



COBBLESTONE PRESS

Britt's
PROTECTOR

SHARA AZOD

Britt's Protector

By

Shara Azod

Britt's Protector by Shara Azod

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, organizations, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Britt's Protector

Copyright© 2009 Shara Azod

ISBN: 978-1-60088-456-6

Cover Artist: Heidi Hutchinson

Editor: Stephanie Parent

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced electronically or in print without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in reviews.

Cobblestone Press, LLC

www.cobblestone-press.com

Prologue

"Come on, Britt. Just one kiss and I'll leave."

Britt Carmichael looked at the face of her date as she considered his request. Jeff was a nice enough guy. Most chicks she knew considered him a catch with his tall, lean frame, light caramel skin and deep brown eyes, but Britt just wasn't feeling it. It wasn't anything Jeff had said or done—she just wasn't interested. The only reason she had agreed to go out with him was that people were beginning to whisper about her. She never dated, never seemed interested in any of the boys at school. Honestly, she wasn't. Not that she was interested in any *girls* at school either. The first year of college was a perfect time for experimentation, but none of her sorry attempts came to much. Which was why she was standing here right now, wondering how she could get away without Jeff confirming what so many were suspecting: that she was a lesbian.

No matter what people were saying, she just wasn't attracted to females. She had tried kissing some girl from Anaheim at a party a few months back, someone who not only wouldn't say a word, but someone she wouldn't have to run into every day. Not only did she feel nothing, she felt wrong. Not that there was anything wrong with being a lesbian, she just wasn't one.

So why didn't she feel a thing for the current "it" boy who was generally accepted to be a major catch? For that matter, why was it none of the boys she knew make her heart beat faster or take her breath away? What the hell was wrong with her?

"Okay," she sighed finally. "One kiss, and that's it. I mean it. Please remember my father was a United States Marine. Try anything else and I'll have you singing soprano for the rest of your life."

As soon as the words left her mouth, Jeff was all over her. Not only did his sloppy, wet kiss repel her, he seemed to have grown more hands than an octopus.

"Hey!" Britt exclaimed, trying to shove the jock off of her.

Just when she felt she would suffocate, she was suddenly free, the night air cooling off the skin that had so recently felt as if it were being smothered.

"What the..." Jeff began only to be cut off by a deep, gruff voice.

"I think the young lady has had just about enough."

An unfamiliar tingling race through Britt's body at the sound. Wes! Wes was back! Since the death of her father, Master Sergeant Brandon Carmichael, Sr., two years prior, Major Wesley Blair had been the official guardian of Britt and her two older brothers Michael and Brandon Jr. He was rarely at the home he had provided the orphans of a member of his recon team. Brandon, who was a grad student at the University of California Irvine, generally took care of Britt and Michael, though essentially they were pretty much a self-reliant bunch. Being the children of a single father who happened to be a member of the Marine's elite Force Reconnaissance, they had to be.

When their father had died on one of his many secretive missions, Wesley had taken them in rather than letting the siblings be split apart by the state. Although their father had left them well provided for monetarily, the state didn't look too kindly on minors living without adult supervision, even if they had lived that way while their father was alive.

Not that their father had been a bad parent. He had taught his children everything they would need not only to survive in the world which he knew to be cruel and unforgivable, but to thrive. His recon team had provided backup and support of the motherless children all their lives. Wes, being the leader of that team, felt it was his duty to take up where their father had left off.

Their mother had disappeared after Britt had turned ten, deciding

that she just wasn't cut out to be the wife of a Marine who was rarely home and a mother of three. Britt and her brothers had no desire to look for her. She had shown she had no honor, no sense of duty and family. Why would they want to live with someone like that? Wes had been their savior, just as he was saving her from a sticky situation right now.

"Say goodnight," Wes told Jeff in his low, calm voice. It was a voice that indicated impending danger for those smart enough to heed its warning. Too bad Jeff wasn't that smart.

"Who the hell are you?" Jeff, who was literally dangling by the scruff of his neck in Wes' powerful grip, demanded. Unwise. Britt almost felt sorry for him. Almost.

"I am Britt's guardian," Wes informed him, bringing his face up close and personal with Jeff's. "This means I'm your worst nightmare."

"Can't a guy kiss his girlfriend?" Jeff squeaked meekly.

Girlfriend? Since when did one date constitute a relationship?

"Say goodnight, kid," Wes told him.

"I'll call you!" Jeff declared to Britt as he flew through the air towards his car parked at the curb.

Yep, the boy was dense. Britt shook her head, wondering how she would get out of being Jeff's "girlfriend" at school on Monday. Then again, maybe she wouldn't. Since it was clear she just couldn't seem to work up enough interest to be attracted to anyone, maybe she could use Jeff's delusions to hide behind for a while. High school might have been a treacherous place, but the small local university was proving to be far worse. The rumors that were now a dull whisper would soon become a deafening roar should she continue to rebuff every guy who showed interest.

"Hey, you alright, kid?"

Wes. She had completely forgotten about his presence as she watched Jeff disappear. Suddenly the weight of what a freak she was became all too unbearable. What the hell was wrong with her? Why couldn't she seem to make a connection with anyone other than her family? As soon as she felt a strong arm wrap around her shoulder, Britt did something she never did; she broke down in tears.

“Hey.” Wes squatted to look at her face to face. “What’s this? Tears? Did that little shit hurt you?”

Britt shook her head mournfully. “There’s...there’s something wrong with me!” she wailed, both ashamed and overcome by the unfairness of it all. It was such a stupid little thing, but damn it, she didn’t want to be some kind of freaky outcast her first year of college! She was supposed to be enjoying her youth and first blush of sexual freedom. Instead she found herself uninterested in anyone that way. What if there was something seriously wrong with her? Did she have some kind of defect?

Wes was at a loss. He had known Britt and her brothers most of their lives, and he would have sworn on a pack of Bibles that Britt was the toughest of the three. He had heard African-American women had an incredible inner strength, and from what he’d observed from Britt since her mother left, and then, four years later, her father died, he believed it. She kept her brothers from wallowing in self-pity, running the household like a Gunny Sergeant running new recruits. To see her breaking down over some stupid little kid with his dick in his hands did weird things to Wes’ normal equilibrium. He swore he’d kill the kid if the boy was the reason for Britt’s tears.

“There’s nothing wrong with you, sweetheart,” Wes told her, enfolding her in his arms. “You’re a beautiful young woman. The kid just didn’t know how to deal with that.”

It was true. Wes had arrived home five minutes before Britt and the dunderhead she was with had driven up. At first he’d thought it was Michael or Brandon with a date. Hearing her date call her by name had been something of a shock. When had Britt developed all those lush curves? Gone were the tight ponytail and sweats he was so familiar with, and in their place stood a striking young woman. Even now he could feel her perky breast pressing against his torso. She may be a bit on the petite side, but there was no mistaking the curves he felt against his front. Against his will, he felt blood rushing to his cock, making it rise, pressing insistently against the confines of his jeans.

He was going to hell. She was a kid, for God’s sake. Shifting so she

wouldn't be able to feel evidence of his depravity, he awkwardly patted her back as the floodgates opened full force. Damn, where the hell was Michael or Brandon?

"There *is* something wrong with me!" Britt sniffed, holding her head up to stare up at him.

The heartbreak in those deep brown pools that were her eyes made him physically hurt. His heart tightened in his chest as his arms squeezed around her. He was definitely going to have to kill someone for this. Fierce protectiveness rushed his brain, literally making him see red. If there was anything in modern times equivalent to the mythological Viking berserker, it was a United States Marine, and as the cliché said, the kid he just threw off his porch had fucked with the wrong Marine.

"I don't like boys!" Britt continued, completely unaware of the turn of Wes' thoughts.

"What?" Surely he heard her wrong. Not like boys? What the hell had been going on while he had been deployed?

"They do nothing for me!" Britt went on as if she was making perfect sense. "I tried a girl, but that didn't do anything for me either!"

Wes felt his eyes cross. He looked down at those hauntingly beautiful baby browns, taking in the soft pillows of her lips. His tried to wrap his head around what she was saying. Try *what* with a girl? Oh, dear Lord, he was definitely going to hell for the visions flashing through his head.

"Kissing, I mean!" Britt exclaimed, although that didn't make his cock go down even a little bit. "I tried to kiss a girl to see if maybe I was a lesbian, but nothing! So I went out with Jeff, thinking maybe I needed to try a guy again, and still, nothing!"

Wes opened his mouth, but nothing came out. What could he say? He was swimming in deep waters here; he needed to tread carefully.

"Do you, um, have urges? I mean, in general? Without, you know, another person being around?" Okay, now the images he was picturing at his own words were not only going to send him to hell, he was pretty sure he could be arrested. But at least she'd stopped crying.

"Yeah," she said as she thought about it. "Yeah, I do!"

"Well, if you have no problem, uh, you know—by yourself, then you are perfectly normal. You probably just need to be with the right person."

She visibly brightened so much, Wes sent up a silent prayer of relief. Maybe this would be over soon. But as soon as he thought he could escape, she jumped up, wrapping her recently filled-out legs around his waist, and started to kiss him all over his face.

"Thank you, Wes!" She was crying again, though these were tears of joy. She continued to rain little girlish kisses all over his face in gratitude. "Thank you, thank you, thank you! I'm not a freak at all. I just don't get turned on by stupid frat boys! I can't thank you enough!"

The last thing Wes meant to do was turn his head. But somehow, his head angled sideways, just in time to catch one of her enthusiastic pecks. As soon as his lips met hers, their mouths seemed to merge. Honest to all the gods of war, he hadn't meant for it to happen, but somehow his hands made their way to tangle into her hair, forcing her head back slightly to open her mouth for his seeking tongue. He swallowed her little mewling moans like they were ambrosia. His mind screamed for him to stop, but his body wasn't listening.

Turning to brace her back against the front door, Wes pressed his painfully hard erection against her; the thin silky layer of her underwear and the rough blue jean material of his pants were all that separated him from paradise. He could feel her growing moisture as he gently rocked against her, his mouth never leaving hers. Far too gone to even think about what he was doing, he pinned her arms above her head, using his hips to keep her anchored against the door.

His lips finally left her as he stared down at her. God, she was beautiful! Her kiss-swollen lips were slightly parted as she panted, straining to move against him as he rocked against her over-sensitized clit. When she came, her eyes fell open, staring up at him in such awe and wonder, Wes felt like weeping like a girl. Instead, he dipped his head to ravish those oh-so-kissable lips once more. Only the tell-tale sound of an approaching car seemed to snap him out of the trap in which he had fallen.

Tearing his mouth away, he stared down at the bundle of pure temptation in his arms. What the hell had he just done? She was a kid, and here he was with his tongue down her throat, dry humping like he was some teenaged punk desperate to get off. What the hell was wrong with him?

Moving back carefully, he let Britt slide to her feet, keeping one hand braced on her shoulder until he was sure she was steady. He wanted to apologize, say anything to excuse what he had done, but nothing came to mind.

“Oh!” Britt exclaimed softly. “That was, that was...incredible!”

Wes winced at her whispered exclamation. He was such an ass.

“I’m really not a freak, I just like older men. It’s not that I can’t get aroused, I just can’t get aroused by guys my age! Thank you!”

Wes opened his mouth to say something, though what, he had no idea, but Britt was already through the front door and jogging up the stairs. The little minx had dismissed him from the equation entirely! Here he was, with a raging hard-on and the taste of her sinful little mouth still on his tongue.

“Damn,” he muttered, making his way into the house.

In her mind, he had just helped her out with a problem. Just good old Wes offering superior wisdom. *Yeah, right*, he thought as he absently rubbed his throbbing member. He didn’t think he would ever be able to look at little Britt the same way again. He was now hyperaware of the womanly curves, the sweet, sensuous lips, the open, free response.

Wes was a man fully aware of his own nature. While some people took days, months, even years to make important decisions, Wes had always been able to do so in a matter of minutes. He weighed pros and cons in his brain in milliseconds, allowing him to gauge a situation and make a clear, decisive choice in the time it took to tie his shoes. The ability was a blessing in his profession. Times like this, it became a curse.

One minute of lapsed judgment and he was done. His grandmother, a full-blooded Sioux, had once told him he would know the second he met his mate. One kiss...well, one make-out session, and he was hooked. He didn’t need to think about it, or try to talk himself out of

it. Britt was his other half. Only Britt was his seventeen-year-old ward. This was so not good.

Licking his lips to try to capture more of the fruity lip gloss she wore, Wes had to fight the urge to march up the stairs and set her straight. The last thing he wanted to do was show her she just needed an older guy to trip her trigger. Just thinking about the possibility made his trigger finger itch. Dangerous thing, that.

Turning around, he stormed back into the living room, where Brandon had just come in.

"Did you know your sister had a date tonight?" Wes demanded to a startled Brandon.

"Uh, yeah."

"I had to run the little fucker off while he was trying to manhandle her. I don't want to see that again."

That was all he had to say. Brandon was a military brat; more than that, he was the son of a proud Marine. He knew an order when he heard one. Wes wouldn't have to worry about Britt for a while. At least until she was about sixty-five with a passel of grandchildren.

He was going to have to stay far away from Britt, at least for a while. There was no way he could be too near her and not touch her. A Pandora's box of desire had been opened. There was just no way to close it again.

* * * * *

Seven years later...

Wes was seething. When he had received this new mission, he had barely been able to keep it together long enough to make it through the briefing. Walking briskly from the nondescript building where he and his team had been given this new assignment, all he could think about was getting to Britt before it was too late.

"Hey, Wes! Wait up!"

He could hear Major General Todd Alexander running after him.

Though he wanted nothing more than to keep going, get in his car and drive nonstop to Atlanta, where Britt was flirting with unreal danger, he couldn't very well blow off his commanding officer. The bastard.

He didn't bother to turn around. He managed to stand still and wait for the older man to catch up.

Keep it cool, keep it cool, he told himself, trying to calm down.

"Hey, man, I know you have a history with this girl..."

"Britt Carmichael is a woman. A young woman, but a woman nonetheless," Wes bit out.

More importantly, she was about to become his woman. He had waited five years for her to be old enough. He had stood back and watched her sow her oats in college. He was done waiting. He wanted her with a single-minded intensity he was no longer willing to deny.

"Yeah, well, I know you have history with the *young woman* and her family. She lived with you for a while, didn't she?"

Wes was not amused. The good Major General had been the commanding officer of Wes' unit for ten years, since the asshole was just a major and Wes was just a captain four years out of Annapolis. He knew Master Sergeant Carmichael almost as well as Wes did. The prick had even looked like he might shed a tear at Brandon Sr.'s funeral. Now that he was officially in charge of all the recon units operating in the western hemisphere, he suddenly had fucking amnesia.

"Britt, Michael and Brandon Jr. lived with me until I was transferred to the East Coast. Michael and Brandon still live in my house in California. I have known *all three* for about ten years now."

Wes didn't know where this was going, but he didn't like the tone. Major General *Prick* Alexander was up to something.

"That's why your unit was chosen for this job. Now that you have been transferred to the Pentagon for a while, you will be able to keep a close eye on the Carmichael girl and her boyfriend."

Wes grit his teeth and clenched his hands in front of him. You get court marshaled for striking a superior officer, and that would only throw a huge damper on his plans.

"Miss Carmichael has been accepted in a trainee position at the

State Department while taking graduate courses at Georgetown. I need you to stick to this girl like glue. We have Intel that although she broke up with her little boyfriend last year, he isn't letting go. Maybe you can encourage her to give him a second chance, so that we can find out what the Santos cartel is up to."

Never had Wes wanted to kill someone so badly. Forget shooting the bastard, he wanted the pleasure of killing him with his bare hands. Somehow, the son of the biggest narco-terrorist, Enrique Socorro-Santos, had hooked *his* woman, and this asshole wanted him to encourage that shit? Oh, hell no! Not going to happen as long as he was breathing.

"I thought the mission was to simply watch her and make sure she was safe, *sir*. Not to put her in the line of danger." It took a lot to say it calmly. It really did. Wes was proud of himself. He hadn't killed Alexander yet. It was an achievement.

"We need someone close to Victor Santos. We need to know where he goes, whom he meets with. I didn't want to tell you in front of the others."

Of course he didn't. The crew loved Britt and her brothers like their own. They were their own. The unit was a family, not a collection of individuals. They were a cohesive unit in and out of theatre.

"You know the gi...woman better than the rest. You have more influence," Alexander went on, blissfully unaware how close to death he was treading. "All I'm asking is that you use that influence to try to nudge her in that direction."

