covered a sleepy-eyed gaze, morning stubble thick on Arden's beautiful, rugged face.

"Jill? What's wrong?" he asked, slowly coming awake.

The animal behind her stirred, its soft head nudging her back while he

purred. She reached back, stroking the silky hide. The purring grew louder, and a sandpaper tongue laved over her shoulders and along the back of her neck.

Arden shot upright. “What the hell?” He looked down at his flesh, patting himself disbelievingly. He studied his tattoo, once again a soaring eagle. “How?”

“At least I’m not the only one flabbergasted.” Giddiness filled her and she laughed. She’d never thought she’d see them again in their separate forms. This was strange, wonderful, too good to be true. Even if it were to only last a few moments, she wanted this time to remember Leo and Arden—Leonard—in the forms she’d fallen in love with him...them.

Beneath Jill’s hand, she felt a shift...muscles rippling, fur becoming flesh and Leo’s voice, “Well, this is a surprise.” He lifted her hand, tangling their fingers together.

“Yeah, no kidding.” Jill shook her head. “How do— What do—?”

Arden shifted quickly into eagle form and then back, his eyes registering astonishment and fascination. Then both Leo and Arden elevated off the ground, their humanity rippling into eagle and lion before morphing together, flowing into the shape of a gryphon. The beautiful creature spread its wings to their fullest and stretched its legs as it softly landed. Bowing to Jill, the gryphon brought its wings forward. Swinging back, they transfigured to form arms as its body became Leonard’s.

As though he was just passing through, he lifted once more, his essence separating into fur and feathers. As lion and eagle, they landed and paced before lifting again and returning to Leonard.

Jill lost herself in the magic of the ever-changing menagerie. There was a sensuality to the shifts, watching two bodies become one, then two again, animal to human, the ripple of muscles underneath tight flesh, fur and feather. Desire rippled through her body and her toes curled into soft dirt. Their show of power and strength had a very interesting effect on her libido.

Leonard appeared again, shifting out of gryphon form. He smiled, kneeling in front of her. “I guess I got more than I bargained for. We’d always thought once we became one again, we’d be just that...one.”

He shifted to Leo and Arden. “Sorry if we scare you. We—I am still getting used to this.” They spoke in unison.

“I think all of us are trying to make some sense of this.” Lounging backward onto her elbows, she grinned. “I don’t care how many of you there are, or what you look like, or how high you fly, fast you run, whatever. You’re mine.”

Arden and Leo shifted through gryphon form back to Leonard. “I think, at this point, that’s the only thing I’m sure of. I’m all yours.” He studied his hands for a moment as if still trying to comprehend his new self. “It’s strange. As Leo, I could get to lion form, but not eagle or gryphon, for obvious reasons. As Arden I could get to eagle, but not gryphon or lion. So, I guess combining what I learned while I was two halves, as whole, I can be any of my incarnations. I just think myself into the shift and I come out as planned. I...we never imagined it would be possible, but I think I like it.”

“You think you do... I get to have three men in one and then some.” Jill reached out and tugged on Leonard’s arm, bringing him closer.

“If it hadn’t been for the hovering threat of death, I would’ve happily remained separate just so I could still completely surround you, fill you, take you, making you mine in every way imaginable.” His hands skimmed over her flesh, claiming her with every touch.

“I’ll take you anyway I can have you. As one or two.” She kissed him, startled when the lips she was kissing morphed and two mouths began loving her flesh. “This is going to take some getting used to,” she laughed.

Then her men did as they’d promised, surrounding her, filling her, taking her, making her theirs over and over again.

# Epilogue

“Trick or treat!”

Sitting in the office in the back of the house, Jill smiled as the sound of children’s laughter mixed with Arden and Leo’s teasing growls. The duo loved Halloween, dressing up in fur and feathers to pass out candy to the neighborhood kids. It was the one day of the year they could become their other halves for public consumption.

The rest of the year, they were hers alone.

The computer booted up smoothly and Jill clicked buttons and typed in her webmail password. It was time to introduce her mom to Leonard.

Hi Mom~

I know you’ve been worried about me, alone so far from home. Well, I’m not alone anymore. Someone wonderful has come into my life. His name is Leonard, and he embodies everything I’ve ever wanted. He’s kind, honest, charming, adventurous and he loves me as much as I love him.

And yes, he’s for real. He even has a really good job, running an advertising and web development company with his two brothers, Leo and Arden.

I’m really blessed, Mom. They’ve welcomed me into their family, just like I hope you and Dad will welcome them into ours.

Today, Leonard asked me to marry him and even though the courtship has

been quick, I've said yes. I know it's right, just like you knew the first time you saw Dad that there was no one else for you. Leonard completes me.

Since I know you're going to ask, yes I'm bringing Leonard with me for Thanksgiving. I want to show off the man I love.

I love you, Mom. Give Dad a kiss for me and I'll see you in a few weeks.

XOXO,

Jill

She reread the email to make sure she hadn't slipped and spoken in plural about her men. Somehow she didn't think her mother would understand how two men could become one, let alone the fur and feathers that came with them. She clicked send, launching the email into cyberspace.

The ring on her finger sparkled in the light from the screen. She didn't know how Leo and Arden had done it, but while she was at work today, they'd found a ring that suited their relationship perfectly. Three brilliant blue sapphires formed a triangle around a larger pear-shaped diamond.

The men had bought matching bands, diamonds and sapphires embedded in platinum. Although each of them wearing wedding bands would eventually draw questions as to who exactly Jill was married to, neither Leo nor Arden were willing to part with the symbol of their attachment. They'd even practiced shifting with the bands on to see if they could take the rings with them. Fabric ripped to shreds during transformation, but metal was more durable and made it through the phasing. As Leonard, the two rings came together, forming one larger band around his finger. In their animal forms, the rings disappeared behind feathers, or embedded in the mane.

Before shutting down the computer, Jill's gaze skimmed over the subject

lines of the piled up mail in her inbox. Charlene's *Top Ten Things to Avoid on Halloween* still remained unread.

She clicked it open and began to read. Her jaw dropped, then shock turned to outright laughter.

"All right, what's so funny?" Leo asked as he walked into the room. He nuzzled the back of her neck and his fake whiskers tickled, making her giggle anew.

Arden knelt next to her and she stared at his plastic beak. Her giggles turned to guffaws and she struggled to take a breath.

"Why do I feel like we're the joke here?" Arden smiled, pulling the cone-shaped beak from his face and tossing it onto the desk.

Tears dropped from Jill's eyes, and she lifted her finger, pointing out a line on the screen.

Never trust a man in costume. They wear what they know and you get what you see. So unless you like getting plundered, avoid pirates, and stay away from animals unless you have a thing for Animal Planet.

"Are we that obvious?" Leo questioned, a twinkle in his eyes as he gestured to his oversized lion suit.

Arden flapped his black wings and harrumphed. "So, if you'd read that before we met—"

"I watch *Animal Planet* religiously." She stood up, immediately finding herself surrounded.

Fake fur and plastic fell to the floor and Jill happily surrendered to the men behind the costumes.

