

Tuesday Morrigan



The Firm  
**Charmer**

Changeling Press

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## **The Firm: Charmer**

### **Tuesday Morrigan**

Tall. Blond. Suave. Keegan Lionheart is "The Charmer" -- known for his ability to charm anyone, man or woman. Daniela Davis is his one failure. And Lancaster, his father and head of the firm, has just demanded that Keegan charm Daniela into staying at the law firm.

Daniela agrees to stay. On one condition. He must help her find Mr. Right. Her biological clock is ticking and she's tired of coming home to an empty home. That's where Keegan comes in. With his gifts, he can teach her how to find and keep the man of her dreams. Too bad his carefully crafted plan starts to go awry when he sees exactly what Daniela is hiding beneath her business suits.

## Chapter One

### Blank Check

Lancaster Lionheart's protégé was quitting and there was nothing he could do about it. And he had tried *very hard* to prevent her from leaving. When Daniela Davis had come to him on Monday with her resignation in one hand and a handkerchief in the other, he'd known it was going to be very difficult to keep her at the Lionheart firm.

He hadn't considered that it would be impossible. But impossible it was. Today was Davis's last day. And he couldn't afford to lose her.

He couldn't explain it but Lancaster felt like she had broken up with *him*, not the firm. It was an uncomfortable feeling. He'd offered Daniela everything there was to offer and she was still leaving. He had even offered her one of his sons -- he had eight sons. Well, really five since the others were married. But apparently not one of them was a deal closer.

His heavy footsteps were softened by deep carpeting as he walked away from Daniela's closed office door. Lancaster had just been turned down for the last time. He had to do something.

His footsteps didn't once falter, even when he was confronted with the closed mahogany door. His gnarled hand gripped the gold doorknob and pulled the door open. The young flaxen-haired giant behind the aged ebony desk stood immediately, full lips parted in outrage. When he saw who had disturbed him, he mumbled something incoherent into the receiver he held before slowly placing it in its cradle.

"We need to stop paying your damned secretary so much. Every time I come to visit you she's got something else artificial on her body. I don't understand her desire to look like Barbie."

"Don't worry about my secretary. She's not your problem, Dad," Keegan said.

"You're right. I have my own problems. She won't change her mind," Lancaster snarled before slumping in the overstuffed chair that had cost him an arm and a leg more than half a century ago. He immediately loosened the buttons on his merino wool designer jacket to give his stomach room.

Out of the corner of his eyes, he saw Keegan run his fingers through his overgrown blond locks before responding. "Who won't change her mind about what?"

Lancaster immediately fixed Keegan with a hard look. "What the hell do you mean 'who won't change her mind about what'? I'm talking about Daniela Davis, of course."

Keegan cringed.

*Damn!* Lancaster immediately reined in his emotions. He was usually very good at keeping his emotions in control, especially around his empathic son. Keegan could literally feel the emotions of others. Their wants. Their needs. It made him the best mediator in the firm.

And Lancaster was angry and hurt. Correction, very angry and very hurt. Such strong emotions gave Keegan physical pain.

Lancaster had personally hired the young, feisty attorney. Daniela was the only attorney in the firm to hold that distinction. Before her, every one of the young attorneys who interviewed with him "hadn't been good enough to lick his boots," as he liked to say. Daniela was also the only attorney Lionheart had trained. And now she was leaving for pastures that were surely greener. "There's got to be a reason she's leaving." It was the most distressing part of her departure. She refused to give any explanation.

"I'm sure there is."

"Well, it sure as hell isn't because I haven't offered her enough money, a corner office with a great view, or a chance to be one of the first silent partners at this bloody firm. What the hell does she want?"

"Why don't you ask her instead of guessing?"

Lancaster turned swiftly, his large deep blue eyes shining with excitement. "Why don't you ask her what she wants and give it to her, whatever it is? I don't care what it takes. I won't lose one of my best attorneys because she's having a goddamned emotional crisis. You're "The Charmer." Charm her into staying. I'm giving you a blank check, son. Make sure on Monday morning Davis strides through those glass doors."

\* \* \*

The moment the heavy mahogany door to his office slammed behind the Old Man, Keegan strode across the room, threw open the etched glass door of the beautifully handcrafted armoire, grabbed a crystal glass and the matching decanter of whiskey and poured three fingers. He swallowed the amber liquid in one fat gulp.

"Damn it," he muttered as his fingers instinctively clenched around the cold hard glass. His father had given him the one task he couldn't accomplish. There was no way he could charm a coldhearted woman like Davis into staying at the firm.

And that was why Keegan waited until he could wait no longer before approaching Daniela. It wasn't that he was trying to miss her. He just wasn't looking forward to the meeting. The firm had nicknamed him "The Charmer" because of his ability to close deals inside and outside the boardroom. But there was no way he was going to be able to charm Daniela into staying. She was dynamite and he was a smoldering flame. When the two got together fireworks went off, but not the joyous Fourth of July kind. No, when they got together someone always got burned. That someone was usually him.

It was almost five when he knocked on her cherry wood door. He waited and when he received no response, he knocked again. This time he heard, "Coming," before the heavy wood door was thrown open.

It took Keegan a moment to process the sight before him. For a second he wondered if he had knocked on the wrong door. He glanced at the nameplate behind the woman. It still read *Daniela Davis*. He was at the right door, but the woman before him was not Davis, at least not the Davis he had come to know over the past five years.

For the first time Davis was wearing something other than a conservative business suit. Starting from her feet, Keegan took in the sight before him. She was wearing a devastating pair of blood-red high heels that screamed sex. Her toned, thick legs were bare of pantyhose. The red dress she wore stopped just below her knees, flaring out over her wide hips, and its plunging neckline left nothing to the imagination, perfectly framing her ample breasts.

What little makeup she wore highlighted her facial features. For the first time, Keegan noticed that she had beautiful almond-shaped deep brown eyes and the most luscious lips. "Davis?" he murmured, more than a little shocked.

"Mr. Lionheart, how can I help you?"

Keegan immediately bristled at the cold tone, remembering why he was there. The formal way she addressed him never failed to irritate him. Every other attorney at the firm called him by his first name. She was once again the exception to the rule. "I would like a moment of your time," he said smoothly.

"Yes, sir," she said automatically before glancing at her watch. "I hope this won't take long. I have an appointment."

"At this hour?"

Her muscles tensed. "Yes, sir," she said before turning and leading the way back to her desk.

At her stiff tone Keegan immediately realized how he must have sounded. It hadn't occurred to him until the words were out that the "appointment" she spoke of was actually a date.

*Way to go, Casanova.*

When Keegan entered the room, he was struck by the soft scent of her perfume. It was delicate and intoxicating. His body clenched in arousal. It took much effort for him to keep his libido in check.

He watched her slowly walk across the room, the firm globes of her ass undulating. The moment he realized what he was doing, he was angry and

embarrassed. Why was he ogling a woman he couldn't stand? Had it been that long since he'd had sex?

Davis folded her small, lush frame into the seat behind the desk. He instinctively sought out the corner window.

"Davis, my father sent me to speak to you," he said softly, unsure of how to go about begging the woman to stay at the firm so that his burly, seemingly unemotional father wouldn't die of a broken heart.

"May I ask what this is about, Mr. Lionheart?"

"When are you going to start calling me Keegan?"

"Is that what you came to speak to me about, sir?" She couldn't quite hide her smile of amusement. And suddenly it wasn't hard to speak to her.

"I deserved that." His smile was instantaneous. "Why are you leaving? Why the resignation?"

She sighed. "I've been getting that a lot."

"Are you going to answer the question this time?"

"In less than thirty minutes I have a date." Her soft brown eyes gazed longingly at the dusking sky behind him. "In thirty minutes I have an opportunity to meet someone that might just change my life."

"You're quitting for this guy?" he asked incredulously. He had never thought of Davis as a pure feminist but she didn't seem the stay at home kind of woman.

She shook her head softly, forcing the ebony strands of her hair to dance around her face. "I'm quitting so I can *meet* a guy."

"And you can't meet anyone working for the Lionheart firm?"

"And where would I find this man? While poring over precedents, statutes, laws, and legislation? While writing memos or aiding on one of the hundreds of cases that this firm receives a year? And if I do find a man, when would I spend time with him? I don't even spend enough hours in bed to justify my rent. What kind of man would understand how I live?"



"A doctor would understand your time commitments. An attorney would also understand."

"You know, every one of my girlfriends who are attorneys and who married attorneys are either divorced, getting divorced, or considering it. No, thanks! That's one court I don't ever want to find myself in."

He smiled at the sight of pure horror on her face. He could relate. The Lionheart men were known to marry for life. No Lionheart had ever even considered divorce and there was a long, written history of the men's lives. Keegan knew his father was the only Lionheart who had been married more than once and that was because his first wife, Kathryn, had died from leukemia before he had actually gotten the chance to mate with her.