Wes looked at the Major General and saw him not as the honorable Marine he used to be, but as an opportunist willing to use innocent women to further his career. Wes knew damn well Alexander was looking to add another star to his chest, thereby becoming one of the youngest Lieutenant Generals in Corps history. Capturing Enrique Socorro-Santos would pretty much guarantee that promotion. Wes couldn't help but wonder how many missions his unit had been sent on to advance this man's career. Some of them damn near impossible, like the one that had killed Britt's father.

Wes swore right then and there he would bring this opportunist

Britt's Protector by Shara Azod

down. No one placed what was his in danger, and Britt was his. Never again would Major General Alexander use another person as a stepping-stone to his main prize of four stars. It would end at two for this officer.

Without bothering to answer him, Wes got in his car and started his long trip from the bucolic Virginia town to Atlanta. To Britt.

Chapter One

"Please, Britt, give me another chance," Victor whined, invading her space. "I love you. Whatever I did, I am so sorry."

Britt grimaced at how pathetic Victor looked to her now. He was still fine, she would give him that much, but the six foot two, lean-muscled, darkly handsome Bolivian seemed so juvenile to her now. He really hadn't done anything wrong per se, she just wasn't into him. Too bad it took a year into the relationship to see that.

The thing was, she had broken up with him a year ago. He was probably trying to accomplish the one thing he never managed to do when they were together: getting into her pants.

"Look, Victor, it wasn't anything you did. It's me. I just...it just wasn't right, you know?" Of course he didn't. If he did, he wouldn't be in the parking lot of her apartment building waiting for her.

"I know why you're nervous," Victor insisted in that patronizing macho tone of his. She hated that tone.

"You do?" This ought to be a good one.

"You are pure, a virgin," Victor explained as if he were talking to a child. "This is why I chose you. I am getting older, no? I am not looking for someone to waste time with. A man must think of his future, of children. You are perfect to be the mother of my children."

Oh, this was bad. The man was delusional. She had been oh so right to break up with him when she had. Thank God after this Saturday, she would be safely out of Atlanta and away from this wacko for good.

"Victor, I am nowhere near ready to become anyone's wife or mother," she said, taking careful, deliberate steps backward. She couldn't outrun him to her building, and even if she could, she would have to unlock the security door to get in. Although she had her key ready to slide into the lock as she always did before getting out of her car, the precious second it took to actually insert the key in the lock took time. Instead, she let the key slide from her fingers and grasped the pepper spray in a ready position. That would give her more than enough time to get into the building and away from psycho-boyfriend.

Victor gave her another one of those damned patronizing smiles and reached out to cup her cheek.

"Of course, *querida*. I will give you time to get used to it. I will take you to dinner tomorrow and we can talk, *sí*?"

"My family is coming for graduation," she hedged. Her brothers wouldn't be here until Friday. Today was Tuesday. All she had to do was avoid Victor for three more days. She could surely do that, right? "I really have to spend time with them."

"You see?" Victor exclaimed as if he had made some kind of point. "You are perfect for me. A woman who values family."

What does one say to that?

"Look, Victor, I have to go." Britt once again tried to ease away, but Victor wasn't having it. His hand strayed from her cheek to her hand, where he held on in a tight grip.

This was so not good. If she peppered him now, he might stalk her big time. She so didn't need this right before leaving. As much as she loved Atlanta, she was looking forward to her position at the State Department and graduate classes at Georgetown. It had been fun, but she was ready to go. The last thing she wanted was a messy exit. She had to think fast to get him on his way.

"Now this seems familiar."

Britt almost melted at the deadly quiet voice that had been seared into her memory so long ago. Despite the sticky situation she was in, that voice, a little gruff and scratchy, darkly dangerous, just did something to her insides. Her body relaxed of its own accord, secure in the knowledge

nothing at all could happen to her while he was around.

"Who is this man?" Victor demanded, frowning over her shoulder.

She didn't need to turn around to know whom he was seeing. His startling, icy green eyes framed the thickest, longest lashes she had ever seen. Regardless of that fact, the man behind her stood at a stunning six foot five inches and some change, and thick, solid muscle strained most of the T-shirts he liked to wear when off duty. There was nothing remotely feminine about him. She had memorized every inch of the gorgeously dangerous face, from the scar above one brow to the dimples in his cheeks. Wesley Blair was simply unforgettable.

Wes had listened to just about all he could stomach. There was something seriously wrong with that kid, and he could not stand to see him anywhere near his Britt. Given that his father was a raging psychotic who had forced his first cousin into marriage, Victor's temperament was hardly surprising. Wes had damn near jumped out of his skin when the weird little fuck touched her.

"You want us to take him down, L.C.?" Warrant Officer Wills asked even as the rest of them silently fanned out around the apartment complex. Wills had spoken out loud on purpose. The wily Marine wanted Victor to know he was surrounded.

As much as Wes appreciated the offer from his second in command, he couldn't tip the junior Santos off. They had to watch him, for now, until he could figure out how to best use him and his father against Alexander and take them down at the same time. Despite Wes' knack for making split decisions, planning was something else entirely, especially when there was so much on the line. He could not risk Britt's safety for anything.

"Not now, Warrant," Wes answered. "I can handle this one."

He hoped he could, but he wasn't so sure. He had no common sense where Britt was concerned. How many times had he been here, watching her from afar over the last four years? In between assignments, he found he couldn't stay away. He had watched her, warned off undesirables when necessary, and she'd never had a clue. In a way, it made him almost as sick as Santos. He had stalked her, more or less, since

she'd moved out of his house and went off to college.

Walking up silently behind her, he made damn sure Santos saw him. He didn't stop until he was close enough for her to feel his body heat. To his immense satisfaction, she recognized him without turning to face him. He could tell by the way her body relaxed as soon as he was close. Her body knew what she had yet to even begin to suspect: she was his. Taking in the pepper spray in her hand and her defensive stance, he felt an inordinate sense of pride.

Good girl, he thought. The bastard wouldn't have known what hit him.

"Victor, this is Wes. Wesley, actually. He took care of my brothers and me after my father died," Britt spoke up smoothly. Steady as a rock, showing not even a hint of surprise.

"Ah, then I owe you a debt of gratitude for taking care of my woman," Santos answered in an oily, falsely pleasant manner.

"Yeah, well, um, we have to go," Britt cut in. Maybe she knew he was about to say something he probably shouldn't. "Have Michael and Brandon come with you? I have to get upstairs to say hi."

He allowed her to grab him by the arm and drag him toward her apartment building.

"I will call you, Britt," Victor called out as she practically ran away.

Dumbass. Couldn't he see she was trying to get away from him? Wes kept his thoughts to himself until they were through the security gate and standing on her living room. He was well aware Vic was watching every move. It was a good thing she lived on the second floor. It was much harder for the Santos kid to try to eavesdrop or see anything he had no business seeing. Wes had some business to take care of with Britt; he didn't need observers.

"How long were you going to wait?" Britt spun on him, looking truly furious.

Wes was thrown for a loop. "What?"

"You and your team were out there when I pulled up." She poked him in his chest. "You saw that whack job accost me, and you just stood there and let it happen!"

"You knew we were out there?" There was no way she could have

known they were out there. She was guessing.

"You're kidding, right?" One thinly arched eyebrow rose incredulously. She had the most beautifully shaped eyebrows. Not too thin, not too thick, with a natural arch. "I know every single time you have spied on me, every time you've scared away my dates. You know, for a recon commander, you are mighty sloppy there, Colonel."

Well, shit. What could he say to that? She had known. All these years, when he had thought he was being so careful to stay out of her life, at least for a while, she had known he was there. Falling heavily on to her couch, Wes was at a loss for words. Did he explain? Would he creep her out? He had better come up with something quick to salvage the situation, which was deteriorating quickly.

"Oh, the look on your face is just priceless!" Britt laughed, coming over to kneel in front of him. "Hey, I am the only daughter of a bona fide Marine. Recon at that. Like I can't tell when I'm being watched."

"How did you know it was me?" She might have known she was being watched, but how could she have identified who it was?

"I don't know," she shrugged. "I just did. I always know when you're near."

Oh, hell yes. There was nothing sexual about her words, but that didn't stop his unruly cock from hardening as she said them.

"I think it's sweet how you look after me. It's something my dad probably would have done."

Not fucking likely. There was nothing paternal about what he had done. But her words helped him take it down a notch. He couldn't take this too fast.

"So?"

"So, what?" When had he lost track of the conversation?

"So why did you wait?"

"Wanted to see what the little shit was up to."

"I see. And why are you here?" Britt asked, eyeing him critically.

"I came for your graduation, of course." *And for you.*

"Cool."

Britt jumped to her feet and walked into the tiny kitchen of her

apartment, leaving Wes to stare after her like some lovesick puppy. Being in such close range was a hell of a lot different than watching her from afar. She was close enough to smell, to touch. This was not going to end well, none of it.

But he had to do it. If he didn't watch over her, Lord knows what the fucking military, DEA, and/ or CIA would do in order to get close to that little shit she had been dating. Speaking of which...

"What the hell is wrong with you, dating someone like that loser?"

It wasn't how he'd meant for it to come out. He had planned on easing into the conversation, to get her to confide in him. So much for that line of attack. Nothing to do now but meet it head on, to see where her mind was at. The Britt he knew would have never willingly got involved with a shit like Enrique's son. So she couldn't have known; he hoped like hell she hadn't known.

"You think I knew he was a creep when I met him?" was the caustic reply.

Wes felt somewhat mollified. She had never lied to him before, so he seriously doubted she was lying now.

"So where did you meet him?"

It was killing him. Every guy she had ever dated killed him. He had no right to feel that way; hell, he would have shot any other man his age who had done half the shit he had as far as she was concerned. Didn't stop the raging need underneath his skin, didn't cool his jets one damn bit.

Britt shrugged, coming back into the living room and handing him a beer. His favorite brand. Had she been expecting him? He looked at the chilled can in his hand, torn between pleasure she had thought ahead, that she had known he would be here, and ugly, sneaking suspicion the beer hadn't been bought for him at all.

"Brandon told me you were coming," she smirked knowingly as she watched him.

When the hell had he become so damn transparent? He usually had a deadpan look that was undecipherable, but this little slip of a woman could read him like a book. It was one of those things that used to drive him crazy, but after she had graduated and gone away to college, he had

found he missed her perceptiveness. Right now, it was downright unnerving. Could she tell he was sporting a hard-on from hell? Did she know how much he wanted to slip that cute little sundress off and take her right here in this tiny ass living room?

He had to get out of here. He was safer outside, watching. Being near Britt was a danger to his hard-won cool.

"I just came by to let you know I was in town and, uh, will be around."

Wes couldn't remember ever feeling this unsure. He placed the beer carefully on the coffee table and debated whether he should stand up or drink it first, then leave.

"I made up the extra bedroom for you," Britt announced cheerily. "Michael and Brandon hate staying with me when they're here. They think of me as a major cock blocker."

Wes choked on the swig of beer he had just taken. The word "cock" coming out of her mouth had him harder than hell, throbbing like a son of bitch. Words like that should never ever come out those oh-so-kissable lips. There was no way in hell he could stay here.

"Oh! I almost forgot," Britt went on as if she hadn't just said what he'd clearly heard her say. "Will the guys in your team need a place to bunk down too? I picked up some extra blankets and pillows."

Yeah, that would be safer. He would be so busy keeping them off her tail that he wouldn't have time to be tempted. There would never be more than two in her apartment at one time, as he had them casing the apartment complex, and never without him present.

Yeah, this could work. It had to, because if it didn't, he was in deep shit.

Chapter Two

Colonel Wesley Blaine was losing his mind. Britt could see it—she recognized all the signs. The man was sporting a pair of balls so blue they were probably in serious danger of blowing up. It was a wonderful thing to behold. He still wanted her. After all this time, he hadn't worked her out of his system as she'd once feared he would.

Going away to college had been a deliberate move on her part. She knew had she stayed, something would have happened between them. The sexual tension in the house after that one glorious kiss on the front porch had been so thick—whenever Wesley wasn't on assignment, that was. The reason he was one of the youngest Colonels in the Corps was because after that night, he had volunteered for every tour imaginable, taking him into untold danger. Britt wasn't sure she could handle it if something happened to him, all because he was afraid of being in his own home.

She knew too that Wes would have hated himself if he had touched her then. She had been so damn young, too young for any kind of serious relationship. Although she had known it at the time, it had hurt something fierce. She wanted him so bad, but she wanted him forever, not for some tawdry affair that burned hotly, then petered out because of guilt and recriminations.

So she had left, hoping and praying that one day he would come back for her. And he had. Britt was not a woman to harbor any delusions. Wes' appearance probably had a hell of a lot to do with her new job in

D.C. with the State Department. What, she didn't know, but she would no doubt find out soon.

In fact, the main reason she had taken the job was to be closer to Wes. After she'd left California, he'd transferred to the East Coast. She would like to believe it was because of her. He had certainly made it his business to periodically spy on her, using his whole team in the effort. It was something that might creep a lot of women out, but she knew Wes. His intermittent spying stemmed more from his protective nature than any desire to interfere.

Britt hadn't exactly been sitting at home waiting by the phone. Wes didn't need a little girl with no experience. She had dated, even had a few "relationships," but nothing too involved or heavy. She just wasn't attracted to anyone on a physical level, not the way she was with Wes.

Her last disastrous relationship had been with Victor. Man had that been a mistake. Victor oozed sensuality from every pore. The Bolivian was one tall, caramel stack of deliciousness, but he was also way too intense. There was something about him that seemed a bit off. Now she was glad she'd listened to her inner voice and broken it off with him when she had. The man was like a dog with a bone.

She sometimes wondered if Victor was so hell bent on getting her back because she had never slept with him. She had never slept with anyone. No one made her stomach flutter or her pulse speed the way Wes did. Originally, she had planned on losing her virginity and returning to Wes a sophisticated lover. That just hadn't worked out. The thought of anyone other than Wes inside her was abhorrent.

Victor had taken her reluctance to give up the panties to mean she was the "perfect woman." In other words, marriage material. He took her reluctance to sleep with him as some kind of divine sign she was meant to be the mother of his children. That just freaked her out.

"You look like you're having some heavy thoughts there."

Britt jumped from where she was leaning against the kitchen counter. Staff Sergeant Cole Ryan, sniper extraordinaire. The man was deadly silent.

"Hey, Cole. Just off of watch duty?" Britt teased. It was really cute

the way Wes still had his team watching her place. The Marine brat in her was flattered.

"Yep, thought to catch a couple hours of shuteye before turning in." The blonde man hit her with a dimpled grin.

He was really adorable in a California surfer boy kind of way. The only thing missing were curly locks falling into his baby blue eyes. Being a Marine, he wore the obligatory crew cut. And unless she missed her guess, Surfer Boy was flirting.

She was just about to let him know, gently, that she just wasn't interested when she saw Wes striding down the hallway, making a beeline for the kitchen with a scowl on his face. Perfect. As soon as she'd known he was in Atlanta, she had come up with a plan to get her man. After all, her dad had been on his recon team—she had known him forever. No matter how badly he wanted her, he wouldn't make a move unless he was pushed, and she had every intention of shoving if she had to.

"So, do you know where you're planning on going?" Britt looked at Cole through her lashes, tilting her head just so. From the corner of her eye, she saw Wes freeze.

"I don't really know." Cole leaned forward, fingering her ponytail. "Maybe you can suggest someplace? Or better yet, are you busy tonight?" Leaning even closer, he whispered in her ear, "He's right behind me, right? Just make something up—there is no way in hell he would let you out of his sight."

Well, damn. Her estimation of Cole went up a notch. Okay, she was game.

"That all depends on what you're looking for," she purred, letting her fingers train down the front of Cole's button-down shirt.

She was asking for it, she knew it, but damn it, Wes needed to stop treating her as if she were forbidden. Her brothers Michael and Brandon always stayed at her apartment whenever they visited. She'd kicked them out to be with Wes. For the last three days he had tiptoed around her, never leaving her alone, but keeping a healthy distance. She needed to kick up the pressure.

"Ryan!" Wes stomped into the kitchen, finally finding the legs right under him.

Britt hid a smile—the absolute fury on his face was priceless.

"Oh, hi, Wes," she sing-songed in the sickliest sweet voice she could manage, her smile one-hundred-percent genuine. "Cole and I were just deciding what to do tonight."

A small tick appeared in his jaw, and his eyes narrowed into slits. "Ryan is busy tonight pulling a double watch."

"But he isn't on duty," Britt pushed a little harder. Sighing, she placed her hand on Cole's arm. "Isn't your whole team here as a favor to you? Surely you can spare him for one night."

"Britt, step back." The words were growled through clenched teeth.

She jumped back instinctively. She had meant to tweak Wes a little; now she wasn't so sure it was a bright idea. She made a mental note to never try to make him jealous again. It looked as if Cole was in mortal danger. It wasn't as if Cole hadn't encouraged it, but he surely hadn't expected this reaction. Wes' body was visibly vibrating with anger, his hands clenched and unclenched at his side.

"Wes, Cole didn't mean—" Britt began, only to be cut off.

"Staff Sergeant Ryan has to leave now."

Now she would have felt like stir-fried shit—if Cole hadn't flashed her a conspiratorial grin and winked before sauntering off.

Wes turned to her as soon as Cole was out the front door.

"Sweetheart, if you value that man's life, you will never touch him again. You won't bat those beautiful brown eyes of yours at him, and you damn sure won't go off anywhere alone with him."

Britt licked her suddenly dry lips and nodded. It was so sick, but damned if she wasn't turned on by his territorial attitude. Her nipples pebbled, their sensitive flesh suddenly irritated by the fabric of her bra.

"And why is that?" she prodded. It may not be the brightest thing to do, but there was no way she was letting him off easy. She would be damned if he was going to pull the macho man, no-one-touches-my-woman bull if he had no intention on touching.

He was quiet for so long, she wondered if maybe she had

overplayed her hand. His mint green eyes never left her face as he appeared to be going through some kind of inner battle.

What if he walked away? What if he told her to go out with Cole after all? What would she do?

She knew Wes wanted her, but that didn't mean a whole lot. Wes was obstinate by nature, and his recon training and status made him doubly so. There was a chance he would stand by his belief that he owed it to her father's memory to stay away from her. Wes was just that kind of guy. She should have kept to her original plan of slowly teasing him to the brink instead of going for cheap jealousy tricks.

To her surprise, Wes took a step closer, cupping her cheek in his large calloused hand. It felt so good to have skin to skin contact after all this time. Her eyes closed as she subtly rubbed against his hand. She wanted that hand to seize her and hold her close, but she knew it was far too soon for that.

"You know the answer to that already, don't you, Britt?"

His voice had softened quite a bit, becoming a low rumble. He sounded surprised that she had figured out he was fighting his attraction. Yes, she knew. She also knew he would do nothing about it.

"What I don't know is why you're holding yourself back from me," she replied, leaving his question unanswered. Maybe he didn't really expect an answer.

"I think you do."

She opened her eyes. His face was closer now, his gaze still steady. His lips were so damn close, but she wasn't about to make the move to kiss him. She might prod, but she wouldn't force him. He had to be the one to make the first overt move—it was just who Wes was. If she were to lean forward, he would move away. Having him here, touching her even in this small way, was thousands of times better than not having him here at all.

All too soon, Wes dropped his hand. Clearing his throat, he took a step back. She wanted to cry foul, but she didn't. She had taken things as far as was wise today.

"I actually wanted to talk to you about your plans after

graduation." The old Wes was back quick as a flash. Nice, concerned, friendly.

Never mind she could see the outline of his erection through his jeans. Never mind her panties were so wet she was going to have to go and change.

She turned so he wouldn't see the pain and disappointment on her face. She had known this wouldn't be easy. His sudden appearance a few days ago had thrown her a little. She'd thought that she had adjusted. Maybe not. She was going to have to pull herself together, though. As the clichéd saying went, Rome wasn't built in a day.

"I, uh, heard you got a job at State."

"You heard, huh?" Well, that answered one question. He was here about her job. "Yep," she affirmed, busying herself with the few dishes in the sink.

Wes moved behind her. She could feel the heat from his body against her back. If she moved back just a little, she would be pressed against him. Was he thinking about that right now?

"I was thinking you should move in with me. I have a condo not far from Foggy Bottom. It would be easier and less expensive." Was it just her, or did one of the best recon commanders in the Corps sound nervous? "Plus I wouldn't worry so much about you if you were...there."

Incredible. The man could face down a bullet, but he couldn't bring himself to say anything he really wanted to say. This was going to be a steep uphill climb.

She debated whether she should say yes right away. One way or another, she had every intention of moving in with him anyway. Not platonically, either. He was offering her a perfect opportunity. If they were sharing the same living space, she could work to tear down those damnable walls of his.

"I don't think that would be such a good idea," Britt said instead of giving in right away. "I mean, if you are going to freak out like that every time I have a date, it may get a bit contentious, don't you think?"

"Date?"

Britt whirled around on him. "Yeah, date. I am a red-blooded

woman. You don't really expect me *not* to date, do you?"

It was clear by the stricken look on his face he had.

"I thought we just made this clear."

Men were so adorably clueless.

"Wes, I'm not to lie. I want you, I have since I was eighteen years old. But you don't feel the same way. I *will* be dating. I'm not the type to sit around waiting for some dude to decide he wants me."

Wes looked like he'd just smelled a raunchy fart while being hit upside the head. Man, men where dense.

"You didn't expect me to just stay single because you can't make a move, did you?" She was rubbing it in a bit, but damn it, he deserved it. She could tell by the blank expression that was exactly what he expected.

"Britt, I don't think I can handle seeing you date."

Well, at least he was honest.

"Then the answer is no."

Britt had planned on sailing right past him and locking herself in her room to cry out her frustration before reevaluating her strategy. Planned on it, but she didn't get more than two steps before she found herself crushed against one rock-hard torso, two hands holding her body tightly.

"Don't do this, Britt." He was begging, but she honestly had no idea what the hell he was begging for.

"Wes, I'm not doing anything to you. You are doing this to yourself. I'm not a child anymore. You need to decide what you want. No more watching me from far away, no more scoping out my apartment, my dates, my life, unless you want to be a part of it."

Extracting herself from his embrace was the hardest thing she had ever done. Not because he wouldn't let go, but because she didn't want him to.

Chapter Three

This had to be the most bonehead move he had ever made in his life. Living with Britt was a special kind of hell, and Wes knew damn well she was doing her best to drive him completely insane. It had taken him three days to convince her to move into his place; now he wondered why he had thought her moving in was such a good idea in the first place. Being in such close quarters was bad enough, but Britt was determined to torture him every way she knew how. She left her bedroom door open, walked around in the skimpiest little nothings, and now she thought she was going out on a date?

It was bad enough he had to come home and catch her in various states of undress, coming out of the bathroom wrapped in a towel, droplets of water glistening against her smooth cocoa skin. His cock knew no relief, even when he took care of himself behind his locked bedroom door. As soon as he came out and caught sight of her, he was rock hard all over again.

All her clothes seem to cling to that tight yet curvaceous body of hers. His hands constantly itched to touch her. He had to stop himself from throwing her down wherever she happened to be and making her know she belonged to him. And she thought she could go out with someone else?

Hell no! So what if he had conceded he couldn't possibly stop her from dating, especially seeing as how he was doing his best not to touch her, at least not in the way he wanted to.

This whole situation was fucked. Right now Britt was upstairs in her room readying herself for this so-called "date" with some asshole who worked at the NSA. Wes couldn't stop his mind from wandering into what could happen. Even with his eyes wide open he could imagine some stuffed shirt touching Britt, kissing Britt, holding.... He couldn't let this happen. It was one thing to watch her wooed from afar, but he knew for a fact she never spent the night away from home, and no man had ever spent the night at her place. In his head he had just assumed it would always be that way. It was completely irrational, but it had given him comfort.

Man, had he ever screwed up. What the hell had made him think being this close wouldn't send him straight over the edge?

Grabbing his keys, he decided the best course of action was flight. He couldn't be here when her date showed up. He might have to kill the guy. But as soon as he swung open the door, he knew it was too late. The man was standing on his porch, a bouquet of cheap gas station flowers in his hand and a smarmy smile in his face. The smile disappeared, but it was too late. Wes had seen his intent as clear as day. He wasn't going a damn place.

"Yeah?" Sixteen years of badass Marine colored the simple word. Mr. NSA paled, taking a step back. He nervously looked again at the number mounted on the wall outside the door.

Wes hated him on sight. No more than five feet eleven, the man wore an impeccable knock off of a Brooks Brother suit, a silk/cotton blended tie from some discount outlet, and shiny fake leather shoes. His nondescript brown hair was heavily gelled and brushed backward. The flashy, expensive car at the curb stood in direct contrast to the patently artificial man before him.

What in hell was Britt thinking? She knew better than to ever think he would allow her within ten feet of a man like this. But then again, maybe that was her plan.

"I'm here to pick up Britt."

The bastard had the nerve to sound condescending. Wes might be in old jeans and a T-shirt, but anyone in the NSA who couldn't tell he was

facing his own death at this precise moment had to be an idiot of the first degree.

"Oh, hell no." There wasn't even any heat in Wes' statement. It was more a recitation of an indisputable fact. Britt was not going anywhere with this asshole.

"Excuse me?" The nameless man had the unmitigated audacity to puff out his chest. It would have been laughable had Wes not been seeing red.

"Do yourself a favor." Wes spoke in a slow, measured tone so that Mr. NSA would be sure to catch his meaning. "Turn around and walk away while you still can."

He could hear Britt coming down the staircase; he needed this dude gone before things got real ugly. One bright smile in this guy's direction and Wes was going to have to punch him in the face. He didn't deserve Britt's smiles. He didn't deserve to even look in her direction. He didn't have enough common sense to save himself, much less protect a woman like her. This was so not going to happen it wasn't even funny.

"Uh, are you her...?"

He was going to have to kick this dude's ass. There was going to be no way around it. He could feel Britt coming up behind him, and the dumb ass seemed no closer to leaving. She would see him, talk to him, and Wes would have to show his behind.

"Is that Greg?" Damn her for sounding so cheerful while he was standing there going insane.

Britt was his. His woman, no matter how hard he may try to fight against it. The truth of the matter was he was tired of fighting a losing battle.

"Is that his name? He didn't say, but he was just leaving." Rage warred with almost uncontrollable lust, and he knew Britt of all people could read him unlike anyone else on earth. She moved to his side quickly, placing her arm around him. As if that would stop what was about to happen. Her date—Greg, she had called him—was not a wise man. He was going to push his luck. Wes had been through too many combat missions not to see hazardous a mile away. Greg wanted Britt

badly, and unfortunately, that was all the man was thinking about. And that was going to get him hurt.

"Greg, can you give Wes and me a minute? If you can wait in the car, I will be right out."

"No, she won't," Wes interjected before *Greg* could answer. "She won't be going anywhere with you tonight...or ever. Leave now."

He heard Britt's indrawn breath, felt her body tense. Finally, she was beginning to understand the danger dear Greg was in. Good. Maybe she could talk some sense into lover boy.

"Maybe you should go." Britt tried to step forward, but Wes jerked her back. He couldn't help himself. He was in a dangerous place right this second; he wasn't sure what he would do if that dude tried to touch her.

"Britt, who is this guy?" Greg demanded, eyeing the way Wes' arm snaked around her waist. "Are you okay? Do I need to call for help?"

Oh, for crying out loud? What kind of man needed to call for help to save a woman in danger? Not that Britt was in danger of anything more than a stiff cock all up in her. If anyone was in any danger, it was Greg.

"I am not in any danger." Britt sounded affronted. Smart woman. "But I can't say the same thing for *you* right now. You really should leave. I am so sorry, I will call you later."

"No, she won't." She would be busy in his bed. This needed to be settled, and he was going to settle it.

Sick with the conversation, Wes slammed the door in Greg's face and then waited. If the man knocked on his damned door, he was going to lose a hand. There was a muttered complaint, and a few seconds later, a car revved and sped off. Looked like Greg caught a clue. Now for Britt.

Wes released his hold on her and looked at her. She had on one of those wrap dresses that tied on the sides—easy on and off. The red satiny material brought out the brown in her eyes, making her skin glow. Her lips were lightly glossed, her perfume light and alluring. She looked and smelled edible, and he was damned hungry.

To her credit, she didn't look the least bit scared, though she had decided not to blast him for what he had just done. She had every right to. He had been explicit in his denial that there would ever be anything

between them. She was well within her rights to date whomever she pleased.

"Take it off."

The time for doubts was over.

"You said this wasn't going to happen." Her voice was low and sultry. A little gasp proved how turned on she was.

"I was wrong. Take it off, Britt."

Wes ground his teeth as he saw how easily the dress opened. Just a little tug on the tie at her side and it fell completely open, revealing a see-through ivory panty set edged with tiny iridescent beads. She was going out like that?

He moved forward to slide the dress off her shoulders. His mouth watered as she stood there proudly. The only show of nervousness on her part was the way she bit her lower lip. Such lush, kissable lips. His head dipped to place a fleeting kiss against her shoulder.

"You were wearing this for *him*?" Greg would never in million years do anything in his life to warrant receiving such a reward. This was a warrior's woman; she needed a man worthy of all that she was.

He doubted he was such a man, but he would spend the rest of his life striving to be.

Britt shrugged. "He was never going to see my underwear."

How reasonable that sounded. How little it did to calm the current situation.

"Oh, baby, you bet your sweet ass he was never going to see them." Wes moved behind her, his hand caressing her bare midriff. His lips found her neck before moving upward to her ear. "I have been such a fool, haven't I?" She shuddered, just a touch. Her body melted back against him. His hips rocked forward, his cock instinctively questing the round soft globes of her behind to nestle between. "Will you forgive me, sweetheart?" His hands cupped her breasts, and their firm spheres filled his hands perfectly. His thumbs rubbed gently over her pointed nipples.

"Yes." It was more than an answer to his question; they both knew it.

He turned her then, taking her lips in a soul-searing kiss that left

them both breathless. His tongue plundered her as he drank in her kiss. It had been so long since he had tasted her sweetness. He had to have more. Without breaking the kiss, he lifted her in his arms and carried her to the couch. The bedroom was just too far away. It wasn't until she was settled into the overstuffed cushions that he came up for air.

"You are so beautiful," he murmured, his hands skimming over the contours of his body. "So perfect."

He opened her thighs slowly, inhaling her husky essence. He was drooling, anticipating her taste. He didn't even bother to remove those tiny little panties of hers before he buried his face between her thighs. He had to taste her!

His tongue snaked out for one long, slow first lick. Nothing could hold back his moan of appreciation. She was just as sweet as he had spent countless hours imagining she would be. Her flavor burst on his tongue, daring him to take more—he was never a man to back down from a dare.

Taking hold of her underwear with both hands, he tore them off, desperate for more. He dove in, thrusting his tongue deep inside while his finger stroked her exposed clit. Nothing in the world had ever tasted so good. He loved the way her small hands felt gripping his head, tugging on the short hairs of his military cut.

He drove her to no less than two orgasms before lifting his head and replacing his tongue with his fingers. She was so damn tight; she was going to choke the shit out of his dick. He needed to see her come. He needed to know he was the man making her come.

"Show me, baby," he rasped. "Come for me and show me you want me."

Her hips rocked upward in time with his fingers. Damn, he loved the way those hips moved. His eyes crossed just thinking about feeling her rocking against his body like that. Her head was thrown back, her eyes closed. He needed to see her, needed her to see him, to see that he was the one doing this to her.

"Open your eyes, Britt, and show me."

She obeyed immediately, her gaze heavy lidded. "Please, Wes?"

"Please what? Tell me what you need, baby."

"I need you to fuck me. Please fuck me."

He was going to come in his pants, something he hadn't done even as an overeager teenager. But he needed her to come first. He needed her to be so wet she was gushing with desire. There was no way he was going to fit otherwise.

"Come for me first."

He didn't know if he would survive it, but that didn't stop his drive to see it.

As if waiting for his command, her body tightened, her pussy throbbing against his fingers. It was every bit as breathtaking as he'd imagined it would be. Her chest heaved and her eyes closed as her mouth opened in a soundless scream. He couldn't get his clothes off fast enough.

"Come here, sweetheart." He sat next to her on the couch, gathering her in his arms and settling her to face him on his lap. "I don't want to hurt you, baby, I want you so damn bad." Even as he spoke, he rubbed the mushroomed head of his cock against her puffy nether lips. He slid it back and forth, watching the play of emotions across her face intensely. Nothing was more important than her; his entire world focused on one single thing. "I will try to follow your lead, okay?"

Britt was biting that lower lip again. It was so adorable, Wes leaned forward to mimic her actions.

"I don't think I can." It was spoken so softly he almost missed it.

"You don't think you can what?" He was throbbing so hard he could barely think straight. His strokes against her pussy increased in speed as he became more frantic.

"I've never...I haven't..." Her voice trailed off as she looked away, appearing suspiciously close to tears.

Aw, hell, not now. Please, please let nothing be wrong.

"You've never what? Been on top?" Surely she wouldn't be so upset over something so as simple as that, would she?

"I've never...done it before."

No, she didn't just mean what he thought she meant. His entire body stilled. "Never done what before?"

"I've never been with anyone before, sexually speaking, okay?"