"So you want forever?"

"Yes," she said with a small smile. "I want forever, but I need it now. I've kind of got a deadline. Plus, I think I deserve it. I've waited long enough."

"Deadline?"

"Yes," she said with a sigh. "The good old biological clock is ticking."

"You say that as if you're ninety."

"No, but I'm not young. Women can't give birth at seventy, at least not yet," she said with a smirk.

"I'll be blunt. What will it take for you to stay on, Daniela?"

"Can you provide me with Mr. Right?" she said with a grin.

"Actually," he said as his long fingers rubbed the golden five o'clock shadow that shrouded his face. "There's a reason why they call me 'The Charmer.' I can teach you how to charm Mr. Right, right into your life."

## **Chapter Two**

### **The Insolent Student**

As Daniela watched the maitre d' lead Keegan to the table behind her, she couldn't help but wonder what had happened to her convictions. Somehow Keegan had talked her into doing something she wasn't sure about.

She'd sold her soul to the devil just because she was tired of being alone. As much as Daniela tried to ignore the truth, it wouldn't be silent. She hated coming home to a cold, empty home and an even colder bed. She needed more. Hell, she deserved more.

"Don't tell me I've done something wrong already."

The voice was smooth, deep, and cultured. She could feel its thick bass rolling over her skin, washing her with its intensity. She had thought it impossible but Curtis Howard's alluring voice sounded even better in person. The phone didn't even begin to do him justice.

To say nothing of the man himself. As Daniela took in the man standing before her, she sent up silent thanks to whatever angel had sent Howard her way. Check one for the online dating site that had set them up. With his smooth caramel skin, deep hazel eyes, and bold, white smile, Curtis Howard was not only a heaven-sent gift, but a beautifully wrapped one.

Daniela's smile was honest and warm when she signaled for Howard to sit. "You didn't do a single thing wrong."

\* \* \*

Keegan hated Daniela's date on sight. The man's cool elegance grated on his skin. The man was too slick, too pulled together, and too fake.

Keegan's low opinion of the man sank even lower when he saw Daniela's date covertly eying her compact, voluptuous frame. He growled low in his throat when he saw the man's fingers slide across the tabletop to grab her hand.

A discreet throat clearing caught his attention. Keegan turned and caught the eye of the waiter standing next to his table. The man's smug smile told Keegan he knew exactly what he was staring at.

He grabbed the menu and quickly scanned it. He ordered the first thing on the menu that captured his attention. The minute the waiter walked away he turned back to the table in front of him. He barely caught the end of a laugh.

His eyes squinted with anger. When he felt his lips start to curl with disgust, he caught himself. He was supposed to be pleased that Daniela had found someone she connected with, even if that connection occurred on a first date and was totally baseless. What the hell did he care?

Right! He didn't care. He wasn't supposed to care. He was supposed to find a man that was stupid enough to fall for her and want to impregnate her before the end of the dreaded Valentine's week. That was their deal.

Little more than six weeks to find her Mr. Right.

He signaled to one of the waiters who walked past and ordered the best bourbon the house had. Something told him that he would have earned it by the end of Daniela's date.

Keegan had just pulled his Blackberry out of his pocket when the waiter arrived with his food and drink. He couldn't help his sigh of relief.

Twenty minutes later Keegan was sure he was going to heave his dinner, which was a shame because the food had been fabulous. But he didn't see how he could stomach Daniela's date. When he couldn't take it any longer, he stood, coughed low and deep, and made his way to the restroom.

He stood outside the men's bathroom door. He didn't have to wait long. Seconds after he arrived, Daniela came around the corner. The moment she sighted him, her face dissolved into dismay. "What did I do wrong?"

"What makes you think you did something wrong?" he asked, confused and intrigued. *Why was that her first thought?*

"Because I always do something wrong?"

"Maybe you're doing everything right and the men are just all wrong."

She snorted at him before folding her arms under her breasts. "Give it to me straight, Lionheart."

"I'm serious," he said softly before reaching out and caressing her soft cheek. Her breath came out in a soft gasp that tickled his flesh. "You're smart, hardworking, articulate, and sexy."

"Sexy?" Daniela whispered.

"Devastatingly sexy... alluring... intoxicating."

Daniela gave him a thousand-watt smile. "You're too good at this. A woman would think you were serious," she said before stepping back. "And that could get you in trouble. So tell me, how's my date going?"

Keegan felt irritated when Daniela pulled away from him. Her skin was so soft, and he'd taken so much pleasure in touching her. He couldn't keep himself from picturing his hands on her body.

*Focus, man. Focus!*

He eyed her for a moment. "Do you want it with or without the bandage?"

"Damn. Without the bandage. Give it to me."

Keegan found himself stifling the urge to tell her exactly what he wanted to give her. All ten inches. Instead he put into words some of the emotions emanating off her date. "He's interested in you, but only for a few nights."

She grinned up at him. "Are you sure he's interested in me? I mean I thought I felt a connection, but..."

"He's interested in a few nights between the sheets with you," he said, spacing his words to emphasize his point.

Her eyes widened. "He just wants to sleep with me?" Then they tightened in suspicion. "And how exactly would you know that?"

He stared at her for a moment, at a loss for words. He couldn't exactly tell her the truth about his abilities. *By the way I'm a shape-shifting lion. And if that wasn't weird enough I'm also an empath.* For the life of him, Keegan couldn't come up with a single intelligent answer. "Trust me. I just know," he grunted.

She lifted one midnight eyebrow in patent disbelief. "Trust me! I'll take my chances."

## Chapter Three

### Fatal Attraction

"I'm coming, Cece."

Keegan glanced at the door in confusion, darting quick glances down both sides of the hall before turning back. Daniela obviously thought he was someone else. Several moments later, when Keegan still found himself standing outside Daniela's door, he started to believe she knew exactly who was at her door and she had no desire to talk to him.

Not that he could blame her.

He'd been more focused on her curves than her. And it had shown. He'd been rash and uncouth when he'd told her what her date was feeling.

Keegan glanced at the peach-tinted roses in his hands. He might need to do something more. He reached for his cellular phone just as the door was thrown open. He glanced up in surprise, one hand digging into his slacks' pocket. His eyes widened in shock at the sight before him. Daniela looked equally surprised to see him standing in front of her door. She simply stared at him, mouth open, for several heart-stopping moments before slamming the door in his face.

*Damn, was Daniela built!* After he'd seen Daniela in her red dress, he'd realized she was attractive, but in those few seconds when she'd held the door open, he'd gotten a glimpse of a whole lot of skin and flesh. Creamy, milk chocolate skin.

Daniela had opened the door with a box of what looked like chocolates in her hand. But it was what she was wearing or wasn't wearing that had caught Keegan's attention. Every inch of her voluptuous body was outlined to perfection in a tight, black lace tank top and boy short set. His hand tightened its grip on the peach roses he held

as the searing memory of the outline of her dark nipples flashed through his fertile mind.

Only a few seconds had passed since Daniela slammed the door in his face, taking away the sight of all that yummy flesh. Cock hard, he grasped the doorknob and opened the door. He came to a standstill just inside and watched Daniela run out the living room and down a corridor. Her plump behind bounced with every step and he couldn't help imagining her bouncing against him as he took her from behind.

He already knew she would be tight and wet, just like he liked his women.

*Damn!*

*Keep it together, Keegan. For God's sake, think!*

Keegan tried to focus on the gift in his hand as he stumbled through her apartment. A left and a right and he found the kitchen. He quickly found a vase, filled it with water, and placed the dozen peach roses he'd bought as an apology into it. When he looked up he found Daniela standing in the doorway. She was swathed in an oversized granny robe.

Not that it helped. He could still picture her fat nipples and he couldn't help wondering how they would feel against his tongue and how much larger they would get when he tweaked them.

"Daniela..." His voice came out dark and husky. Keegan coughed, trying to clear his tone of the deep note of arousal. "Daniela."

Daniela stared at his hands, studiously avoiding his gaze.

"I'm sorry about last night."

She lifted her gaze. After a moment she shrugged one softly rounded shoulder. Her gaze lowered to the vase in his hands. "Thank you for the roses. They're beautiful."

"Daniela?"

"It's okay. You were right by the way. I should have listened to you. The guy was too touchy-feely. Hands..." She shivered and strode toward the vase.

He froze. "What happened?"

She gave him a half-hearted smile. "He *tried* to do something. I made it very clear that wasn't happening."

Keegan's jaw hardened and his fingers clenched into fists as he pictured Daniela's asshole date. If he ever ran into the guy in a dark alley...

"Hey!"

He looked down into her softly rounded face.

"I said I'm okay. He didn't get his way. Believe it or not I've got a way with words."