Her cheeks bloomed with barely perceptible color, her voice defensive.

She was sitting there looking indignant after blowing his mind; his cock was hairsbreadth from her opening. His chest expanded, feeling close to bursting. She had saved herself for him. He knew it like he knew his own name. The long ago night seven years earlier on the front porch was never far from his conscious; now it rushed to the forefront in bright, vivid color.

He tucked her legs around her and stood.

“What are you doing? You aren’t going to stop, are you?”

As if that was an option.

“I am not about to take your virginity on the couch,” he told her, proud that he was hanging on to the vestiges of his control. Damned if she wasn’t pulling on the last delicate thread with all her might. “We are going to my bed, where you will be spending a great deal of the rest of your life.”

Chapter Four

Britt couldn't believe it was finally happening! Years of fantasizing with nothing more satisfying than her "marital aides," despairing she would ever get the one thing she wanted more than anything else in the world, and now it was finally going to happen. When Wes placed her legs around him, she crossed her ankles, afraid to let go, afraid he would pull away. She closed her eyes and held her breath until he laid her on his bed.

"Open your eyes and look at me, baby."

Damn, he was magnificent! His lightly tanned body was thick and defined, with perfectly formed muscles rippling across his torso, shoulders and arms. He was every bit the Marine, all gloriously chiseled and fierce. His green eyes sparkled so much they almost seemed to glow as he looked down on her, his large hand slowly stroking his—

Holy crap! That wasn't a dick, that was a weapon!

"Last chance, baby. You don't want this, then I'll walk away like this never happened," he warned her. "Once we do this, there's no turning back. You are mine—forever."

The dark need in his voice seemed to stroke her pussy as surely as his tongue had done just a few minutes before. Her stomach clinched with need. Was he kidding? Didn't he know there was nothing she wanted more?

"I want *you*." Britt spoke firmly, clearly, so there was no misunderstanding. "I always have."

Wes growled, making her blink. She wasn't afraid, not exactly. He

was on her in a heartbeat, wedging his big body in between her legs. She barely got out a squeak of protest before his mouth descended on her sensitized pussy once more. The feel of his heated tongue against her softest folds sent waves of pleasure throughout her body. Her back arched involuntarily as he destroyed her with his tongue. He even took her pulsating clit in between his closed lips, pulling just so. She screamed out, gripping his head in a failed attempt to get him to stop. Her breathing was no more than gasps as she tried to hold on to her sanity.

But he was relentless, driving so high she saw spots in front of her eyes when she came.

"Wes!" He wouldn't stop! "I can't take anymore!"

"Yes, you can," he growled against her sopping quim. "Get wetter for me, baby. Come for me."

Nothing but death could keep her from it. One orgasm blended into another until she was hoarse from shouting his name. She was scared she might black out until he moved upward, nipping along the way. His fingers replaced her tongue, moving in a tantalizing rhythm that kept her on edge, but didn't push her over.

"I think you might be wet enough. Do you think so?"

The whole asking her questions she couldn't possibly answer was something they needed to talk about. Later. Much, much later.

When he removed his fingers, she wanted to cry. Even though she wasn't sure she could take another orgasm, she felt bereft with the absence of some part of him inside her.

"Please, please, Wes. I need...something!"

She was going to implode if he didn't do something, and quickly!

"I have you, baby. Hold on."

Then she felt it. The thick, broad mushroom head of his cock, rubbing enticingly against her opening. Rubbing, but not going in. She tried to jiggle just a little to get him to slip inside, but he was holding himself apart from her. It was maddening; how could he do such a thing?

"I don't want to hurt you, Britt."

He was so beautiful poised above her, his muscles tense beneath his skin. She needed this man so badly, she wanted to weep with it. She

wanted to scream and pounce.

"Put it in! Damn it, Wes, put it inside me!"

But he didn't. He entered the thick head, then took it out again and rubbed against her clit. Just as soon as she was sure she was going to come again, he would go back to her opening.

"Not yet." He was panting now, a sheen of sweat on his brow.

What the hell was he waiting for?

"If you don't fuck me right now, I am going to—*oh!*"

Nothing could have prepared her for this! In one stroke he had buried his entire dense length deep inside her, then stayed perfectly still, pelvis to pelvis. She felt impaled, skewered, so full she would surely burst. Yet she had never felt so good in her life. Tiny nerve endings deep inside her pussy danced in delight around the pulsating organ. It was crazy, but she wanted more. She had no idea where she would put it, but she wanted it.

"Fuck, baby, you are so damn tight!" His teeth were clinched tightly, the words forced between them.

And nothing had ever sounded sexier.

But then he started to move.

Her eyes widened as the mass of sensations swamped her. The friction of his cock scraped ever so delightfully against her vaginal walls, sending shockwaves of pleasure zipping through her veins to every part of her body. She didn't think it possible, but more juices poured from her body, easing his way.

"Fuck yeah! Just like that, Britt; baby, get wetter for me!" he groaned, throwing his head back in ecstasy.

How much wetter could she get?

Much, apparently, because as his strokes quickened, she got even wetter. Something was building inside of her, something so unlike anything her dildo produced. The warm, smooth flesh was vibrantly alive, throbbing inside her. Her hips moved, seeking the masterful organ every time he withdrew. She wanted it deep inside her forever, but at the same time, she was sure it would destroy her.

"Deeper! Harder! Please, Wes, I need it so bad!"

Britt's Protector by Shara Azod

"I don't want to hurt you." Even as he said it, he grabbed a hold of her, angling her hips upward to thrust deeper and harder, just as she had ordered him to.

"Yes! Just like that!" she gasped, lost in a sea of something so intense, it was painful.

She didn't want it to stop, not ever.

"I can't hold on, baby—come for me."

His thumb strummed her clit as he spoke, sending her soaring. She didn't just come, she exploded, breaking completely apart.

"Wes!"

* * * * *

Oh, hell, she didn't just come, she kept doing it. Her pussy gripping his cock in an excruciating grip, sucking him as surely as if it were her mouth. He didn't even try to hold back as he burst deep inside her womb, nor did his erection fade. Holy hell, he couldn't get enough.

"Turn around, baby."

He expected a fight, or at least a protest, but she did neither. Instead she turned immediately, going to her knees as if she had read his mind.

The rounded globes of her ass made him want to cry. So fucking perfect. His hands grasped, messaged, even spanked them. He was going to have to have her here, but not yet. It was way too soon.

Placing himself between her thighs, he slid back home, groaning as she clamped down on him.

"So damn good. Britt, baby, you feel so good."

He was barely inside before she came again, clasp on to his cock. Fuck! His baby was multi-orgasmic! There was no way he was going to survive it. There was no way he wasn't going to make a valiant effort trying.

Pulling her backward, he held on until the latest round of spasms subsided, then started all over again.

"That was so beautiful, honey. Can you do that for me again? Can

you come all over my cock?"

Her only replies were broken whimpers, music to his ears. He had never felt like more of a man. He had never felt so raw and vulnerable. He was a trained killer, yet this woman had gotten to his very core and made it hers.

"Let me see it, Britt. Show me how you can come for me."

Even though he had demanded it, he hadn't expected it to happen so fast. No sooner had he growled the words in her ears than she was shuddering, her quim milking all he had.

"Yeah, Britt, just like that!"

He was lost. As they tumbled onto the rumpled sheets, Wes knew he would never be the same.

Chapter Five

Britt caught herself humming again as she pushed her cart down the grocery store aisle. She just couldn't seem to stop humming or smiling to herself. The last two weeks had been like a dream. She had a job she loved, and even better, a man she loved to come home to at night. It seemed so surreal that after seven long years, fantasy had finally become reality. And oh what a reality it was.

Wes was more than she had ever imagined in her most fevered dreams. The things he could do with that lethal tongue of his had to be illegal in at least seven states.

Her thoughts ran to just a few hours earlier, when he had awakened her this morning by curling his tongue around her clit, brushing the soft skin of her inner thighs with the light morning stubble. He suckled her extended nubbin like it was a tiny dick, licking the underside, nipping lightly until she shattered.

The man was insatiable, which was perfectly fine with her. At twenty-five, she figured she had years to make up for...

"Britt? *Querida*, is that you?"

Startled out of her scrumptious memories, it took her a moment to place the voice that so rudely interrupted her. When recognition finally clicked, she had to bite her lip to keep from groaning out loud. Victor, here in D.C.? She thought she had left him far behind in Atlanta, or better yet in Bolivia, where he was supposed to be returning after receiving his MBA.

"Victor? What are you doing here?"

Thank goodness Wes was training with his crew. He would blow a lid if he saw Victor. In fact, he had in not so many words told her never to see him again. Oh, she had pouted prettily and complained, but it wasn't as if she had any intentions of seeing him again anyway.

"I came looking for you!" Victor grasped her arm, moving a little too close for comfort. "I have been going out of my mind worrying. I tried to contact your Department of State and get nowhere."

He was agitated, with dark shadows under his eyes, which looked a little too feverish to her.

She tried taking a step back but found herself up against the store shelf. Casting a quick look around, she noted for the first time how deserted the store was. If he started acting crazy, she had two options: fight or flight. Victor wasn't a small guy. She may be considered petite, but she could hold her own against most nonmilitary guys. If she wasted time screaming, it might take too long for help to arrive.

Sizing up the man in front of her, she made a quick decision. Fight it was. Victor looked as if he hadn't slept in days. He was slimmer than she remembered, which indicated he wasn't sleeping well.

What was this crap all about?

Oh, no! No, no, no. He couldn't possibly have developed some kind of weird obsession, could he? That was insane! Things like that only happened in the movies or really bad romances.

"Victor, what do you want with me?" This was so not happening, not now. "Why have you been looking for me? We broke up."

"I have been worried about you, Britt," Victor insisted, rubbing her arm up and down as if he were petting a spooked horse or something. His accent was noticeably thicker, bespeaking an extreme emotional state.

Damn, she was starting to think like a third rate psychoanalyst. She just needed to be firm, to let him know where things stood once and for all. They were rational human beings; he would either understand or go away pissed. In any event, he was going to leave her alone.

"Look, Vic, I'm fine." Britt pushed him back, more than a little annoyed when he wouldn't budge. "I have moved on, just like you need

to do.”

“You can’t mean that animal, that Marine! Britt, we were meant to be together, I know this in my heart. Give me a chance and you will see...”

“I think the lady told you to leave her alone.”

Britt sagged in relief at the sight of Cole appearing silently behind the now extremely distressed Victor. She would let Wes have it later for having one of his team members follow her, but right now, all she felt was relief.

“This is not your concern,” Victor growled in response, his grip on her arm becoming painful. “Go away. This lady and I, we have business.”

Oh, dear. His accent was really heavy now. His eyes darted from her to Cole while his hands bit down on the flesh of her arm. She was going to have to do something.

“Victor, this is Cole.” She kept her voice as even and calm as possible. Victor had thrown a switch; no point in trying to talk herself out of that fact.

Cole Ryan was a wall of pure muscle, and even in civvies, he was all Marine. His stance indicated he was ready to pounce, and that just could not happen out in the public like this. Cole could and would kill at the least provocation. The recon team was tight like that. A threat to one was a threat to all, and she had always understood that when she and Wes got together, she would have seven other men watching her back. Just like she had growing up.

“Cole is a friend...”

“I need to speak with you,” Victor hissed, making the mistake of turning his back on the other man. “Please, Britt, we need to talk.”

Cole moved so fast that if she had blinked she would’ve missed it. His forearm went around Victor’s neck, cutting off all sound. He pressed down until Victor let go of her arm, struggling for breath.

“I don’t think you understood me,” Cole drawled in a Southern accent he didn’t really have. “You need to walk away from the lady real slow like, you got me? It would be best if you forgot you ever knew her.”

A slight, jerky nod was all the other man could manage, but it was enough. Cole let him slide to his feet before firmly but surely pushing Britt

and her cart down the aisle.

That was a relief. It could have gotten a hell of a lot uglier had Victor not been so careless.

"You can't tell Wes this happened," she tried, knowing it would do no good.

"Yeah, right, babe," was the only reply.

* * * * *

"Britt? Britt, where the hell are you!"

He was going to spank her little ass. When Ryan had called him, he had just about had a heart attack. Suppose the little shit had managed to sneak her out of the store when Cole was distracted. Suppose he hadn't thought to put someone on her tail. What would have happened then? If she thought hiding from him was going to save her, she had another thought coming. He knew damn well she was in the house.

Taking the stairs two at a time, he checked the bedroom, then her former room, both bathrooms, and still no Britt.

"Damn it, Britt! Where the hell are you?"

"I'm right here. Quit bellowing, you'll disturb the neighbors!"

Like he gave a shit.

He was about to inform her of that little tidbit when he caught sight of her descending the stairs that led to the roof, where he had set up a nice fenced oasis to take in the stars on balmy nights.

He opened his mouth to blast her, but when she came into full view, he completely forgot what he meant to say.

Damn, she was beautiful! Dressed in a light cotton pure white sundress, her hair piled on the top of her head, she looked like some dark, mysterious, ethereal goddess fallen to earth. She moved with slow, fluid sensuality that had him rock hard within seconds, bypassing slightly aroused to horny as hell in a heartbeat.

Why was he pissed again? He couldn't recall with the way the dark outline of her quarter-sized aerolas winked at him beneath the damn near see-through dress. It was such a stark contrast to that sweet, innocent

smile of hers, he groaned out loud, moving in her direction as if pulled by some irresistible force. He was pretty sure he was mad at her, wasn't he?

"Hey, baby. Rough day at the office?" Her sweet siren's call teased his earlobes as she wrapped her arms around him. "Miss me?"

Yeah, he was gonna have to spank her, even if he couldn't remember why.

Before he could formulate an answer, she lifted her head to him, lips parted ever so slightly.

"Aren't you even going to kiss me hello?" she pouted.

Manipulative minx.

"You're so gonna get it," he murmured before taking her up on her invitation.

Their lips met and molded together, and the saccharine taste of strawberries exploded on his tongue. He would simply never get enough of this woman. She opened her mouth immediately to his questing tongue, her soft moan swallowed by his kiss. He didn't let her go, didn't let her breathe on her own until he had explored every sweet inch of her mouth, holding her slight body as close to his own as he could possibly get it. He wanted to taste everything, sucking her bottom lip before diving in to the moist cavern of her mouth. It wasn't until they were both panting with need that he lifted his head, giving his delightful handful one final tight squeeze.

"I set up dinner on the roof," Britt purred before he could get a word in edgewise. "Grilled the steaks myself. Why don't you shower and come on up and join me?"

It wasn't until he was halfway through his shower that he remembered Victor and what had happened earlier at the store.

Wes tried with all his might to steel himself at the sight he knew would await him as he climbed to the roof. A fruitless, wasted effort. From where she stood in front of the chimenea fire pit, he could damn near see right through the little sundress. If there was a sexier woman on earth, he had certainly never seen her.

"There you are." There was a smile in her voice, though she didn't turn around to face him.

He loved that about her. She was a Marine's child through and through. And she would make a perfect Marine wife.

Wife. Damn.

Wes combed his fingers through his hair. Yep, that was definitely where this was going. A future without Britt was no future at all. He had been destined to marry her since that first kiss seven years ago, and he was tired of running from it.

"Have a seat." Britt finally turned, nervously biting her lower lip. "I'll get the food."

He did as he was told, biding his time. He waited until she placed his plate in front of him, brimming with a fat juicy steak and loaded baked potato, along with a bowl of salad. She'd even remembered his favorite beer. The little minx. No doubt it was all planned to divert his attention. So not gonna happen.

He waited until she was seated and had taken a bite before he began this time. "You wanna tell me what happened at the store today?"

"You wanna tell me why I have a tail?" she retorted without skipping a beat.

Damn, he loved this woman.

"For things just like what happened today. So tell me what happened."

"Sounds to me like you already know."

"Britt, don't make me pull you over my knees to find out."

Pulling a mulish face, she sat back in her chair, arms folded over her chest. When he arched his eyebrow, she arched hers right back at him, not giving an inch.

Wes didn't get to be a colonel so quickly by being a fool. Britt wasn't going to back down. But neither would he.

"Come here, Britt."

He didn't expect her to actually do it. But she did. Without pause, without fear, she moved to stand directly in front of him. Head high, eyes bright, she was so his perfect match in every way.

"You aren't even a little intimidated by me, are you?" He didn't really expect an answer, so when he got one, he was more than a little

surprised.

“Of course not—I can take you.”

“Excuse me?” He couldn’t have possibly heard her right.

He was shocked when her little finger jabbed his chest to give extra umph to every clearly enunciated word. “I. Can. Take. You.” Standing back, she placed her little hands on her oh so womanly hips. “I am bigger than you are.”