He smiled. "I remember all too well. I'm sorry your date didn't turn out the way you would have liked."

She grabbed the vase and placed it in the middle of the small breakfast table.

"Speaking of bad dates, I know last night wasn't exactly memorable for either of us, but I was hoping you would like to continue with our original agreement. I'll help you find a good man and you'll stay at the firm."

She leaned over and sniffed the roses. "Why do you want me to stay at the firm, Keegan?"

He stilled at the sound of his given name on her lush lips as he went hard all over, imagining her whispering his name as he thrust deep into her. But that would never happen. Keegan quickly regained his composure and smiled. "To be honest you're the best at what you do, plus my father won't stop bitching about your resignation."

She gave him a soft smile and laughed. "That scraggly old bastard. If he was forty years younger I'd take him up on his offer."

Keegan took a step forward. "What offer exactly?"

This close he could see her eyes widen with surprise. There was no denying the gruff note of his voice, the insistence in his tone. Her eyelashes fluttered as she lowered her gaze and smiled.

One honey-blond eyebrow lifted in silent inquiry. That self-satisfied smile had told him more than words could say. "Tell me you're kidding, Daniela."



She shook her head no and giggled, a soft, intoxicating sound of pure mischievous pleasure.

"I like the sound of that. You should do it more often."

Daniela stilled and for those few moments he held his breath wondering if he had gone too far. Her gaze slowly lifted to capture his. Keegan felt himself sinking into the depth of her warm brown eyes. He held her gaze and pulled several roses from the bouquet. "I'll give you a rose in exchange for a laugh."

She leaned over the flowers he held and delicately sniffed the bouquet. Then she looked up and gave him a smile. "You're horrible," she said with a chuckle.

"You really should laugh more often."

She took the flowers from his hands. "Life hasn't given me many reasons to."

Keegan took another step forward and dipped his head. His lips were so close to hers he could feel her gasp of surprise drift against his mouth. "I'm sure I could give you a few reasons," he whispered against her lips before capturing them in a kiss. His hands went around her waist, crushing the flowers between their bodies. Daniela flinched when his grip on her waist tightened, but Keegan held on as he kissed her deeply, pressing his lips against hers, and thrusting his tongue into her mouth.

One rough palm slid inside her robe to cup a heavy breast. His finger brushed over her nipple. The lace camisole she wore provided just enough friction to help him coax her fat nipple out of hiding. He tweaked the full bud and elicited a soft moan from Daniela.

Keegan moved his hand down her torso, slowly mapping the hills and valleys of her voluptuous body. With every inch he charted, the robe slowly loosened and opened. With his free hand he pulled it over her shoulders. Keegan got another quick glimpse of mocha flesh and black lace before he pressed his lips against hers. He cupped her breasts and molded the flesh. "God, what I wouldn't give to see you in this with garters and heels."

Daniela moaned softly against his lips when he slipped one hand underneath her camisole and palmed a naked breast. He could feel her every gasping breath as the

heavy orb rose and fell in his hand. He plucked her nipple and groaned when she leaned against him.

One hand moved to her back and gripped her ass. The other moved down and over the curve of her belly until he reached the soft midnight curls shielding her sheath. He slipped one finger through the moist lips of her pussy. A shiver of satisfaction ran through his body at the feeling of her liquid desire. She wanted him.

He'd never felt more powerful.

Keegan brushed his finger against the swollen bud of her clitoris as he thrust his tongue in and out of her parted lips, imitating the act he wanted to do with his body. Daniela's fingers tightened on his shoulders as she spread her legs, giving him more access to her hot core. He dipped one finger into the moist well of her cunt, gathered the cream, and rubbed it across her clitoris, around her entrance, and over the fleshy lips of her cunt before returning to her clit. He rubbed it a little harder until Daniela started to groan and tremble in his arms. With every relentless circle he drew, her muscles tightened, signaling that she was on the verge of coming.

And he wanted her to come hard.

Keegan increased the pressure of his caress. Daniela shrieked slightly against his lips before pressing soft kisses against the column of his throat, his collarbone, any inch of him she could reach.

He slipped one finger into her pussy.

A shattering scream tore through the air.

Daniela froze in Keegan's arms, but only for a moment. She pushed against his chest and stepped away from him as though he had literally burned her. He watched, a little surprised, as she quickly pulled her robe around her. Her gaze darted to the woman standing in the doorway.

"Christ, I'm sorry. I didn't know..." The woman started to turn away. She looked over one shoulder. "I'll be waiting in your bedroom."

"I'll be there in a moment, Cece."

He started to shove his hands in his pocket when Daniela turned to him. At the same moment he realized his fingers were wet with her cream. He held her gaze as he lifted his hand and licked his fingers clean.

She froze and her eyes widened. He strode toward her slowly, eating up the space she'd put between them. His fingers tangled in her hair. He tightened his grip and lifted her head for his soft kiss. "I'll call you later to figure out our next move."

"Next move?" she mumbled.

He smiled. "We do have to find you a man."

Daniela seemed to come back to herself at those words. "Right. You find me a man and I'll stay."

He turned and strode out of the kitchen. By the time Daniela closed her door behind him, Keegan had come to a decision. He was going to find Daniela's Mr. Right, but until he came along, Keegan was more than willing to play the part of Mr. Right Now. At least until he worked this new hunger for Daniela Davis out of his system.

## Chapter Four

### Learning Curve

Daniela came to a stop several feet away from him. He could tell by the harsh lines of her body that his presence caught her off guard. She flashed him a tense smile and resumed her stride. He moved away from the door jamb just as she stood before him. "So was this one better?"

"Excuse me?"

He watched her hands as she opened her door. It took her two times to get the key in the lock. He made her nervous. At least he had since the incident in her kitchen. It hadn't escaped his notice that she was actively avoiding him at work.

The interesting thing was he cared that she was going out of her way to stay away from him. He just didn't know why he was concerned.

Daniela finally got her door unlocked and pushed it open. She stood in the doorway, one hand on the doorknob while the other held a bright green leather briefcase. "Want to come in?" She turned and strode into the living room.

Keegan closed the door softly behind him and followed Daniela inside the apartment. "I take it you didn't get my message."

She dropped her briefcase on the couch and turned to him. "No, I didn't. And Alex was very nice."

"Much better than the last guy?"

She flashed him an honest smile. It settled low in his gut. "Yeah, much better than the last guy."

"Good. At least so far, I'm doing my job."

"Proud, aren't we, huh?" she said with a smirk.

The Daniela he knew was back. There was just enough bite in those few words to make him squirm... and smile.

She pivoted on one heel and walked out of the room. He followed her. Daniela yelled as she opened and closed cabinets, "Want something to drink? Tea? Wine? Coffee?" She stopped when she realized he was standing in the kitchen doorway.

"Coffee?" she repeated softly.

Keegan smiled and glided into the room. "I don't drink tea, and with work tomorrow, wine isn't an option." He took several more steps into the kitchen. He could feel Daniela watching his every advancing step. He didn't stop until he was standing less than a foot away from her. "And coffee... this late, I'll be up all night."

Keegan felt hunger rise as he watched the slow glide of her tongue over her bottom lip. A nervous habit he was coming to greatly enjoy. Then she chewed the lip for a second. "I'll make coffee."

He grasped her wrist just as she reached for the coffemaker. "Don't worry, love. I've got all the energy I need." He pulled Daniela to him and kissed her parted lips. Something warm and seductive burst in his veins at the first feel of her lips against his. And it was unsettling and invigorating.

Keegan kissed her deeply, drinking in the taste of her lips, sipping from her mouth, tasting and devouring her. He wrapped his arms around her and his palms settled on the full cheeks of her ass. He tightened his grip and kneaded the soft flesh. Daniela groaned against his lips and broke off the kiss. "Keegan?"

He brushed his lips against the underside of her jaw, suckling her neck as he slid his hands under her skirt. Hard palms found soft satin. "I want to peel these off of you."

"Lord," she moaned before tilting her head to the side. "Don't make me regret this." He stopped nuzzling her neck and stilled, sensing the decision Daniela had come to. Keegan whispered her name softly. Daniela brushed her face back and forth across his chest several times before turning it to the side. All the while he kept caressing her bottom. "Do you want to come to my bedroom, Keegan?"

The whispered words thundered through his mind. "Yes."

She stepped back and looked up. Keegan found himself snagged by the heat in her espresso gaze. She held out one hand. He stared at it for a moment, a mere moment, before interlocking their fingers.

He was a little surprised by the simple beauty of her décor. Everything was done in rich creams and sweet browns, giving the whole room an inviting, never-want-to-leave feel. She let go of his hand and reached behind her. Keegan immediately felt bereft. Two ceiling to floor windows bracketed Daniela's voluptuous silhouette as she unzipped her dress. He sucked in a deep breath when the black fabric pooled around her feet and her beautiful body was revealed.

Pink icing. It was all he could think as his eyes ate up the sight of her flesh clad only in two scraps of pale pink satin fabric. One for her breasts, the second covering the heat he was dying to love.

Her arms started to wrap around her body. "Don't," he barked out. His eyes slammed shut as the rough sound of his tone cut through the air. He was barely hanging on and it was showing. Keegan took a deep breath and licked his lips. When he felt a little calmer, he opened his eyes and caught Daniela's gaze. "Don't cover your body. Don't ever cover yourself when you're around me. I love every inch of you."

"Keegan..." she murmured in a breathless whisper as her eyes darkened to a midnight shade.

He flashed an arousal-hardened smile and swiftly walked over to where she stood, unable to pretend he wasn't waiting for the moment when their bodies would join. Keegan picked Daniela up and felt rather than heard her shriek when her legs wrapped around his waist. He walked them over to her bed and lightly placed her on top of the thick comforter. He followed her down, leaning over her, so their gazes were level. "There's so much I want to do to you, so much I want to experience with you."

"Like what?" Every word was a breathless caress that seemed to slide over his already engorged length.

"I want to do things I've never done before. I want to learn everything that pleasures you. I want to learn how to make you come with each and every touch."

Her eyes widened and air rushed past her parted lips. After a moment she jerkily shook her head in agreement. The ball he didn't know he held in his chest loosened. He stood up and took a deep breath. "I need two stockings."

"Stockings?" Daniela's eyes widened with surprise and confusion.

He smiled. "They make good last minute bindings."

"Oh." She started to get up. He pushed at her shoulders. "Just tell me where."

Keegan followed her directions and grabbed two pairs of flesh-toned thigh-highs. He placed them beside her on the bed. "I need you to lie in the middle of the bed."

She slowly licked her lips before tugging on the bottom one as she gave him what he needed. Keegan knelt on the bed, grabbed the silky fabric on her hips and held her gaze as he pulled Daniela's panties down her body. Thick fingers wrapped around her upper thighs and spread her legs wide. Dark pink and warm brown flesh was revealed. Keegan simply sat on his haunches for several moments drinking in the sight of her sex.

"Absolutely gorgeous," he murmured in a dark voice that was alien to his own ears. He brushed his finger down one labia. A soft shudder wracked Daniela's body. His smile tightened as he unsnapped her bra. Her breasts were slowly revealed to him as he pulled the straps down her arms. When she was totally bare his breath whooshed out of his lungs.

He grabbed one delicate wrist and fingered it, brushing his thumb over the erratic pulse that matched his own. With a few deft motions he tied her left arm to the bed. He bent low and brushed his lips across her open mouth. It was only the lightest of touches but he felt every ridge, every curve, and every contour of her lips low in his gut. He stepped back reluctantly and walked around the bed. This time his fingers shook as he tied her right hand to the headboard. After taking a deep breath he stepped back and slowly stripped. He could feel Daniela's gaze on him as he took his time. His fingers stalled on his boxers. He decided to leave them on. Something told him he would need the added barrier between their bodies.

There was something about Daniela's nudity that got under his skin. Maybe it was the vulnerability in her eyes.

"That's beautiful."

Keegan followed her gaze to the tattooed image of a lion down his chest and abs. "Thanks," he said, unsure of what else to say.

He cupped her heavy breasts in both palms. Holding her gaze he ran the full pad of his tongue across her areolas. Her eyes closed and she rocked her hips against his. He repeated the act over and over and over again, until she was crying out his name, begging him to suckle her. Then and only then did he wrap his lips around her dark, swollen nipple.

"Oh, God," Daniela moaned in a soft breathless voice. The sound made his cock jerk and leak pre-cum.

Keegan started off giving her just the lightest bit of suction, just enough to make her rock her hips against his in a silent demand for more. Little by little he increased the pressure, suckling her nipple a little harder, before nipping it softly. His fingers toyed with her other nipple.

When her nipple was stiff, wet, and almost painfully sensitive he switched, paying attention to her right one. He continued to toy with the moist nub as Daniela moaned and pleaded with him.

"Keegan," she whispered in a dangerously seductive voice as she rolled her hips, placing pleasurable pressure against his cock.

*Damn!* He growled around her nipple as his eyes closed. He fought for patience and won. But her simple touch had pushed him close to the edge. Keegan doubled his efforts, paying more attention to her nipples, moving his golden head back and forth until a litany of breathless demands and pleas fell from Daniela's lips.

She suddenly stilled beneath him, and then her body started to shudder. Keegan watched her face as he continued to play with her breasts. "Oh God. Oh God. Oh, my God," Daniela screamed as an orgasm tightened her body. Once, twice he swiped his



tongue across both nipples before he leaned back on his haunches. He found Daniela staring at him with passion-glazed eyes. "I didn't think..." she whispered softly.

"Now we both know," Keegan responded as he brushed his lips across hers. "Thank you."

Confusion marked her face. "Why?"

He smiled as the heat inside spiraled, becoming something denser. "Because you gave me the chance to show you, me, us something new."

She searched his gaze for several moments before flashing him a wicked grin and wiggling her hips. "My pleasure."

Keegan dipped his head and brushed his mouth across hers. He thrust his tongue through her parted lips and kissed her deeply, consuming the taste of her flesh, and tangling his tongue with hers in an ancient dance older than time.

When he broke off their kiss they were both breathing hard. His gaze roamed over her face as one hand moved between her thighs. Keegan parted the swollen lips of her sex and stroked Daniela, using her every facial reaction as a guide that told him when to go slow, when to go fast, when to be hard, and when to be soft. He caressed her clitoris as he lowered his head and captured one nipple.

Keegan moistened two fingers in her cream before sliding them deep into her sex. For a moment he simply held them inside her, doing nothing more than allowing her wet heat to coat him. He released her nipple with a pop and slid down her body. Keegan kept his fingers embedded deep inside her.

He breathed against her sex, blowing moist air over her already heated flesh. Daniela started to struggle against the bindings and lift her hips. Keegan pushed his fingers deeper into her cunt as he straddled her legs, preventing her from moving. He placed a soft kiss on her fluttering belly as he withdrew his fingers. Keegan ran his tongue over the softly-rounded mound as he plunged them back in.

A moan drifted through the air.

He heeded the implicit warning in the throaty sound and slid his fingers out until only the first knuckle was sheathed. His thumb brushed across Daniela's clitoris in

a circular motion that forced her legs to shake. He thrust his two fingers back into her sex hard and curled his fingers, pressing them against the raised nub on the inner walls of her cunt as his thumb caressed her clitoris. Daniela's body shook harder and her voice deepened. Keegan watched her beautiful face as he plunged his fingers in and out of her sheath, making sure to tease her G-spot with every entrance.

Her teeth dug into her bottom lip as a deep shiver ran through her body. Keegan increased the speed of his thrusts. "Fuck. Fuck. Fuck," Daniela started to chant as her legs jerked beneath his thighs.

"That's it, baby. Come for me. Come for me," he murmured before leaning forward and suckling one nipple.

It was as though Keegan had poured gasoline on kindling. Daniela came hard, tightening around his fingers, as her pussy milked his digits. Her cream coated him as he thrust into her once, twice, thrice.

"Fuck," she grunted as he withdrew his fingers from her still clenching sheath. He threw one leg over hers and sat beside her hip as he removed her bindings. Once they were off he pulled her to him as he lay upon his back.

He started to shake his head no the moment her hand reached for his boxers. She looked up at him with uncertainty in her wide, brown gaze. He smiled and brushed his lips against hers. "You've already given me more than I deserve, more than I even asked for."

Her hands didn't move from his waist, instead they inched down toward his boxers. Keegan was forced to grab her determined little hands. Her gaze fluttered to the hard ridge of his cock before returning to his face. "Last I checked I came twice and you got nothing."

"Wrong." He leaned forward and pushed Daniela onto her back and pressed his lips to hers.

Keegan could not explain his mood, why he wasn't jumping the bones she was so doggedly offering. He tried not to think about the fact that he wanted to take it slow with a woman he'd never wanted to date as he pulled Daniela closer to him.

## Chapter Five

### Dangerous State of Mind

“Woohoo! Party over here.”

Someone grabbed her around the waist. Daniela found herself in the middle of a conga line. She turned around and caught Killian’s emerald gaze. Like all the Lionheart men he was handsome and charismatic. “It’s about time, sweetheart,” he murmured before placing a soft kiss on her cheek. She laughed as his lips brushed across her skin.

“Nice to see you too,” she murmured as she tried to maneuver her way out of the line. One hand landed on her backside. She shrieked softly as the sting settled. “Damn it, Killian. That actually hurt.”