Wes howled with laughter, He just couldn’t help himself. She was dead serious, even though she was five-three in two-inch heels and he outweighed her by more than a hundred pounds. Yet here she stood, ready, willing and able to take him on. It was too funny, too cute for words.

“Honey, come here.” He didn’t bother to wait for her to do it but pulled her into his lap, holding her close.

“You don’t have to have one of your men on me all the time, you know. I *can* take care of myself.”

Even though her face was buried against the crook of his neck, he could hear the pout in her voice. He had to smile. His woman was a handful, he would give her that.

“I know you can, sweetheart. I just.... Look, this Victor kid is bad news. I just want to protect you.”

“Victor is just a little confused, otherwise he’s harmless. He thinks he’s in love. It will pass.”

Fuck, he was going to have to tell her. She was going to be pissed, no doubt about that, but it was the only way he could think to get through to her that Victor wasn’t some innocuous guy who had a hard time letting go. He just hoped she wouldn’t do anything foolish after he told her.

Chapter Six

"Britt, there's something I need to tell you. About Victor."

She didn't like Wes' tone. There was something about the way he said it that made the hairs on the back of her neck stand on end. She wasn't going to like this, whatever it was.

She tried to get out of his lap, just in case she needed to touch him or something, but he wasn't letting her up. Instead he held on tight, taking both of her hands into one massive paw. Whatever it was, she was going to want to hit him. His actions screamed it.

"Victor's full name is Victor Emmanuel Socorro-Santos, oldest and only legitimate son of Enrique Cesar Socorro-Santos, the head of the largest narcotics ring in South America, and of late, a narco-terrorist."

Britt felt her blood freeze in her veins. Victor? A drug dealer? No, Wes had to be mistaken. She may not have been able to feel anything beyond mild friendship for the guy, and yeah, he had given her the creeps near the end of their relationship, and he had really freaked her out earlier today, but some kind of terrorist? Not Victor.

"No." She shook her head in denial. There had to be some mistake. "Not Vic. I mean, he is a little off, but he's no terrorist or some kind of drug dealer. I'm not that bad of a judge of character."

"I never said *Vic* was any of those things." Wes had the nerve to snap at her. What the heck was his malfunction? She was the one who had the right to be pissed. "I said his father was."

"So what's that got to do with me? Wait—is that the real reason

you were in Atlanta? You didn't come to see me graduate; you came because some prick head in the Pentagon told you I was seeing Vic. You came to warn me off, didn't you? The rest was all bullshit, wasn't it?"

She made a valiant shot at getting up, but Wes was having none of it. He held on tight without really hurting her. Damn man.

"I came to Atlanta to see you, and you damn well know it!" he growled, turning her to face him without so much as a struggle.

All she could do was straddle those large, muscular thighs of his and stare daggers at him. It was as thrilling as it was galling. It might be a little off, but she was getting wetter and wetter by his show of masculine dominance without really manhandling her. It was so damn hot.

"I know you aren't done telling me everything, are you?"

The truth was it didn't really matter what had brought him to her; she was grateful for whatever it was. This thing between them had been beneath the surface for a long, long time. One way or another, they were destined to get together; she was just glad it had been sooner rather than later. She wouldn't let him know this now, of course. It was good for the soul of a man to squirm a bit. Built character and all that.

"I was, uh, kind of, well...."

Oh, that was rich; the big bad Recon Marine was scared. Of her! She would laugh, but she couldn't let him see she was amused.

"You what? You were supposed to what?" she pressed.

"I was told to keep an eye on him through you. I was told to let him get to you and then follow."

Britt could have melted right there. He was supposed to use her as bait, and he hadn't been able to do it. He hadn't been able to countenance another man touching her. It was sweet in a twisted Marine kind of way. Too bad she was going to make him suffer for it, just a little. It was what he deserved for keeping things from her. He would learn.

"So you were going to use me as bait?" she asked incredulously, resuming her struggles to get free. It was futile, she knew it, but she had to put up a good show. "Let go of me!"

"I will never let you go, baby. And you know better. I would never allow anyone to use you in any way. I swear, Britt, I only wanted to

protect you.”

“Is that why you slept with me?”

She knew damn well it wasn't, but she needed to hear him say it.

“Are you serious?” Pinning both hands behind her back, he lifted his hips, his erection pressing directly against her core. “Does this feel like the only reason I slept with you was to keep you here? I have been through seven fucking years of torture, wanting you every second of every day. I haven't been with another woman since that night. When I closed my eyes, there was you, and only you.”

He kept her arms behind her with just one hand. His head dipped to take a nipple into his mouth over the fabric of her dress. The material scrapped against the puckered nipple, adding an extra sensation to the pleasure his mouth was already giving her. Her head swung back as she arched into his embrace. By spreading his legs, he opened her thighs and reached between her legs.

“Oh, you naughty girl, you're not wearing any panties,” he groaned against her, switching breasts. The abandoned orb felt cold and bereft. But then his blunt finger skimmed over her labia.

The tables were turned just that quickly. She needed that finger to do more than idly caress her. She could feel her own juices coating his finger.

“Please, Wes?”

She needed more, and she knew he would take his sweet time giving it to her.

“Shhh, I need to show you why I can't keep my hands off of you. Be patient, baby. We'll get there soon.”

Yeah, right. He was going to make her pay for everything she had said.

His mouth went back to work on her aching breasts, feeding off of each one. His finger continued his slow campaign to drive her crazy until she thought she would scream in frustration before plunging inside, bringing a grateful cry to her lips.

“That's right, show me. Show me how hot you can get for me.”

Her hips swiveled, trying to get as much of his finger inside as

possible.

"More, Wes! I need more!"

"And I am going to give you more, baby." His voice was dark with promise as he added another finger, making her insides quake. "I promise, I am going to give you everything I have."

His lips moved to her throat, roaming over the column of her neck. She was jerking, moaning in helpless abandon as he played her like a maestro. When he added his thumb to circle her clit, Britt came apart, crying out his name.

"Wes! Oh, shit, Wes!"

"That's it, baby. Come for me. Show me."

His fingers never stopped until the last tremor died away. She watched with heavy-lidded eyes as he brought his fingers to his mouth, licking away her honey until there wasn't a drop left. It took a minute before she realized he had let go of his arms. She knew from experience Wes was about to use his mouth and tongue to drive her crazy all over again, so she decided to take this second he was distracted to drive him crazy for once.

In one fluid move, she sank from her perch to kneel between his spread thighs.

"Britt, what are you doing?"

She didn't answer, just shot him a wicked little smile before reaching for the drawstring of his shorts. She had to yank hard to manage to pull them down, but she had taken him completely by surprise, so he jumped just enough for her to get them to his knees.

"What do you think you're doing?"

She noted that although his hand rested heavily on her shoulder, he didn't try to pull her away like he usually did. She had wanted to taste him for so long, but every time she got close, he would deftly shift their position and distract her. She was almost starting to believe the man had some kind of weird phobia about blowjobs or something.

"Britt, please, baby, you don't have to do this," Wes grunted when she cupped his heavy testicles in her hands.

They were so hot, all wrinkly but smooth at the same time. She ever

so gently rolled them in her hands, causing him to emit some kind of tormented, growl-like whimper. She liked the sound of that. It sounded the way she felt every time he touched her. She decided to experiment a little, sticking out her tongue to lick the hypersensitive globes. When his head thrashed backward, she decided to take it to another level and suctioned one into her mouth.

"Shit!" Wes nearly jumped out of the chair.

Smiling around her newfound prize, she suckled a little, then moved on to the other, this time eliciting a guttural moan as Wes' hand fisted in her hair.

"Sweetheart, you need to stop," he gasped when she came up for air, smiling mischievously up at his fierce visage. "I can't take.... Oh, damn!"

She didn't really want to hear whatever reason he was about to give why he should be the one having all the fun. She dipped her head and circled the helmeted head of his cock with her tongue while slowly milking the thick root from the base to where her mouth lay. It wasn't so much the act as it was the reaction that excited her. Every mutter, every groan fed her desire until she was so wet she could feel her own moisture coating her inner thighs.

There was some kind of heady pleasure in giving a lover gratification. She now understood why he seemed to relish burying his head between her thighs. His growing desire fed her own, making her just as needy as she was making him.

By this time, she was taking as much of his length into her mouth as she could, and they were both beyond simple need. He couldn't seem to keep his hips from rocking into her mouth, or the hand clutched in her hair from drawing her closer. Britt had to press her thighs tightly together to try to relieve the swelling pangs of want. She gulped him in, her hand frantically working every inch she couldn't fit inside, as if by giving him gratification, she herself would be gratified too.

"Oh, shit, Britt, please. Baby, you've gotta stop."

All of a sudden her mouth and hands were empty, Wes towering above. She leaned forward, trying to recapture her new obsession back

into the cavern of her mouth, but one strong hand held her at bay.

"Wes?" Her lips trembled, not understanding what she had done wrong.

He lifted her up until she was standing in front of him, the exquisite cock pressed between them instead of inside her, where it belonged.

Without a word, his mouth took hers, not so much in a kiss as it was a claiming. His kiss was so demanding it was almost brutal, but as with everything, Wes knew how not to cross that line. Instead his lips, his tongue plundered her own, searing her. She could vaguely hear the rasp of a zipper being drawn down, but it didn't dawn on her what it could be until her dress was nothing more than a pool at her feet.

Sweeping her up in his capable arms, Wes stepped out of his own discarded clothing.

"I have to have you now, Britt. I can't wait."

* * * * *

Wes was going to snap. As soon as he felt her heated mouth on him, he knew there was no way in hell he was going to last. He'd had to stop her before he exploded in her mouth. That just wouldn't do. He needed to be buried deep inside her when he came. Some primal instinct demanded that every ounce he had to give be spilled deep in her womb.

He didn't understand and didn't give a damn if he ever did. Britt was a precious miracle who defied explanation. He was a simple man with simple needs; he didn't need to know the secrets of the universe. All he needed was in his arms right now.

He managed to make it to the lounge chair without throwing her down and diving in wherever they stood, but he didn't manage to get her underneath him. Somehow, the little imp had managed to get *him* on his back. She was sitting there looking like the cat who swallowed the canary, all sultry and pixieish at the same time.

He was simply never going to get enough of this woman.

"I want to be on top," Britt declared, sticking her chest out in what

he suspected was her version of the conquering hero stance.

Too him, she just looked like she really, really needed to be fucked. Fucked, then made love to, then fucked again just for good measure.

He would have replied, but she shifted, moving so that her entrance was poised right above his cock. His throbbing head was nestled right there, but apparently Britt was trying to kill him, because she made no further move.

"Okay, now admit I can take you." Britt grinned evilly as she crouched, still completely above him.

"What?" She had to be kidding. She asks something that ridiculous at a time like this? "Take me where?"

She dipped down just a fraction, just enough to coat the top of his cock with the juices he needed to be swimming in, then stopped again.

"Admit that I can take you, like in a fight," she said as if it was the most normal thing in the world to be asking when all he wanted to do was—

And that was why she was asking. She knew it was ludicrous as much as he did, but she she would win just by getting him to admit it, no matter how false.

Then again, it wasn't really false, was it? She could take him, because if she needed to beat the shit out of him to prove something, he'd do it. And in the end, that was all she was asking.

He may be dense, but he wasn't that dense, not when it came to Britt. He needed to eat his Wheaties everyday when it came to this woman.

Grasping her hip, he surged upward, forcing her completely down on his cock before growling, "Yeah, baby. You can take me."

* * * * *

Britt gasped in stunned delight as she felt every glorious inch of Wes invading all the available space she had. His one forceful thrust hit right at someplace crucial inside her, someplace she would not have believed existed for all the money in the world just a few short weeks ago,

sending sparks of delight to every nerve.

"Oh, yeah, Wes, please?"

"Oh no, baby, this is all you." He chuckled as she grappled with what to do next. "Ride me, Britt. Fuck yourself on my cock."

Her mouth opened in an "o" shape; she tried to close it, but his words sent a thrill through her. Was it bad to love it when he spoke dirty like that? It shocked her but excited her nonetheless.

He must have sensed her hesitation because his hands assisted her in finding a rhythm. He guided her while she learned to lift up and glide back down where she wanted him to be. It took no time at all for the friction of his thick member against her inner walls to ignite from a simmer into a full-blown blaze.

Her hips rocked faster and faster, seeking and finding that elusive place that sent unintelligible cries flying from her lips. Her hands clawed at his shoulder, trying to hang on even though she was quickly spiraling out of control.

"That's right, baby, just like that. Ride your cock, baby, take what's yours."

With a broken cry, Britt slammed down on him, her body shuddering with release. She knew from experience he was nowhere near being finished with her yet, but she wasn't sure she could move.

Just as she'd suspected, Wes swung himself up into a sitting position. Britt tried to roll over, content to let him take the reigns, but he wrapped his arms around her waist, holding her steady.

"I want to see more, Britt. Show me more."

She would have asked him how she was to do that, but Wes answered the question by picking her up by the hips, then grinding her back down, ensuring that his shaft slid against her opening as he did so.

Wes!" she gasped, loving the feel of his hard, yet smooth chest and torso against the softness of her skin.

"Wrap your legs around me," he ordered, coming to his knees.

"Wes! Oh shit, Wes!"

This new position gave him the ability to power into her, over and over again. His head lowered to capture first one nipple, then the other

between his teeth, sucking and biting at the same time. Lightning flashed down her spine. Her world exploded into disjointed images and sounds.

“Fuck yes, Britt, baby, come all over my cock!”

She could feel herself spasming, could feel Wes blast inside her. She swore she could see fireworks behind her closed lids.

“I love you, Wes.” She wasn't really sure she had said it, but she heard the words in her own voice from somewhere, perhaps deep in her conscience.

“I love you too, Britt. I love you to death.”

Britt smiled softly at the rumbled words in her ear. She knew he did, but it was fantastic to hear him say it. At least she thought he did, but what did she know—she was already on her way to sleep.

Chapter Seven

Victor stroked his swollen cock, breathing heavily as he looked through the telescope. That was not his Britt. His Britt was sweet and innocent, nothing like the wanton whore who was riding the filthy big cock of a Marine like an avenging Valkyrie. The man had corrupted her somehow, pushed her to do these unspeakable acts under duress. That, Victor rationalized, was why he was working on his third orgasm as he watched. It was some kind of spell or drug, something that made his innocent angel nothing more than a slut.

As he moaned, Victor's movements on his engorged organ increased in time with Britt's thrashing body. She was breathtaking, the way the moonlight cast her skin in an ethereal glow. Her head was thrown back, her mouth open in a scream he would give anything to hear. He should be the one beneath her, and in his mind he was. Watching from a window of an apartment complex far enough away not to be spotted by the Marine's watchdogs, Victor became the man Britt was loving with such wild abandon. In his mind, it was her pussy painfully gripping his cock, her walls contracting on the delicate skin.

"Sí, querida! Sí!"

His voice echoed off the walls of the nearly bare apartment, his body tensed and seized, but his eyes never left the telescope. Not until he watched the Marine cradle Britt in his arms and disappear into the house of sin the man had created did Victor find the strength to turn away.

He had to get her away from the Marine. That was the only way he

could get her to see they were meant to be together. He would take her home to Bolivia, where they could be alone. He had doubted the other military man who had approached him, claiming to want to help him sneak his woman out of the country. Victor had not believed him. He knew the man only wanted to find the location of his father's stronghold.

There were ways around that.

Rummaging through his pants, he found the card the man had given him. First, he would call his father and tell him of the situation, and then he would call this Major General. He would get his woman. One way or another.

* * * * *

"I told you to watch her, not to have her move in with you!"

Wes watched Major General Alexander's face turn from red to purple, then back to red as the man paced in front of him. Fucking prick. Like he would ever put Britt in danger without being up close and personal to protect her. This man didn't know him at all, after all these years, if he thought he would use anyone as bait. As a United States Marine, his job was to protect, to kill the enemy, not to put civilians in danger. And this particular civilian would never, ever be placed in harm's way while he drew breath.

"Did you really believe I would willingly place the woman I have known her entire life in danger?" Wes asked the man incredulously.

Talk about being colossally stupid. This guy had to be completely out of his mind.

"We need to make sure Victor Santos makes contact with her," the Major General went on. "He is far less likely to do that if she is living in your house. Damn it, man, Master Sergeant Carmichael has been dead for ten years—you don't owe his kids anything anymore. Let that shit go. Britt Carmichael is a grown woman; she doesn't need a babysitter."

Killing my commanding officer wouldn't do Britt any good, Wes had to mentally caution himself. I can't protect her if I'm in the brig.