He leaned forward. “No, it didn’t.”

“I could sue you for sexual harassment.”

He snorted. “I think that might ruin our great friendship.”

The conga line turned and she caught sight of Kane Lionheart. “Exactly how many of the brothers came to this thing?”

Killian grabbed her arms and pulled her out of the line. He flashed Daniela a wide grin. “With Father’s help, Keegan managed to coerce us all into coming, well, all except Khalil.”

She gaped at him. “All seven brothers are here?”

“And their wives. Even Nicollet came. Pop’s happy. He and Sam are babysitting the twins.”

She folded her arms over her chest. “Keegan is really going all out for this, isn’t he?”

“Dad’s determined to keep you. Can’t say that I blame him.”

She flashed him a bold grin and winked. "Keep it up, Lionheart, and I might think you're serious."

His grin widened. "If I thought you would take me up on my offer I would be."

They were interrupted before Daniela could say anything. "There's the woman of the hour."

Daniela turned to find Keegan leaning against the wall. He straightened and marched toward her. There was no other word to describe the purposeful way he moved. Daniela bit her bottom lip as the searing memory of their last interaction washed over her.

The feel of his hands on her heated flesh. The intensity of his devastating kiss. The release that had rained through her system like a monsoon. For one moment she felt herself drowning in the memory.

For one moment she wished they were back in her bedroom, touching, tasting, and teasing one another.

She gave him a tense smile. "I came just like you ordered."

He stopped in front of her and looked her over, starting from her platform-clad feet and ending up on her brand-new hairdo. He smiled. "Yes, you did and you came dressed for battle."

Her belly did back-flips as the little voice in her head reminded her that she had gone through so much trouble just to see that hot look of pleasure on Keegan's handsome face. Not that she was actually interested in him. A girl just liked to know her work was appreciated.

The little voice in the back of her mind snorted in patent disbelief.

Her palms itched with the need to squirm as Keegan took his time looking her over. His heavy-lidded, smoldering blue eyes deepened to an indigo color as his gaze roamed over her, searing every inch of flesh it touched. Despite herself, Daniela felt the brand of his gaze deep between her thighs.

Someone coughed behind her.

She watched his nostrils flare as he took in a deep breath. One, two, three heartbeats skipped before he held one arm out. "Ready to stalk the prey?"

She laughed and took his arm. The laughter, the caustic comments, those things she could handle from Keegan. The lust... The end of her laugh stilled as she felt the aftershocks of her last orgasm flutter through her sex at the thought of Keegan's lust.

The man was insatiable.

She hadn't slept with him yet, but she knew that Keegan wouldn't stop pleasuring her until her voice was hoarse and every inch of her was sore.

"There's that sound," Keegan murmured softly in response to her chuckle and froze. He glanced down at her quickly, but there was no mistaking the red shade that highlighted his sharp cheekbones. They were both remembering the last time he had commented about her laughter, and the way he had held her in his arms as his fingers thrust deep into her cunt. Until that moment neither of them had really acknowledged the sexual tension that simmered between them. Yes, he'd called the morning after he spent the night, but they hadn't actually talked about what happened between them.

They were both too cautious to broach the subject. It was the white elephant in the room.

"Hey, Keegan, is this the lovely lady you've been gushing about?"

The tense moment between them was shattered as they both looked up to find a young, handsome man striding toward them. When he stood before them, Daniela realized with a sharp pang of desire that he was not as young as she had first thought. Thank God! For a moment there she had wondered if Keegan thought she was a cradle robber.

He smiled and butterflies fluttered in her stomach. He was more handsome up close. Beautiful might have been an apt description if he hadn't been harshly carved with strong lines, hard muscles, and violent grace. The man had a strong, dimpled square jaw that spoke of determination, a wide mouth with a bottom lip just plump enough to bring to mind devastating kisses, and the most startling gray eyes she had ever come across.

There was something about the way he watched her and Keegan with those silver eyes that told her he saw everything. But it was the hungry, anxious emotion in his gaze that wrapped around her, sealing her in the warmth of his cloudy gaze.

"Yes, Taylor, this is Daniela Davis. Daniela, this is Taylor Manning."

Oh lord, if he didn't turn out to be gay or married, she was going to kiss Keegan. Again.

"I'll talk to you guys later. I see Kaiser over there."

"Tell him I said hi," both she and Taylor said at the same time. They turned to one another and laughed. Out of the corner of her eye, Daniela saw Keegan walk away.

"So, tell me Daniela, what kind of law do you do?"

She smiled and faced him. Keegan had done his part and found her a gorgeous man. Now it was up to her to use the skills Keegan taught her to capture him.

\* \* \*

An hour and a half later Keegan found Daniela alone in the kitchen making margaritas. "There's the life of the party."

She glanced over her shoulder and smiled at him. "All because of you," she murmured softly before pressing the on button.

He strode up to her as the blender roared loudly. Every step was calculated, because he could feel the anger and attraction that had been bubbling inside him for an hour and a half boiling to the surface. Keegan had been manning the party, doing his duty as the host. And he had not been able to keep his eyes off of Daniela as she flirted and toyed with every single man in the room.

Even though he knew his strong reaction was irrational, he couldn't help but feel jealous. Daniela was looking for a husband and a man willing to father her children. He wanted... none of that.

Still, after the night they'd shared he had a right to feel something.

Right?

The silence in his mind was deafening. Ironical considering all week it hadn't given him a moment of peace, replaying the sight of Daniela's face contorted with

ecstasy every moment he was awake and forcing him to dream of her every time he slept.

But what truly made him nervous was the way he had taken off at first light. Like a greenhorn boy. The truth was he had been too afraid of what she would say in the light of day about the night before. The last thing he wanted to hear was a speech.

He knew where she stood.

She knew where he stood.

The problem was he was starting to get the nagging feeling he wasn't entirely happy with his location.

Daniela turned the blender off and poured out two servings of margarita in the brightly colored plastic glasses. "Want one?"

He gave her a half grin. "Hmmm, I'm thinking I want something more substantial," he murmured as he took another step toward her. She turned slightly at his softly growled words. And found him standing right behind her. Daniela's warm brown eyes widened and deepened to a midnight color.

Her dark pink tongue glided along her bottom lip. "Thanks for inviting me to this. I really appreciate it."

He nodded and moved just a little closer to her. Daniela froze, eyes locked on his. "Keegan, what are you doing?"

He smiled. "I'm not sure," he whispered before dipping his head and brushing his lips across her neck. He moved his hips at the same time, pressing his cock against the cradle between her thighs. It was like she was made for him. His erection fit perfectly between her plump thighs.

Keegan swiped his tongue down the column of her throat, consuming the sweet salty taste of her skin, the dark sugary taste of her desire, everything that seemed to emanate from her pores. "Damn, you taste good."

She giggled and rocked her hips forward, brushing the warm haven of her sex against the swollen length of his cock. He groaned her name just as her fingers dug into

the fleshy mounds of his ass. The tight grip spurred him on, the slight dig of her nails settling deep in his balls.

God, he wanted her. And this time, if they came together, he was going to make sure he came inside her. He had not been even remotely satisfied with the orgasm he'd coaxed from his flesh with his own hands after he'd left her bed.

He needed Daniela clenching tightly around him as he spilled his seed deep inside her sheath.

Keegan gazed at her as she watched the slow descent of his head. "What are you doing?" she choked out. The words seemed to echo in the millimeter that separated their lips. Keegan envied the words.

His gaze flickered to hers, but only for a moment before returning to her lips. She licked her bottom one slowly. He groaned and whispered, "Making both of us feel good," before brushing his mouth against hers.

The kiss was soft, tentative. A test of the waters. "I don't even like you," she muttered as she stood on her toes and repeated his soft caress, sliding her mouth along his in a deceptively seductive manner.

"I hate you too," he whispered against her mouth.

"Good to know." Her giggle was cut short when he captured her lips and kissed her deeply. Keegan thrust his tongue between her lips and kissed her with all the passion he felt, both the anger and the arousal. The kiss seemed to go on forever. He couldn't get enough of her sweet taste. Even when he was breathing hard, barely able to take enough air in to fill his lungs he kept kissing her.

"Oh, get a damned room."

Daniela broke off the kiss to look at the doorway where his brother Killian stood watching them.

"We got one -- the kitchen," Keegan growled before pulling Daniela close. Out of the corner of his eye, Keegan saw Killian freeze in surprise. He had just realized who he had walked in on. Keegan pressed a kiss to Daniela's lips that were parted in shock. Her gaze flittered to Killian's before floating back to his. Something dark and harsh rose up



in Keegan at the look in his brother's gaze. The shock, the confusion, and the disappointment that flickered across Killian's face as he stared at Daniela wormed its way deep into his consciousness. He knew that Killian would be telling the family what he had seen Keegan doing, soon. Very soon.

He couldn't help the viper of jealousy that snaked out and wished the tale traveled to each and every man who had flirted with Daniela tonight.

"I'm disappointed, Daniela. I thought we had something going on. I thought we had a future together."

Daniela laughed just as Keegan growled, "Get your own woman."

"Possessiveness is a dangerous state of mind, Keegan," Killian yelled before walking away. His brother's words grated over Keegan's skin as he took a step away from Daniela. The problem was he could not possess her. It was his job to find her a man who was ready for commitment. And that man was not him.

## Chapter Six

### Parachutes

Keegan leaned his forehead against the etched wooden door that, if opened, would lead him to Daniela. He'd never been more torn before. He wanted Daniela with an intensity that threatened to burn out of control. But he knew his obligations and he knew what he was capable of.

Daniela wanted something he could never give her.

He wasn't ready for commitment, marriage, kids... one woman till death did them part. He started to break out in hives just thinking about it.

And he wasn't foolish enough to believe she would be okay with them having a temporary thing, something to tide one another over until she met Mr. Right.

And things were more complicated by the fact that he didn't know what Daniela wanted. Yes, he knew what she'd told him. But what people said and truly wanted were two different things.

Normally he could easily find out their true desires.

Not with Daniela, because he couldn't read her. In all his life Keegan had only come across one person whose emotions he could not feel, and that person was Daniela. He ignored the implications of what it might mean and knocked on her door.

After an eternity he heard the soft tread of Daniela's feet as she walked to the door. He stepped back seconds before the door open. As usual, Daniela looked beautiful. Her midnight hair was slightly messy and looked as though she had run several fingers through it. Or just gotten out of bed.

He couldn't help thinking about the last and only time he'd been in her bed.

She was wearing her robe again. She didn't quite look at him. She, instead, seemed preoccupied with chewing her lip.

"I came to..." He tried to think of why he was standing outside her door and couldn't think of anything but the feel of her lips against his. He took a step back and admitted the truth. "This was a bad idea." He turned and started to walk down the hall. He managed to take two steps before Daniela's hand captured his wrist. He couldn't bring himself to turn around. He stood still as Daniela's fingers moved up his arm.

"It wasn't a bad idea," she murmured softly, but the words seemed to boom in his head. The hunger inside him tore through the resistance he had been able to erect. He whipped around and grabbed her around the waist. Judging by the shriek that escaped from her lips he caught her totally off guard.

Keegan made a mental promise to make it up to her as he strode through her doorway and turned to close her condo door behind them. He took a step forward and bumped her bottom against the door. "Lock it," he growled.

Daniela's wide gaze locked on his and for a moment he could see her every concern in her eyes. Then she smiled, a slow, smoldering smile that promised to make his every naughty dream come true. His cock twitched at the sight. Daniela stared at him as she reached behind her and turned the lock. The moment the resounding click snapped through the air, his lips descended upon hers.

Daniela couldn't understand the fire burning between her and Keegan. One moment she was moaning his name as she brought herself to completion and the next he was standing at her door looking confused and forlorn.

It was like the same rope of need that tugged at her pulled to him.

The most distressing thing of all was she didn't really like Keegan. So what if he was intelligent, funny, sweet, and attentive? It wasn't as though she actually *liked* him, but she wanted to screw him until his dick fell off.

And it seemed as though he wanted the same thing. At least judging from the intensity of his drowning kiss. Somehow they made it to the hallway. But it was all she could take. She needed him inside her. "Keegan," she groaned as her fingers sifted through his golden hair.

He held her gaze for a moment, but only a moment, before his eyes closed and his mouth tightened. "Fuck," he growled softly before turning around and smacking them against the wall. She barely noticed the pain as her back collided with the wall. Keegan's fingers were in her hair, as he deepened the kiss. Her own hands moved down the front of his body, popping buttons, releasing a zipper, until she held the long length of his erection in her hands.

Oh lord! Talk about stumbling onto a pot of gold. Keegan seemed more than fully equipped to work magic as far as Daniela was concerned. She tightened her grip and palmed him, stroking up until she reached his swollen tip. One finger brushed over the bulbous head, catching the pearl of cream there and spreading it.

"Fuck!"

"How many?" she whispered as her thumb drew a line from the slit in his head to the root of his stalk.

"Ten. Ten inches," he choked out. Indigo fire burned in his gaze. "Stop." He pushed at her shoulders until she was forced to release him. "Keep them here," he rumbled out as he crossed her arms at the wrists. His hands slipped down her arms, over her shoulders, cupped the full mounds of her breasts before reaching the belt of her robe. He quickly undid it and pushed the thick fabric off her shoulders.

"Drop your arms."

The robe pooled at her feet. He pushed it several feet away from them. His gaze roamed over every inch of her naked body. He eyed her hands for one moment. He grasped her wrists and pushed them behind her back. Her wide eyes watched him, as with one hand he dug into his pockets. He pulled out a slightly rumpled tie and quickly bound her hands behind her back. The feel of fabric against her wrists turned her on more.

"Keegan..."

He took a step back and stared at her for one moment. "Spread your legs. Show me your pretty pussy."

Her face heated up in embarrassment, but she did as he asked. His gaze latched onto her nether region and a wicked smile spread over his chiseled face. He took two steps toward her. "Beautiful," he murmured before palming one breast. The tone in his voice, the sweltering heat in his gaze, the ardent feel of his touch, it all combined to tell her just how much that single word was meant to convey.

"Beautiful" did not even begin to describe the way Daniela felt. Helen of Troy, Cleopatra, and Venus had nothing on her.

She groaned at the feel of his warm, hard hands on her hot flesh. And then he dipped his head and ran his tongue over one turgid nipple.

"Shit. Shit. Shit," she chanted from between clenched teeth as he suckled her. Daniela lifted her hips and brushed her slick mound against him. "Please, now, Keegan." She already knew the man was talented when it came to foreplay, but any kind of play or games was the last thing she wanted.

"Thank the Lord." He stood and stared at his cock for a moment. "Are you on the pill?"

Belatedly, she realized what he was asking. She sent up a silent thanks to Cecile. Just three months ago her best friend had coerced her into starting birth control, complaining that the last thing Daniela wanted to discover was herself, alone and pregnant by some asshole who wouldn't cut it as a husband and father. She nodded her head.

"Amen," he said with a harsh laugh before grasping one hip. His fingers dug almost painfully into her, but she relished the touch. His gaze snagged hers. He stared deep into her eyes as he slowly sank himself into her. The burning pleasure of penetration stripped her to the bones. The intensity of her own emotions left her shaken.

Daniela stared up at Keegan in surprise. She felt like she was dying and being born at the same time. Her emotions were churning so wildly she couldn't seem to even identify them, let alone grasp them. She felt as though she were jumping out of a plane without a parachute.

But something in Keegan's eyes promised to give her the wings she needed to fly. His fingers tightened in her hair, telling her without words just how much he needed her attention.

"This... this doesn't change anything," he breathed out. "I'll still help you find a man."

"I know," she murmured. Because the truth was it couldn't change anything. She didn't dare allow such a dangerous man to have that much control over her. Sex she could handle. Anything more was too much for her to give. And she knew sex was all Keegan could give her. Daniela lifted her hips and pushed him deeper inside her. Her teeth dug into her bottom lip as the demanding pleasure pounded through her veins. He shuddered and groaned her name.

"I want to fuck you, Keegan, not marry you."

"Good to know," he whispered before capturing her lips. *Oh God*, Daniela thought as she kissed him back with all the passion he had ignited inside of her. She'd never felt this way before, never felt this much desire for a single man. It was like Keegan had flipped a switch and she'd gone from simply wanting a companion to needing a lover.

Someone who touched her like there was no tomorrow.

Someone who touched her like Keegan did.

He thrust into her over and over again, straining muscles that were rarely used, igniting a fire that before him had never burned. It only took a few strokes and she was coming. She broke off their kiss to scream his name as every muscle in her body clenched with her release.

Eyes closed, mouth open, the dark sound of his erotic, encouraging words seemed to come from far away as he thrust past her rhythmically clenching sex. With every stroke, every glide, the fire that burned in her veins got hotter, deeper, more demanding until the passion that ebbed and flowed inside of her became a hurricane that swept through every inch of her body. The heat started in her core, streaked out through the walls of her pussy, spilling into her abdomen before making its way to her

toes and her head. At the pinnacle of the fire she felt the heat burst through her face, her feet, and her cunt simultaneously. Daniela screamed Keegan's name as the most intense orgasm she'd ever had the pleasure of experiencing tore through her.

"Fuck," Keegan grunted as the last spasms of her satisfaction danced around him. She looked up and caught his gaze. Daniela's orgasm had been so intense she had forgotten about him.