Taking a deep breath, Wes decided it was time to lay down the law

with Major General Prick.

"Babysitting is the last thing I am doing with Britt." Wes let his posture speak for him. The Major General had worked with plenty of Special Forces squads; he would know an offensive posture when he saw one. "And trust me when I say I am well aware that Britt, who is Miss Carmichael to you, is all woman."

The Major General looked dangerously close to imploding, but Wes didn't back down an inch. The man was bound to find out sooner or later about Wes' relationship with the woman he wanted to use as bait. Wes preferred it to be on his terms.

"I could bring you up on insubordination charges," the Major General hissed. Wes could tell he had bypassed anger and was hovering over blind rage, and frankly, he couldn't give a shit.

"I would love to see you do that," Wes drawled, his negligent pose in no way masking the ready tension in his body.

The man may be a high-ranking officer, but Wes would bet all he owned the Pentagon had no idea of the little plan the Major General had hatched. Though this was probably a CIA-sponsored plan, it was highly illegal. The United States didn't use unknowing civilians in covert ops. At least not on U.S. soil. They could request assistance, they could charge a person and coerce assistance, but using someone completely unaware would never pass muster.

Just as Wes suspected, the Major General backed down.

"Look, Colonel, we need to find out where Enrique Santos' stronghold is. He's building an army, and the Bolivian government has been no help. The Victor person is his only legitimate son, our only link to him. Sooner or later he will want to take this girl home to Daddy. Then we can follow. The girl won't be in any real danger. We will be watching. It is the best shot we have."

"Or we can do a little reconnaissance. You know, as in recon." Normally Wes would never be as sarcastic to a commanding officer, but this puissant deserved no respect.

Marines have a code they live and die by. Honor, courage and commitment. They were the bedrock of the Corps. This man before him

had no honor to use a woman to do a Marine's job. He had no courage if he had to hide behind a woman's skirts to find the bad guy. And as for commitment, Wes could see the man was committed to nothing but himself. He was no real Marine. A real Marine walked through the fires of hell for his country, his family, his God. Major General Alexander wanted to put others in hell for his career.

Never had Wes wanted to put his fist through another man's face so badly. Instead he stood his ground, knowing he would never allow anyone to put Britt in harm's way. He wouldn't even if he didn't know and love her. The fact that she was his only heightened his resolve. This was going to end badly, and he accepted that. It may well be the end of his career, but he would take that risk.

"Is that your final answer, Colonel?"

All of a sudden, the other man was calm, cool and collected, as if his earlier fury had never happened. A red flag waved in front of a bull.

"Yes, sir, Major General."

Wait for it, Wes silently warned himself. Whatever the Major General was about to do, he wasn't going to like it. He needed to keep his cool long enough to come up with a plan to circumvent whatever the man had in mind. Wes didn't believe for one second the Major would ever give up taking the easy way to his third star, and he was dead set on using Britt to get it.

So not going to happen.

"Fine." The Major General turned and began walking away before he threw the kicker over his shoulder. "Be prepared to move out in twenty-four hours. You will get your chance to do your '*recon*' in Bolivia." He stopped and turned to fix Wes with what he supposed was a warning glare. "And I do mean your entire team, Colonel. Leave no man behind."

Again, so not going to happen, but he let the Major General go ahead and believe he had gotten the upper hand.

It was too bad Staff Sergeant Ryan was about to suffer some mysterious malady. Like he would really leave his woman unprotected.

* * * * *

"You have to leave tomorrow?" Britt pouted but didn't really complain.

Wes pulled her body tightly against his own, wanting her again already. His bag was packed and by the front door, his crew warned and ready. It was the first time he could recall being so reluctant to go on a mission. Britt had changed him in more ways than he realized. It was time to make some serious decisions about his future in the Corps.

As a colonel, he really didn't have to be in the field anymore. He'd already had more than his share of front line duty. The majority of his years on active duty had been attached to teams that were mission ready. He could transfer to the Pentagon, or even the Company with little fanfare. But transferring to the Company no longer seemed a viable option. There was no guarantee he wouldn't be sent abroad at the drop of a hat, and now that he had Britt, he wanted to spend every night in this bed until they wore it out and had to buy another.

"I won't be gone long, baby," he assured her. And once he came back, he wouldn't be leaving again.

Drug kingpins who tried to translate their business into an empire were an old, tired story. Ever several years or so, a new one popped up. Enrique Santos was number ten since he had been in the Corps. After him, there would be others. He'd done what he could to make the world safe; now it was time to think about his future.

"Just be careful and come back to me whole."

From her lips to God's ears. He would fight to his last breath to make it so.

But leaving was the last thing he wanted to think about right now.

He rolled Britt on top of him, his lips claiming hers in a breath-stealing kiss, his tongue demanding entrance and stroking her own. He sucked, bit, and sucked some more until she melted. She opened her legs readily, but that wasn't what he was after this time.

"Britt, do you trust me?" Wes broke his kiss to ask, his hands caressing the contours of her generous behind.

He had wanted this for so long, but he had to make sure she was

ready.

"With my life." There was no coy smile or hesitation, just a woman acknowledging her love and trust of her man.

"Can I have you here?" He ran his finger down the crack of her ass, his breathing becoming heavier at the thought.

"Yes."

Her answer surprised him. It was quick and sure, not the ambiguous answer he'd expected.

"Honey, are you sure?"

Sweat had begun to form on his brow. He wanted this badly, but he would wait if he had to. It had become something of an obsession with him, wanting acutely to make her his in every way.

Even before her answer, his hands were moving to the bedside drawer to retrieve the small bottle of lube he had placed there in hopes this night would happen.

"I want this too," Britt answered, her gaze unwavering, unafraid. "I have wanted it."

Wes closed his eyes against the tide of need that swept over him. She awed him. She had never doubted for a second they belonged together, even when he was fighting it. She surrendered her heart and body so sweetly, he felt the weight of responsibility to his core.

He took his time, circling her delicate rosette until she was shivering; then he inserted one finger carefully, making sure there was plenty of lubrication to ease his way. He watched her face to gauge if he was hurting her. He was caught up at the exquisite ecstasy pictured on her face.

"Does that feel good, baby?" His cock was weeping in anticipation. She was whimpering sweetly, her body moving in time with his finger.

"Yes." It was a panted whisper, sounding like heaven to his ears.

He added another finger, moaning when she let out a little cry of pleasure. He had to be patient, but he wanted in so damn bad.

"Does it hurt?" *Please, please, don't let it hurt.*

"No, I want more."

Oh, hell yes.

Pulling on a condom, he made sure his cock was lubed generously before placing it against her rosette, setting his jaw at the effort not to surge upward. He would let her set the pace.

"Okay, honey, you take as little or as much as you can. You set the pace." He would try to survive it.

Intelligent woman that she was, she didn't try to sit up, but rather moved down on his rod slowly, keeping her thighs spread wide. Wes hissed as she pushed against the head of his cock, sending bolts of pleasurable sensations down his spine. He had to grip her hips to keep her from going too fast as she sank down, clasping him in a vice that was so snug his head began to spin.

"Careful, baby. Take it slow."

It wasn't what he wanted to say, but he wouldn't cause her pain for anything in the world.

"Wes, please."

She was panting, her eyes wild with a need he understood all too well.

"Sit up slowly. If it starts to hurt, stop. Try to bear down."

Heaven help him, she did it without pause, taking most of him inside her secret opening.

"Shit, Britt, you're killing me!"

She wasn't listening, she had already began to move, gradually at first, but steadily picking up steam. She was going to be sore as hell in the morning, but he couldn't stop her. His heart pounded so hard he was afraid it might come right out his chest, his body alternately rigid and pliant as she drove him in a whirlwind of bliss.

"Wes! Oh shit, Wes, I need something!"

He left one hand clutching her hips, afraid if he let go she might buck too hard and hurt herself. The other hand found her clit with unerring accuracy, pinching the little nubbin until she was screaming, trying to take more than was wise.

"Wes! Wes!"

He could feel her constrict around him, strangling his cock until he too was pumping furiously.

Britt's Protector by Shara Azod

"Damn, Britt, baby, I love you so much!"

His world exploded as he came with a deafening roar. His final thought before he drifted off to sleep holding her tightly to his chest was, how could he ever bear to leave her?

Chapter Eight

Britt knew the minute the Major General walked into the small office she had been escorted to this wouldn't be good. She didn't trust Wes' C.O., basically because Wes had told her not to. He had warned her before he left to give the man wide berth if she came across him. This was the man who wanted her to get back with Victor just so they could find the Santos stronghold. It was an unbelievably stupid plan. Who's to say Victor would have ever taken her someplace like that, even if they did get back together? Never mind the dozens of laws such a hair-brained scheme would be breaking.

As she had never been in this section of the Harry S. Truman building which housed the State Department, she made sure to note her available escape routes before the man closed the door and stood in front of it. There was one other door directly behind her. It could be a closet, and if she needed to make a quick exit, she would be venturing into unknown territory, or worse, a dead end.

She would have to take on a Marine officer who may not have been the biggest of men, but he was still bigger and much heavier than she. She would have to take him by surprise in some way, should she need to.

For now, she sat at one of the chairs placed around the round table in the center of the room. There was no other furniture, nor anything to hit him with. To her discomfort, Major General Alexander sat right next her, despite the nine other chairs. He was way too close for comfort.

"What can I help you with, Major General?" Good, her voice was

calm and collected, although butterflies were having a party in her stomach.

"Please, call me Todd."

Of course, she wouldn't. His smile was much too oily, his manner way too forward. Although this man had been her father's C.O., he hadn't been at the funeral. He had sent flowers and a card, cold and impersonal. Besides that, her father never liked him, and as far as she was concerned that sealed the deal.

At her silence, his composure slipped a little, but he managed to pull his mask firmly back in place before forging on.

"Before we get down to business, I wanted you to know I liked and respected your father. He was a good man, and his loss was sorely felt."

More bullshit, but okay, she would let that one pass.

"Thank you," she answered politely but offered nothing further.

"Right." This time his frown stayed in place; he'd probably finally realized nothing he could say to her would make her drop her guard. "Well, we have a...situation we think you can help us with."

"We?"

"It is a joint Pentagon, CIA operation," he clarified.

Great, here it comes.

"You used to date a Mr. Victor Socorro-Santos, am I correct?"

"Yes, I did, and the answer is no." There was no point beating around the bush. She wasn't about to volunteer herself into something way beyond her depth, even if Wes hadn't already warned her. Espionage was all well and good for those trained in it. But she wasn't, nor did she have aspirations in that direction.

"I haven't asked you anything yet," the Major General snapped in irritation. "And don't you want to help in the defense of your country?"

"If I wanted to help in the way I think you are about to ask, I would have joined an entirely different agency, or one of the Armed Forces. I am serving my country just fine by working here." She got to her feet, intending to walk out.

"Todd" jumped to his feet right along with her, grasping her arm. He didn't expect she would be ready for him. She spun on her four-inch

heel as if she were performing a pirouette, sweeping out one leg as she did so. He stumbled, but he didn't fall, although he briefly loosened his grip on her arm. It was enough to give her leverage. A sharp push to his diaphragm and she was free.

Unfortunately, those four-inch heels that assisted her in such a perfect turn slowed her up on the way to the door. Todd seized her from behind, placing her in a chokehold. Britt let her body go limp, throwing him off balance again, but there was another set of hands there to stop her flight. She felt a sharp prick at the base of her neck. She felt her body falling. She tried to move, but gravity had become too heavy, pressing her body downward.

Just before her too heavy lids closed, she saw Victor, unkempt and wild-eyed, staring down at her.

"Hello, *querida*. Finally, I have you."

Then everything went black.

* * * * *

Staff Sergeant Cole Ryan checked his watch before looking through his scope again. It was closing in on six o'clock, and still no Britt. This was not good. Taking out his cell phone, he called the other man on duty stateside.

"Warrant? There is no sign of our little bird. Has the snake come out of his hole?"

Warrant Officer Sydney Wills was also stateside, watching the movements of Major General Alexander. That meant the team was in the field with one sniper, a dangerous proposition, but Colonel Blair needed men he could trust, men who had been with him the longest. Cole didn't blame him. If that was his woman, he would pull out all the stops to keep her safe.

"Son of a bitch!" came the shouted reply. "I thought it funny the bastard hadn't left his office all day, so I infiltrated the premises, and he ain't here."

"Shit! That's not good. Do we have a location on the scumbag?"

"415 2nd Avenue. Meet you there in twenty."

But as it turned out, Victor was gone also.

"Well this is FUBAR," Wills muttered as they went through the empty apartment they'd tracked the Santos kid to.

Fucked Up Beyond All Repair was right. Cole didn't want to see the Colonel's face when he found out about this, but they didn't have a choice. They needed to hightail their asses to Bolivia ASAP.

* * * * *

Britt woke with the worst taste in her mouth. She opened her eyes slowly, the harsh light sending shards of pain deep into her skull. She'd been drugged, and judging by the soft drone of engines and the cool air, she was now on a plane.

Fuck!

She knew Cole had been watching her, but if her guess was right, the asshole who had come to lure her to Victor hadn't used the front entrance, which was no doubt where Cole had been stationed. Damn, damn, triple damn! She didn't know how long she had been out, but surely by now Cole would know she was gone and put two and two together.

"Ah, *querida*, I see that you are awake."

Britt gritted her teeth to keep from cursing like a drunk sailor on leave. Victor wasn't exactly lucid. She couldn't afford to piss him off; he might become violent. Instead she gingerly sat up from where she lay.

She couldn't deny the décor was damned impressive. She was on a private plane, currently on a plush white chaise. There were six lounge-type seats to her right, three facing three, with plenty of room to kick back and relax. There was a full bar and kitchen, and a closed door she was guessing led to the bathroom and probably even a bedroom. The plane certainly seemed large enough.

She was so stunned she almost missed the heap on the floor in the far corner—almost, but not quite.

"Is that Major General Alexander?"

An eerie cackle jerked her attention to where Victor sat on the floor, facing her.

"Oh!" He looked horrendous! The bags under his eyes were so discolored they looked almost black against his wan skin. Gone was the light golden complexion that was flawless and even toned. He was sporting a scraggly beard, and his hair looked like it hadn't been washed in several days. At least his clothes were clean, if a bit wrinkled, and he wasn't giving off any body odor.

"Victor, what are you doing?"

"You mean with the *puto* over there?" he asked, jerking his head in the prone man's direction. "He thought he could use my future wife to get to my father. He thinks I am stupid, no? Why else would he be willing to help me rescue you? Just because I am South American he thinks I am an idiot?"

"Rescue me?" Oh dear, it was far worse than she thought. He thought he was saving her, no doubt from Wes. Thank God he hadn't gotten it into his head to do away with his rival altogether. Thank God Wes was away. As much as she was pissed at Victor right now, he obviously had gone over the deep end. She had every confidence Wes would come for her. Eventually. She just had to hold out until he did.

"From that swine who held you prisoner!" Victor declared with the sincerity of a Southern Baptist preacher. "I saw the disgusting things he was doing to you. I saw what he made you do to him! I knew you couldn't stand it. I had to save you, *querida*. It's okay, I know you were forced. In my eyes, you are still pure. We will marry, have children, and put this all behind us."

It just kept getting worse. He ranted throughout the flight, and through it all the comatose Major General didn't move a muscle. Since he didn't really require her to keep up his animated discussion, she plotted on losing him in the airport when they finally landed, even managed to drop off during the long flight.

To her dismay, they didn't land in a public airport. She watched through the window as the plane descended into thick foliage, a single airstrip cut out of the tropical rainforest floor.

This wasn't good.

Wes hadn't told her where he was going, so she had no idea how long it would take Cole to let him know she had disappeared. She would have to do whatever she could to stay safe and alive, though if Victor's father was half as crazy as the son, she was in serious trouble.

Seemed like she was about to find out. Instead of debarking the plane as it landed, armed men stormed on board, taking the Major General away. Britt did her best to stay silent and demur, trying to disappear into the white on white interior of the luxurious interior of the plane.

"You must be Britt."

The smooth, barely accented voice spooked her. She hadn't heard anyone approach her. The armed men had only been interested in the Major General.

The man now towering over was impressive. Tall and lean, the man looked like he'd stepped off an issue of *GQ*, The Elder Version. His suit was immaculate, as if it wasn't seven hundred degrees outside. His linen suit was light tan, his skin golden, deep brown eyes so dark they appeared black, and a sprinkling of gray at the temples of otherwise naturally jet black hair. He put his son to shame.

There was no madness in this man's eyes, just cold determination. There was no telling what that could mean.