*Damn, talk about the good stuff.*

"That was too beautiful not to repeat." Keegan's words and intentions settled over Daniela at the exact moment she realized he was still hard. Her gaze widened as she stared at the man above her.

He leaned low and brushed his lips against hers as he slowly withdrew. "You keep looking at me like that, sweetheart, and I just might start to think I'm something special." He whispered the words before his tongue traced her lips, and plunged into her mouth.

He slid into her, pressing against her sweet spot, filling her to the point she thought she was going to overflow, as he nibbled her lips. His soft, tender kisses aroused her as much as his harder, darker passions. Daniela's nails dug into the roughly hewn mass of his shoulders as he plunged in and out of her sex in a slow, devastating rhythm. And he never stopped tasting, teasing, caressing her mouth with those dangerously soft, full lips of his.

After an eternity... After her lungs burned with the need for air... After her body trembled with the desire to explode... he broke off the kiss and placed his forehead against hers.

"You are special." For a second Daniela thought he hadn't heard her and then he stilled; a miniscule lack of movement that would have been ignored if he wasn't so close, so deep inside her mind, body, and soul. A shudder shook every inch of his six foot plus frame before he pulled out and slammed into her over and over and over again. The hand that Keegan had under her thigh lifted her higher and opened her wider so that she was forced to take every one of his deep, penetrating thrusts.

She clung to him, just as his softly growled “Come for me, pumpkin” drifted down to her. It was as though he had pressed some secret automatic button. Her orgasm thundered out of nowhere, ripping through every inch of her body, setting every nerve on fire. She screamed his name at the top of her lungs as lights exploded everywhere. Before her eyes. Across her skin. Deep inside her sex.

After a moment Daniela managed to catch her breath and looked up to find Keegan watching her with a smile on his face. “Who’s Pumpkin?” she murmured softly.

His grin widened, becoming more devastating. “You are. You know you’re lovely when you come.”

“Yeah?” she whispered shyly, oddly enough a little insecure with the fact that he was talking about something so private and looking at her with so much emotion in his eyes.

He slipped out of her and threaded his fingers through her hair. “Oh yeah, pumpkin, you’re definitely lovely.”

Keegan watched her for a moment before bending low and slipping his arm under her thighs. Daniela yelped when he picked her up and held her against his chest. “What are you doing?” She stared up at him in surprise.

His gaze roamed over her face before taking in every inch of her exposed body. His eyes closed for a brief moment as his breath rushed in and out of his slightly parted lips. His lids snapped open, his gaze holding her immobile. “I’ve wanted you for some time now. One taste is not going to satisfy me.”

A river of molten heat ran through her as he walked them to her bedroom. Thick cream leaked from her sex and started to coat her thighs. Daniela now knew all too well what Keegan was capable of and she couldn’t wait to see what he had in store for her next.

By the time he laid her upon her bed she was quivering with the need for satisfaction. Keegan brushed his mouth across hers and nipped her bottom lip before suckling it deep into his mouth. The wet heat of his mouth was intoxicating and



demanding as he sucked on her lower lip. Daniela groaned his name when he released her. But he didn't move away. He held her gaze. "I want to taste you."

His words were a statement, not a question, but still she felt the need to answer. "Yes," she breathed out. He stood and walked across the room. Too late, Daniela realized what he was intending. She chewed her lip as he picked up her dresser mirror and walked to the bed. He propped it between the footboard and mattress. She found herself staring into her own gaze.

She waited for the moment when he would touch her, reach for her, but it didn't come. He lay across the middle of the bed, close enough that she could feel his body heat. The fact that his head was at the end of the bed made her more than nervous. "Come here, pumpkin."

She glanced at the mirror before looking at him. He flashed a wicked grin and repeated his command.

"I hate you," she muttered before moving down to the foot of the bed. She stared down at him. "I don't think..."

He shook his head, cutting off her protest. "You said yes. Don't think I'm going to let you deny me the taste of that pretty pussy."

A shudder ripped through her body at the sound of his explicit words. She opened her eyes to find he was still watching her.

"You like it when I talk dirty, don't you?"

She chewed her lip as she nodded her head. His gaze flickered from her eyes to her sex before returning to her eyes.

"Sit on my face," he grunted in a dark voice. His words, his rough tone, the heat in his gaze, all combined to create a ball of heat in her pussy. Daniela slowly moved one thigh over his torso. She braced her arms on each side of his head. Her breasts swung in front of his face. "Say it, Daniela. Say 'First I want you to...' Say the words and I'll do it to you, for you, anything you ask."

He meant it. Looking into his eyes, hearing the conviction in his voice, she knew there was nothing she could ask for in bed that he wouldn't give her. Her every wish.

Her every fantasy. Her every erotic dream. He would make them all come true if she was strong enough to ask for it.

She leaned a little forward. Her nipple brushed across the rough stubble on his cheek. Keegan shuddered as he watched her bud. "I want you to suck on it. Suck on my nipple."

He held her gaze as he opened his mouth. An alien sense of power shot through her as she fed him her nipple. In all of her previous relationships, the man had been the initiator when it came to sex. Keegan was giving her the chance to call the shots.

And she loved him for it. She froze as the thought thundered through her mind.

Keegan released her almost immediately. "Did I hurt you?"

The honest concern in his tone sliced through her erratic thoughts. She smiled down at him. "No."

It's just a figure of speech, she said to herself as she brushed her nipple across Keegan's lips. The heat slowly resurfaced in his gaze. After a moment he parted his lips and suckled her. Passion made every one of her muscles tighten as the sweet, wet heat of Keegan's mouth swirled through her veins.

"Oh, God," she groaned as he suckled her. He took as much of her breast into his mouth as he could fit and fluttered his tongue back and forth across the almost painfully sensitive bud.

Her eyes started to roll back in her head as heat infused her. Her gaze was caught by the sight of her own face. The reflected image of her own passion-etched face seared her, sending waves of desire through her veins. She was beautiful, lovelier than she had ever believed. She was suddenly grateful for the presence of the mirror.

When she could take no more she leaned back. Keegan released her nipple, but not before giving her a slow, lingering swipe.

"Do you want to taste me?" Daniela lifted her hips until she was kneeling above Keegan's mouth.

He slowly licked his lips as his eyes ate up the sight of her wet pussy. "Yes."

She slowly lowered her hips. Her eyes closed almost the moment his mouth brushed across her nether lips. Keegan's tongue thrust deep into her cunt and licked her slowly. "Yes, eat that pussy."

Keegan growled an answer and went to work devouring her. "Yes. Yes. Yes," she began a chanting litany of praise as Keegan flicked his tongue back and forth across her clitoris. God, the man was good. Grunts vibrated across the sensitive flesh of her pussy as she rocked her hips against Keegan's lips.

"Holy... shit." She leaned forward and grasped the footboard as a blinding streak of pleasure shot through her womb. Her fingers tightened on the bar. Every inch of her body clenched with passion. "I'm... oh... God."

Keegan's hand snaked up her torso. Fingers brushed across her lips. She opened for him and sucked on the long digits as she groaned his name. A finger from his other hand brushed across her sex and pressed the swollen head of her clit. Daniela released his fingers with a gasp.

She flinched when something wet and thick swirled around her rosette. Her eyes popped open as Keegan increased the pressure against the hole. Her mouth opened and her body exploded as a blinding orgasm sliced through her every limb.

She stared at the mirror in surprise. Her shock barely settled when she felt herself being pushed on her back and then flipped over. "Holy fuck!" she shrieked when Keegan thrust deep into her sex in one stroke. She shuddered and looked over her shoulder at the man behind her. The fire in his gaze stole her breath. He held her gaze as he wrapped his arm around her waist and threaded his fingers through the midnight hairs shielding her sex. Fingers brushed across her clit as he withdrew. "Who's fucking this pussy?"

Her eyes widened. Her heartbeat raced. Before she could wrap her mind around his question he surged back into her, pushing past the tight muscles of her sheath. "Who?" he growled as his finger toyed with her clitoris.

"Oh... my... God!" Daniela could feel her pussy rhythmically clenching around his cock with every flick of his fingers. She gasped when he pulled out and slammed back into her.

"Who?"

"Shut up and fuck me," Daniela threw over her shoulder before she gripped the sheets and pushed her hips forward for his withdrawal and rocked them backward for his thrust.

A wide palm landed on her ass with a stinging touch. She yelped in surprise and at the feel of the slight pain.

"Who's fucking this pussy?" he grunted as a hand collided with her other cheek. Her breasts jiggled as she shuddered at the hot feel of his palm against her backside and her cunt tightened around his cock.

"Oh, God."

"Say my name!"

*Whack.* Withdrawal. *Whack.* Thrust. *Whack.* Withdrawal. *Whack.* Thrust. Keegan began a steady rhythm that left her breathless with burning desire.