"Victor, you will ride in the jeep with the men until you learn how to present yourself," Enrique Santos spoke to his son, though his eyes never left her face. There was no hint as to what he was feeling or thinking. Britt didn't even try to gauge the situation. This was a professional—she was out of her element. "Your lovely...fiancée will ride in the limo with me."

She took his outstretched hand and rose. It would do her no good to fight, so she wasn't about to. She allowed him to lead her down the stairs toward the waiting car, casting just one look toward Victor. He appeared sullen, but he hadn't spoken once his father had. Interesting to know. Maybe she could get the man to send her back. It was doubtful, but worth a try.

She waited until she was seated across from him in the cool limo before trying.

"*Señor Santos*, please know that I mean no disrespect, but—"

"But you couldn't possibly marry a little weasel like my son, *non*?"

Not looking good for the home team.

"Don't worry, *cariño*," he went on smoothly. "I would never ask such a thing."

Nor would he let her go home. It wasn't said, but Britt heard it implied. She decided to try to act indignant.

"*Señor*, I have no idea what you might think of most American women, but I would not be happy being a man's mistress." It was safer than stating what she wouldn't do. Men like this one didn't take kindly to being challenged.

"Nor would I ever ask it of you," he assured her. Too bad she didn't feel the least bit assured. "I have looked into your background, *Señorita Carmichael*. You are not the kind of woman men take to mistress. You are the woman a man marries."

Not good. Very not good.

"Victor is...not well."

"Victor is a fool, much like his mother, may her soul rest in peace," Enrique informed her. "I would never allow someone as perfect as you to marry someone as damaged as he. I would marry you myself." His gaze swept over her in one long, assessing look. Although his eyes went hot, she could sense no real sexual desire in him. Odd. "There is no doubt you would give me many fine, sane sons. However, that is not to be."

Enrique turned his gaze out the window, staring intently into the wild, beautifully lush scenery. Britt thought he meant to leave her hanging, but then he spoke as if he had never stopped. "Victor is not my only son. I am thinking you are just the thing to bring the prodigal child home."

That was even more odd. Victor had told her he was an only child. Through the limited information she was able to look up after Wes had told her what his C.O. wanted her to do, she had found Enrique had never remarried after his wife had died five years ago. That meant the son of

whom he spoke was illegitimate. Being that Enrique was proudly Castilian, having pure Spanish blood, she was shocked to hear he would accept an illegitimate son while eschewing the one whose blood was as pure as his own. And speaking of the Major General....

“What are you going to do with the Major General? He is a two star; surely you aren't planning on keeping him.”

The laugh that was her answer sent shivers down her spine. It was not deranged, just evil.

“Oh, don't be concerned with him, *cariño*. He will be let go, eventually.”

Britt let that go. She didn't want to know what was in store for the asshole, and though she would have to pray about it, she found she really didn't care.

Chapter Nine

"How the fuck did you let that happen?"

A flock of birds flew screaming into the sky after the bellow. It possibly gave away their position, but Wes really didn't give a shit. He'd trusted Staff Sergeant Ryan with the most precious thing in his life, and now he was telling him she was gone? He could give two fucks about the Major General, but Britt...

"We tracked her here." Cole, to his credit, didn't bother making excuses. Wes would probably have shit him if he had. There was no excuse for losing Britt. "We have the location of the stronghold."

"How the hell did you manage that?" Planting locators on people who were thought to be in the Santos inner circle was proving to be futile. The closest they had gotten were a couple of outposts on the edges of the jungle and one cocaine processing plant.

Strangely, satellites hadn't been able to pick up jack shit, leaving them completely in the dark. It seemed Enrique Santos had found a way to block out the most advanced spy equipment in the world, which should not have been possible. It was far more likely he had managed to stumble on some location with natural defenses against electronic devices. Either that, or he was underground, which would be pure hell to get in and out of.

At least they had been able to wire the processing plant with explosives. It wouldn't make much of a dent in the overall supply chain, but it was something.

"Put a locator in Miss Carmichael's purse," Wills spoke up. "When they took her, they took along the purse. It was in the lining, so I'm guessing they didn't find it."

"They took Alexander," Cole added. "He hasn't been seen or heard from. The Pentagon doesn't know, the Company is trying to keep it all hush-hush, claiming he is on CIA business, but they have operatives in the field looking for him from here to Mexico. And, Colonel, they're nervous. Finding him is priority number one according to our undercover contacts."

Wes fumed with impotent rage. He really didn't give a shit what happened to Major General Prick; the man had sold his woman out. Served the asshole right that he got caught up in his own web. He hoped the Santos people gutted the bastard. His team would bring the corpse back with all due respect, after he personally pissed on the remains. Heaven help the bastard if Wes found him alive.

"Give the coordinates of Britt's location to Masters," Wes ordered. "Thane! Contact Admiral Mullins on a secure line, report everything to him and only him, you get me? Every fucking detail down to the Major General's first orders and his involvement in this shit. Inform him we are going in to extract Britt and the Major General. If he orders us to stand down, you can't find me—got that? Let's move out."

Ten men against a small army of drug traffickers wasn't the most ideal of situations, but Wes had to take that chance. Moving through the jungle wasn't particularly hard—contrary to popular myth, it wasn't hard to make a path through the jungle floor. The densest vegetation was overhead, closer to the sunlight. It was dark and full of poisonous plants and creatures, and it was hell to move quickly and quietly.

This wasn't their first rodeo, so Wes and his crew managed to make good time through the interior. It was full dark when they made it to the gates of the fabled compound.

"Shit, it's like a fucking fortified top secret base," Wills muttered when they stopped to watch from a safe distance.

This was not going to be easy. They were a good hundred yards away and had detected a multitude of traps and lookouts along the way.

Each man on Wes' team had at least five years of field experience, so avoiding both without tripping an alarm hadn't been hard, but the sophistication of the security they had come across told him this wouldn't be child's play.

"Check communications," he ordered. "I am going up this tree. Wills, Masters—circle round the back. Wills, find a high point and set up your rifle. Masters, take the low ground. I want a team of three on port and starboard. Cole, you're with me. I want explosives on the perimeter. Thane, make sure air support is ready and waiting. Go time will be this time tomorrow. Make damn sure they are here."

Unless Britt was in imminent danger. Then he would storm those fucking gates all on his lonesome if he had to. "We check security rotations, try to locate holding cells, if any, on site." They had to get the Major General out if they could, but he was in no way a priority. "Hernandez, set your post and get your ass back to me in three hours. We are going in to take a little look see. Everyone mark time and move out."

He had to find where they were keeping his woman and the best way to get to her. Wes had snuck into far tighter places, but never had so much been on the line. In the past, the most he would lose was his life; this time, his heart and future was at stake. They couldn't make any mistakes.

Three hours had never taken so long. He was ready to jump out of his skin by the time he finally heard Hernandez's subtle bird call. Silently sliding down from his perch, he met the other man deep in the underbrush. He wasn't the least bit surprised to find Hernandez dressed in the uniform of one of the guards seen intermittently around the structure.

"Found a way in, Colonel. Starboard, two clicks."

Of course he did. Sergeant Hernandez was a Houdini at finding a way into any base, building or compound known to man. Wes didn't ask where the man got the uniform from. He already knew.

"How does it look inside?" he asked instead, knowing it was likely Hernandez had been in and out of the compound a half dozen times, testing security.

"No drugs on site, but plenty of hardware," he replied, referring to

guns and ammunition. "Close to two hundred personnel on site. Two barracks near the back, one holding pen directly in front of the barracks. The Major General is there, broken but not dead. They are expecting company. Place is on full alert."

So Enrique knew they were coming, which meant Alexander had spilled the beans that they were out there. Had the weasel even tried to resist? They were trained to stand up to torture; the Major General had been a former field officer himself. The fact that he had talked turned Wes' stomach. He might be alive now, but Wes sincerely doubted the man would make it back stateside that way.

Following Hernandez's lead, they slipped through a dog hole hidden by thick, sticky vines. Moving along the wall, the Sergeant led him to the sprawling main house, located in the dead center of the compound. The men moved without sound and entered through the back cellar door.

"There is one way up to the kitchens through here. Empty now, likely locked. House servants live in small cabins portside. There are two entrances there, fully guarded. The kitchen door isn't dead bolted, easy access. There are four Dobermans roaming the ground floor."

Damn, Hernandez had earned himself a meritorious advancement if they made it out of here.

"Dunno where they're keeping Miss Carmichael. You take the upper floor, I'll deal with the dogs."

It took Wes three full minutes to disarm the electronic alarm on the door leading to the kitchen. He had to bypass the trip alarm and make sure there was no way anyone monitoring would see a short in the system. They couldn't keep the dogs from hearing them enter, so Hernandez went first. They were already familiar with the other man's scent. Tranquillizing them took ten more minutes, and then Wes moved into the cool inside of the house.

"Find the security room and wire it to blow. Use a remote detonator," Wes instructed. "Is there a back way to the second floor?"

"Down the hall through the laundry room. Three bedrooms downstairs for the cook and two maids. Two armed guards at the base of the staircase."

With a curt nod, Wes moved out.

The guards were easy; a tranq dart to the upper thighs had them out immediately. Making it up the squeaky stairs without alerting anyone was a son of a bitch. Wes found himself using his arms to pull himself up without using his feet. And there was another guard at the top of the stairs.

It took the fucker ten minutes before his stance relaxed enough for Wes to sneak up on him. His upper arms were sore as hell from holding his weight up so long. He couldn't resist a little kick to the unconscious man's head as he passed him.

Finding the room where Britt was being held was both the easy part and the hardest thing he had ever done in his life. He couldn't let her know he was there. It would only put her in danger when everyone woke up in the morning and found their inner sanctuary had been breached. He just needed to know where she was now, and then check out the places she would likely be moved to once Enrique figured out they had cased the place.

Wes was betting Enrique was no fool; how could he be to have built all this? The only question was, would Enrique do something to Britt in anticipation of attack? Wes was betting not, due to his only son's obsession with her. If Britt was a normal prisoner she would have been dead, in the pen with the Major General, or passed around to the guards. That she was being kept in the main house and given a room of her own spoke volumes. Victor meant to keep her, and he had his father's permission.

"Ready, Colonel?"

He didn't have to walk away now. He could walk into the bedroom, get his woman and get the hell out of dodge. He placed his hand on the door, torn between duty and his own desires for the first time in his life. Britt knew and understood his duty, but he had never expected it to take precedence over her. Most men were never faced with such a choice. Laying his hand flat on the door, he had to struggle to find the inner strength to walk away...for now. It wasn't coming.

"Colonel?"

Fuck! How the hell was he supposed to leave her here?

"How much explosive did you place inside the compound?" Wes rasped.

He couldn't do it. He couldn't leave her here to be rescued later. He had to take her out now. There were just too many variables he couldn't control.

"Twenty-five total. Left the area immediately surrounding the holding pen clean. The Major General should make it out alive, as long as the blast waves don't get him," Hernandez replied.

He needed every man he had to take out this operation, as per his orders when he had left on this assignment. Find the Santos stronghold and take it out. If he took Britt out of here now, he would need someone to guard her, which would leave him one man down. And if they didn't make it out, what would happen to her?

If he left her here, what would happen to her?

"Make sure the path is clear." Wes made up his mind. "I am taking her out tonight."

Hernandez grinned with pure delight. "You want me to contact Staff Sergeant Ryan to meet us at the rendezvous site?"

"That's affirmative. And make sure the others know we will be one short for go time tomorrow."

This could cost him his career, but Wes found he just didn't give a fuck. Britt was worth it. He was just the lucky bastard who got to love her.

Chapter Ten

Britt paced the ornate room restlessly. It was a gorgeous suite really, bigger than her entire apartment in Atlanta had been, but that didn't make it any less a cage. Although Enrique Santos had been all that was kind since bringing her here, the underlying ruthlessness of the man gave her the creeps. He kept staring at her like she was a side of beef and he hadn't eaten in days. It was unneerving.

He hadn't touched her, much to his credit. And he had kept Victor away by tasking him with menial little things. The only time she had seen the younger Santos was at dinner, a heavy seven-course affair way too hot and rich for the climate. Enrique had a whole "Lord of the Manor" thing going on, complete with servers and a butler who constantly refilled water and wine glasses. It was very weird and more than a little bizarre.

What really had her going was the full closet with brand new designer clothes all her size, not to mention the empty nursery attached to the suite she was given. Talk about creepy! Enrique had definitely been expecting her. But he had said she was some kind of bait to bring...what was it? Oh yeah, the "Prodigal Son" home. What the hell did that mean? He had more little Victor's running around loose upon an unsuspecting world? That was just plain scary.

But Wes would come for her. She knew it. It didn't matter that they were deep in some forsaken Bolivian rainforest, Wes would find her. He was the best damn Marine on Earth.

With one last frustrated huff of breath, she decided to ready herself

for bed. She had done her best to check the room earlier before dressing for dinner (honestly, who did that anymore?) for any kind of cameras or listening devices. Although she could find nothing with the naked eye, she still didn't feel comfortable. The fortifications and army of heavily armed men gave testament to how paranoid Enrique was. He didn't know her from Adam, and even if his insane kid did kidnap her, he would be naturally suspicious.

Checking around the room, she settled for a basic highbacked chair to use to blockade the door. Unfortunately it was a hell of a lot heavier than it appeared. She was struggling to just move the heavy object when a pair of very large, very strong hands plucked the chair up as if it weighed nothing.

A normal reaction would have been to scream, and Britt really would have, except she recognized the hands immediately. She didn't make a sound, just turned and launched herself into the arms of the man she knew would come to save her.

"Knew you were coming!" she whispered heatedly, jumping up and wrapping her legs around his waist.

"Shhh," Wes hissed, then attacked her mouth furiously.

Britt met the thrust of his tongue stroke for stroke, moaning softly into his mouth. She had expected loud explosions and gunfire, had mentally prepared herself to make a run for it at the first sign he was here. The last thing in the world she had hoped to see was him here, in her assigned bedroom.

"Baby, come on, we have to get out of here," Wes broke away from the kiss to warn her. "I want you to follow me and be as quiet as you can."

Britt slid to her feet reluctantly. She just didn't want to let him go, but he was right. It was way too dangerous for this right now.

"Hang on, let me change." Whoever had provided her with clothing had thought of everything. She had seen some lightweight pants and hiking boots earlier.

Making haste, she stripped from the designer dress and heels she had dressed in for dinner, smiling a little to herself at Wes' hiss when she stood in nothing but the finest lingerie. No comfortable cotton panties or

support bras had been in sight, so she wore a peach lace set that hugged her every curve.

"Damn!" Wes exclaimed softly. "Hurry up before I do something to get us caught."

No, she didn't want that. She was ready in a heartbeat, following her lover as quietly as she could. They crept down the hallway to a narrow staircase she hadn't noticed before. There was a passed out guard a little to the side.

"Okay, baby, I need you to climb on my back," Wes whispered to her. "The stairs creak, and we don't want to alert anyone."

She climbed on, wondering how the hell he was going to stop the stairs from making any noise if he was over a hundred pounds heavier. She got her answer when he didn't actually walk down the stair, but leveraged himself up by holding on to the handrails and walked his hands down without touching the ground. If she weren't so scared to alert anyone to their presence, she'd be turned on. She could feel his muscles bulging underneath his uniform, but he wasn't even breathing heavily by the time he made it to the ground floor.

She almost screamed out loud to find one of Enrique's guards waiting for them, but Wes seemed to know him.

"Miss Carmichael." The man smiled at her. "Good to see you safe."

Tension seeped out of her body. He was one of Wes' men. Thank God!

Wes didn't put her down as she'd expected but carried her out, through the kitchen and the cellar, and didn't even put her down as they raced to the perimeter fence. Only when they got to a hidden hole in the ground did he finally set her on her feet.

"Alright, Britt, listen, Hernandez is going to go through first. I want you to follow him, okay? Don't stop, just follow where he leads, alright? I will be right behind you."

"No," she whispered right back. "You go first."

It occurred to her he was placing Hernandez out there to watch their backs, but he was dressed like one of the Santos' guards, Wes wasn't. Plus Wes would stand out like a beacon, being so obviously out of place. If

someone spotted him, he would be shot on sight.

"Britt—"

"It's a good idea, Colonel. If someone spots me they will think nothing of it. But we need to make a move on. There should be someone on roaming watch; we don't have much time."

For a second, Britt was afraid Wes would argue, but he didn't, much to her relief. Still, he waited for her on the other side, grabbing her by the arm and hustling her into the brush. When they were far enough away not to be overheard, he finally stopped.

He turned to look at her, opening his mouth, then closing it again. Britt found tears coming to her eyes. Wes looked scared. In all the years she had known him, she had seen a multitude of emotions from this man, but never fear. His hand tangled itself in her hair, yanking her to his chest. She could hear his heart beating at triple its normal tempo. She heard his deep intake of breath, but he still said nothing.

"Wes?" Lifting her head, she witnessed something that was so unbelievably heartbreaking, tears flowed freely.

Wes was crying. His eyes were shut, but the wet tracks flowed down the contours of his chisled cheeks. He was crying for her. Nothing could have been more humbling.

"I was so damn scared, baby," he whispered, this time more out of emotion than caution. "So damn scared."

What could she say? She had never really been scared for herself after it was clear Victor wasn't going to kill her outright. She had known Wes was coming.

"I knew you were coming for me, Wes," she assured him. "I never doubted it. I knew you would never let anything happen to me. It's one of the reasons I love you so much."

* * * * *

Wes wasn't so sure he deserved such blind faith. He had almost left her there. Not that he wasn't coming back, but for a brief second, he'd considered going through with the original plan. Of course taking her out

tonight blew the plan straight to hell. They were going to have to move in as soon as her disappearance was discovered.

He just couldn't move yet.

"Colonel? Orders?"

Wes never though he would be grateful to be interrupted, but Hernandez was right. There was no time for this. Dawn was less than an hour away. They needed to get ready now.

"Britt, I am going to need you to stay with Staff Sergeant Ryan. No matter what, do not make a sound. Santos is going to have men scouring every inch of this jungle."

"Forest," she retorted without missing a beat. "The word jungle is a misnomer; there's no such thing. It's a tropical rainforest."

"Damn, I love you."

Only Britt, faced with a possible illegal covert ops mission, could take the time to correct him. She wasn't shakey, didn't dissolve into hysterics, but stood there like a trooper ready for her orders. She was one brave woman, and he couldn't have been prouder.

"Hernandez, take my smart-mouth woman to Ryan. Instruct him to keep her safe. If things go FUBAR, tell him to get her the hell out of here."

"You'll be back for me," Britt told him with absolute conviction. "I will be right here waiting."

He hoped like hell she was right. The alternative was unthinkable.

Chapter Eleven

As soon as Enrique heard Victor bellow, he knew what had happened. The damn crazy fool! After he had escorted the woman Victor thought to marry to her room, he had spent a good part of the evening investigating Britt Carmichael, and what he'd found out infuriated him. Victor had brought the woman of a fucking Special Forces Marine into his compound! What the hell had his idiot son been thinking?

But then, that was the problem. Victor hadn't been thinking, at least not rationally. The boy never had. Always a little off, Victor had grown into a completely insane man, one who had cost him dearly.

This entire fortress had been built on a magnetic fault line, making it impossible to detect by electronic devices and camouflaged from satellites. He had no idea how much time he had, but he knew he was going to have to relocate his nerve center. And all because Victor couldn't accept the woman didn't want him. What woman could want such an obviously crazy boy pretending to be a man?

Enrique had loved his late wife. She was everything a wife should be—quiet, docile, obedient, and she never stuck her nose into his business. She had also been his first cousin. Thank God they had only had one child, because obviously they had been too close of relations to have normal children. She had never seen what he had in their son. It was good she was gone now, because if they were attacked, Victor would not survive it. Enrique would see to that himself.

Walking slowly down the hall, he took note of the fallen guard at

the servants' staircase. A heavy sigh escaped him. They had been discovered. No doubt Victor's crazed yells signified the woman was gone. Good. One less person to worry about. Though he had harbored hopes she would be perfect for his son, the son who would one day take over his empire, Enrique understood she would be of little use to lure Gabriel home. He had read through much information emailed to him from his contact in the states. The man she lived with was a seasoned warrior who had never taken a permanent lover before. This told him the man was serious about her. He would never give her up.

Enrique could easily have the man killed, but from what he read, this Britt woman had a long history with her man. That meant she would harbor feelings for him long after he was gone. Gabriel deserved better than that.

"What is it, Victor?" he asked as he entered the suite that had been given to Britt. He already knew, but he had to play his part in this disaster.

"Britt is gone!" Victor spun around in a circle as if the woman would appear out of thin air. "Have you seen her? Is she with you?"

The boy hadn't even noticed the downed guard. How sad.

He considered telling him the truth, but that would be far more trouble than it was worth. Instead, he would make sure he would be rid of one problem.

"She is downstairs," he lied evenly. "All of this yelling is unnecessary. And what are you doing in her room?"

Deflection was good. It would throw Victor off guard.

Victor colored and began to stammer. "I...I was just...I wanted to check on her...to make sure...I wanted to make sure she was okay."

"At dawn?" Enrique let his raised brow speak for him. Victor was insane, but he wasn't stupid. He would understand Enrique was not buying it and was not pleased.

"Well, since you're awake and dressed," Enrique changed course, "I need you to go to the barracks and tell the men I will be down to supervise another round of interrogations of our prisoner."

Enrique didn't get to where he was today without having dealings

with American Special Forces. The barracks would be rigged to blow. All who weren't killed would be taken down in a firefight. There was no way of knowing how many American troops surrounded the compound, but they would concentrate on where the majority of the men were.

"Now?" Victor whined. "I wanted to say good morning to Britt. To, uh, see how she is adjusting."

"I will give her your greetings," Enrique replied, turning to go.

He needed to talk to his second in command and make his escape. Time was of the essence.

* * * * *

"Still no movement," Wills whispered through the communication device in Wes' ear. "No alarm, nothing."

Wes didn't like this. The sun had risen five minutes ago. Even if Britt's disappearance had yet to be discovered, the knocked-out guards surely had. Yet people were beginning to mill around the compound as if it was just another day. He didn't like this at all.

"Colonel? Air support will be here in twenty minutes," Thane warned him.

They had to go now. If they were going to get the Major General out and take out Santos, they needed to be in and out of that compound in ten minutes and get to the waiting jeeps hidden in the foliage by support teams while they had waited and watched. Air support would be dropping a precision bomb with the potential of liquefying their insides with the ensuing shockwaves. He needed to get Britt far away from here.

As much as he was tempted to just call in the air strike and leave Major General Alexander to his fate, a quick death was too good for the snake, and he was supposed to take out Santos. If nothing else, Wes would be taking out his son. It was a matter of principle—the man had dared to kidnap his woman. He could not be allowed to get away with that, and Wes wanted him to know just who the hell he had fucked with.

"Blow the explosives," he ordered, ducking down and readying himself to move.

Loud booms erupted all around the fortress. Wild life screeched or took flight as bright orange fireballs lit up the dawn.

"Go! Go! Go!" Wes yelled as he ran, automatic already firing.

The place was in chaos. Men were yelling, running, tripping over one another. Hernandez, dressed as one of them, managed to take out three dozen by jumping into armed jeeps, dropping a grenade, then jumping out before it exploded. Wills and Thane hightailed it to the pen where a battered Major General cowered. Two other team members covered them while Wes took three to search for his prey. As luck would have it, Victor came barreling out of one of the barracks, headed straight for him.

"The brat is mine!" Wes yelled out, though he really didn't need to. His men took out the other guards while they were all disoriented.

Wes shot for the kneecap, dropping the younger man, who was obviously unused to pain.

"It would be easy to kill you right here," he growled, kneeling right into Victor's face. The man tried to scream, but a solid punch to the jaw shut him up so that all he could do was whimper. "But I want you to suffer." He shot the hand reaching for a discarded weapon, this time allowing Victor to bellow to his heart's content. No one was paying attention. "You thought you could touch her? Did you think I wouldn't come for her?" He stood, pointing his weapon right at the fallen man's crotch.

"I swear, I didn't touch her!" Victor screamed, looking around desperately for help that never came. "I honor her. I would never use her the way you did! She was mine!"

That just pissed Wes off. He shot Victor's crotch twice, just in case he missed the first time.

Victor gave a high-pitched squeal, curling up in a fetal position. Like that was going to help.

Taking out his seven-inch Desert Ka-Bar with serrated blade, Wes knelt beside him, rolling him over. He had little trouble moving Victor's arms out the way. Looking deep into the man's horrified eyes, he showed him the weapon, making sure to turn the knife at an angle to catch the

rays of the rising sun. All around them were frantic gunshots, men running and screaming, secondary explosives going off, confusing the guards into thinking they were surrounded by a full platoon. Neither man paid any attention to any of it.

Wes leaned down to whisper into Victor's ear once the man had a good look at the instrument of his impending death.

"She was never yours," Wes informed him, sliding the knife into Victor's gut with ease. "She was always mine." He thrust upward, then twisted. "Pray now. It's your last chance for a final confession."

* * * * *

Britt watched the compound, biting her lower lip. The place was like a scene from the bowels of hell. There were fires breaking out everywhere, people running and screaming. Men had come out of nowhere in the rainforest, first running toward the place, now hightailing it from there. She couldn't make out much from her tree perch.

Cole was still as death beside her, his weapon trained on the action. She knew better than to ask him if he saw Wes; it would only distract them. He was their final cover.

When Cole shot repeatedly, she closed her eyes and started praying. She didn't ask if it was good news or bad. She honestly didn't want to know. As long as he wasn't grabbing her and hauling ass, she would take it as a good sign.

It seemed like forever before nine men came running toward them.

"Time to go! Retreat! Retreat!"

Wes!

Not waiting for help, she leapt down, running as fast as her legs would carry her in the same direction as the rest. She didn't get more than a few feet before she was swept up into someone's arms. Wes. He didn't speak, didn't pause, just kept running. Although he was now holding her, he didn't break stride, keeping up with the rest with ease. Of course two of them were carrying a broken-looking Major General, and none too gently at that.

No one spoke until they were loaded into two jeeps, her riding on Wes' lap, her head buried in his chest.

"No matter what, keep your head down," he ordered as they motored through the rainforest.

No one spoke; she doubted if anyone was even breathing much until they got to a clearing. To her surprise, there was a military chopper waiting for them. She was more or less thrown on board, the crew jumping in after her. Wes sat her down, then disappeared to the front of the chopper.

That's when it hit her.

She had been kidnapped by an insane person, dragged across two continents, held in a gilded cage while being told she wouldn't have to worry about the crazy person, but used as bait and a trophy for a criminal's chosen successor. Not to mention the mini war back there. The magnitude of it all hit her hard, taking her breath. She put her head between her legs, trying to hang on to the delicate thread that was holding her together.

She was going to break down. Now, after all that, she was going to lose it.

"Hey, hey, princess. Don't go all weak civilian on us now."

Cole. She wanted to thank him, but she didn't think she could lift her head. She may not be weak, but she was a civilian, and this had been way outside her comfort zone.

"I can't help it," she half sobbed. "I tried, but..."

"Come here, baby."

Wes was back! Without a thought of the other men in the tightly backed chopper, she climbed right on to his lap, sobbing all over his sooty, filthy shirt. His hands soothing her up and down her back only made her cry harder. She had almost lost him! If he hadn't had Cole watching her, if he hadn't already been in Bolivia, she might have never seen him again. She didn't think she could take that.

Funny how that thought never occurred to her until now. It crashed into her, making her feel battered and raw. What would her life be like without Wes?

"I swear to you, sweetheart, this is the last hurrah for the both of us," Wes assured her.

"What?" her head snapped up. He couldn't mean that. The Corps was his life. As broken down as she might be right now, she could never ask him to give it up. "You don't have to do that! What would you do? You're a lifer if I have ever seen one!"

"There are places in the Pentagon that I would be just as happy at," he assured her, wiping a tear from her eye with his thumb. "I don't want this anymore, Britt. I don't want to spend one single night away from you."

His words filled her with immeasurable joy. Although she would have never admitted it, she didn't want him to do this anymore either.

"Do you really mean it? You won't miss being in the field at all? Promise?"

"Honey, I swear to you, this was already getting old, but it died a quick death the moment I got with you. Promise."

Chapter Twelve

Who knew the CIA had luxury planes like this? Britt for one was forever grateful they did. While all of Wes' crew had already been flown home, she and Wes had been stuck in Columbia while CIA investigators went through the bomb site. It seemed that Enrique Santos had set up his own son, not raising the alarm because he was busy escaping, leaving Victor to his fate. At the mention of another son, Britt had been questioned to death, but as he had never given her any details, she couldn't help much. Wes declared he wasn't leaving her side, and to her surprise, no one questioned it.

The one thing that did bother her was Todd Alexander's fate. He had been stripped of all rank and transferred directly to Leavenworth without trial. Yeah, he was a traitorous asshole, but she thought everyone got a trial. Instead, she had been informed that the man had too many secrets. Besides that, he was official "dead" according to all records. He didn't have a family, no one to ask about him, so who would know? It just didn't seem right somehow.

"What are you thinking about?" Wes purred next to her. "You look way too serious. We have this plane all to ourselves for the next eight hours, and then we'll be home. You should be smiling, not frowning."

She couldn't help but smile at his gentle teasing.

"I was just thinking of the Major General," she admitted. "Such a sad ending of a career. And without a trial."

"The man is blessed to be breathing, trust me on that. And you

shouldn't be thinking about the slimeball anyway."

"Yeah? What do you think I should be thinking of?"

Wes' wicked grin sent shivers through her body. Her body was instantly too hot, though all she wore was a strappy sundress.

"Why don't you come over here and sit in my lap?" His voice dropped to that sexy growl, making her all wet and wanting.

She wasn't about to complain, though. It had been way too long since they last made love—at least three whole hours.

Their lips met tenderly, a series of sweet pecks at first. His tongue traced the outline of her lips, requesting entrance which she answered immediately. The kiss became fevered, demanding. Each tongue battled for supremacy, stroking, sucking. Britt was soon gasping for breath, panting with the need to be fulfilled. A large, callused hand made slow progress up her thigh, then around her hips, to finally come to rest on her ass.

"Fuck, baby, are you wearing any underwear at all?"

She loved it when he got all desperately horny like that. She loved that she could do that to him. "Nope." She grinned like a naughty child. "Do you think I should put some on?"

"You do and I will paddle that ass," he growled, cupping both butt cheeks into his hands and grinding her down on his rock-hard cock.

Britt moaned, throwing her head back. Her hips took over, riding the thick, hard ridge in his pants. So good—but she wanted more!

"Wes! I need you now!"

"Soon, baby, soon," he promised, nipping her chin, then her neck, and sending a fresh wave of tremors through her. "I want to see you get off like this first. Show me how pretty you come."

She was going to kill him. Her hips buckled, a cry escaping as she did exactly as he told her to. She felt her cream seep into the material of his pants, heard his tortured groan, but the damn man didn't make a move to give them what they both needed.

"Damn it, Wes!"

Her fingers flew to his pants, ripping them open and then tenderly removing her prize. She didn't bother pulling the pants down, but placed

him at her opening, sinking down with a grateful sigh.

"Naughty girl," Wes rasped, swatting her ass.

Britt gasped, the sharp hit sending electric bolts straight to her clit. Her body moved instinctively, demanding every inch.

"Yeah baby, ride me."

"Wes! It's so good. So damn good!"

He lowered his head, taking a nipple between his teeth and biting ever so gently. Her hips moved faster, her body slamming down as he suckled her. His hands never left her ass, keeping her anchored as she was swept away in a torrent of bliss. She loved the feel of those hands squeezing and molding while his lips, his tongue, his teeth added more sensation to her already overwrought body.

"Wes! Oh, damn, Wes, I'm gonna, I'm gonna..."

It was impossible to focus long enough to form the words. She was frantic now, bouncing up and down on his cock like a madwoman. She had to have more! She couldn't seem to get close enough.

"Come for me, Britt, baby. Come for me again!"

Her body shook, the waves crashing over her, sweeping her up in the storm. She screamed, her nails burying into his shoulders as she came all around him.

"Damn! Fuck!" Wes surged upward, pounding into her as he too was swept away in orgasmic bliss. "Yes, baby, hell yes!"

She came again, one exquisite eruption following another, as she rode furiously, commanding every drop.

"I will never get tired of that." Wes sighed as she melted against him.

She didn't bother to move his organ from her warm cocoon. It felt too right having him there.

"I hope not." She smiled against his cooling skin. "I have a lifetime invested in you."

"I'll do my damndest to make sure it's worth every second."

Author Bio

Shara was born in Florida, grew up in Southern California, and has lived all over the world. A Marine brat, Navy vet, and the wife of a Navy lifer, she has visited four of the world's seven continents. Her favorite destinations are Paris, Hong Kong, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Catania. Her favorite past times are shopping, exotic foods and engaging in pointless debates about politics and philosophy. When not glued to really bad B movies, she is usually watching cable news shows and arguing with the TV.

She has been writing all her life but decided she wanted to write romance after reading *The Flame & the Flower* at the tender age of thirteen. Her greatest creation was three handwritten notebooks full of romantic tales, all about Duran Duran.