"Say my name, Daniela." Fingers gripped her clit in a vise as his cockhead caressed her G-spot. "Say it!"

"Keegan," Daniela screamed as her body went off like a lit fuse. If she'd had the energy to think past the pleasure exploding throughout her body, Daniela would have been ashamed at just how well Keegan played her body.

"Yes. Me," he said as he thrust into her repeatedly, tightening the band of heat that constricted her sex, elongating the length of her orgasm, until her chest burned with the need to take in more than gasping breaths of satisfaction.

"Yes. God, yes." She pressed her hips back for his thrusts even though her body shuddered with orgasmic pleasure with her every breath. Moist skin brushed across her spine. A tingle of awareness trickled into her veins. A long, muscular arm moved against hers as a wide chest settled on top of her back. Wide, full lips brushed the back of her neck as a finger pressed against her clitoris.

"Come for me, pumpkin. Make me come for you."

Her eyes shut at the sound of his whispered words. At the sound of his desire-laced tone. His words held her heart in a tight grip. Her sex answered the plea in his voice and broke out in spasms around his hard, thick length.

"Yes." His finger moved south, brushing the swollen head of her clitoris in a down stroke that left her shivering for release.

"Oh God!"

"Come on, pumpkin. Come... for me."

Her fingers tightened in the sheets, pulling the fabric across the bed as heat flashed across her nerves. Her muscles clenched, before exploding in a bout of spasms. "Shit." Keegan froze above her before jerking repeatedly into her. With a strangled groan, he released his seed inside her.

She fell to the bed almost immediately, too exhausted to do anything more than breathe. Her actions forced Keegan's cock from her pussy. She grunted at the withdrawal just as strong hands grasped her. She opened her eyes to find Keegan watching her with heavy-lidded eyes. He placed her on top of his sprawled body and wrapped his hands around her body.

"Thank you," he whispered before nuzzling the area behind her ear. His wide palm landed on one cheek and caressed it in a slow, circular motion.

"You're welcome," she murmured as she closed her eyes, content with the feel of his body wrapped around hers.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Save Me from Myself**

Daniela closed her apartment door behind her and bent at the waist, reaching for one heel. She'd just come back from her dinner with Taylor. There promised to be at least a few more dates with him in the near future.

She jumped when the door directly behind her vibrated with the simple force of Keegan's knock. She straightened with one heel in her hand and smiled to herself. It was only the second time he'd knocked on her door, but he had a distinctive pattern. Daniela threw the door open and smiled up at the man standing in her doorway. "Checking in on me?"

He peered at her curiously for a moment before shaking his head. "It's my job, isn't it?" he said before giving her a soft smile that did dangerous things to her libido. "So, how did it go?"

She bent low, took off her remaining heel, turned and walked to her kitchen. She could hear the soft steps of Keegan's leather loafers. She couldn't help wondering if he too had just come from a date.

Unbelievably, she found herself hoping he'd just come from the office, despite the fact that it was Saturday night. Something about the thought of Keegan dating made her uncomfortable.

"It went well." She grabbed a bottle of wine from her fridge. "Taylor was, of course, a gentleman." She reached up for the wine glasses. Keegan was immediately there. He grabbed two glasses.

"So you two clicked."

She could feel his words as his breath whispered over the back of her neck. "As you knew we would." Daniela turned slowly, but Keegan didn't take a step back. She found herself caged between him and the kitchen counter.

"I'm... glad."

She lifted her gaze and looked into his eyes. The emotion shining there, in the endless depth of his bright eyes, told her Keegan was anything but glad. That fact gave her a little too much pleasure. She didn't want him, so why did she care that he was jealous?

"So when's your next date?" he murmured as he lowered his head.

Daniela watched the slow descent of his head, her eyes glued to the full contours of his lush mouth. After an eternity his lips brushed against hers. It was the slightest of touches, but it was devastating nonetheless. Daniela slowly opened her eyes to find him watching her with cautious eyes.

"What are we doing, Daniela?"

Her heart rate raced at the emotion she could feel simmering just beneath the surface of his words. She chewed her lip for a moment, trying to decide what was best to say. Best to do. She decided on the truth. Neither of them could handle anything more. "Enjoying one another's company."

He sighed and moved his hips against hers. "For however long that lasts, right?"

She gave him a shallow smile. "Right."

"Good to know," he said with a smile before kissing her hard. As Daniela sank under the power of Keegan's talented tongue she tried to pretend that she hadn't felt the tiniest bit of disappointment when he admitted that they were just friends with benefits.

\* \* \*

The heat curling through Keegan's system was making him a little nauseated. If he didn't know better Keegan would say he was feeling guilty.

*Good thing you know better!*

The caustic words shot through his mind just as his lunch partner stepped into the room. The man flashed him a bright smile before sliding into the booth. "I feel like it's been forever since we've done this."

Keegan gave Taylor a smile that he knew didn't reach his eyes. "It has been forever. We should do this more."

Taylor's hand paused halfway to his water glass. His smoky eyes lifted and caught Keegan's. "What's wrong," he said solemnly.

Keegan gave him an honest smile. He wished he was not in the predicament he had found himself, wished he had set Daniela up with someone other than Taylor, or better yet that the two just didn't click.

"I need you to back off from Daniela."

Taylor grabbed the glass and took several sips. He didn't speak until he had placed the cup back onto the table. "You want to tell me why I should do that?"

"No." He regretted the word almost immediately, especially when he saw the dark cloud that passed over Taylor's face. "She's not for you," he tried diplomatically.

"Why, because I'm a cop?"

Keegan bristled. He and Taylor had grown up together, been best friends for longer than he could remember, and yet their occupations always seemed to come between them. He'd gone straight to law school after undergrad. Taylor had enrolled in the Academy. Nothing had changed between them, that is, until they'd started to notice the way women treated them.

Some women liked the danger they associated with a police officer. And then some liked the security they believed came with being a lawyer's lover, girlfriend, or wife. Things went from bad to worse when Taylor's ex, a woman he had already purchased a ring for, hit on Keegan.

"You know Daniela better than that."

"Do I?"

He nodded. "Yes, you do."



Keegan tried not to squirm under Taylor's penetrating silver gaze. After a moment the other man sighed. "Are you going to tell me what this is really about?"

Keegan gave Taylor a lukewarm smile. "Trust me when I say she's not for you."

One dark eyebrow lifted in silent inquiry.

He lifted his hand and showed his friend his Mark of the Mated. For the second time that afternoon Taylor paused. After a moment he seemed to rouse himself enough to glance from Keegan's hand to his face and back again. "Shit, you're mated."

Keegan stifled the absurd urge to laugh at his friend stating the obvious. He mentally groaned, *Look what she has done to me.*

"Want to take a guess to whom?" he said with a wry, self-deprecating laugh.

Taylor slowly lifted his gaze. "You've got to be shitting me. You guys have butted heads since she joined the firm. Hell, I partially went out with her just to see who was woman enough to bust your chops."

"And now we know said woman is my lovely mate." For the first time in a long time Keegan flashed an honest smile. Any thought of Daniela as his brought the emotion surging to the surface.

Taylor sighed. "As much as I hate to admit it, I'm backing off. Can't be the asshole best friend that came between two fated lovers, now can I?"

Keegan grabbed his mug of coffee. "I don't *exactly* want you to back off."

Taylor groaned. "Why not exactly?"

"I think Daniela would notice if all the men who were interested in her suddenly stopped calling her."

"You love her."

Keegan froze and a warm wave of embarrassment flooded his veins. "Of course not." What he felt for Daniela was lust and the kind of proprietary feelings that were bound to surface around any shape-shifter's mate.

He was a fucking lion. That was the only reason for his emotions. Nothing more, plenty less.

Taylor smiled. "Then why are you so concerned with her feelings?"

"Because I'd like to have a peaceful marriage. Whenever that day comes."

Taylor took a sip from his drink. "What do you mean whenever that day comes?" Taylor was fully aware of his one year time limit. A marked Lionheart had one year to convince his mate to spend the rest of her life with him. If he wasn't able to accomplish the task, the male could not feel sexual desire for another female until his mate's death.

Keegan shrugged and spoke freely, the first time since he'd walked into the diner. "I'm not ready for marriage, but Daniela is. I'm not even ready to tell her what I am, which is why I'm going to need your help the next couple of weeks."

"Something tells me I'm not going to like this."

"You may not like it but you're going to help me, because this is important. I might lose my mate and be forced into an endless celibacy."

"Okay, no pressure. Now tell me exactly how I'm going to help you with your lovely mate."

Keegan slid Taylor an angry glance. Lovely mate? His description of Daniela did not go unnoticed by either him or the beast that lived inside of the man. He pushed away the insane jealousy and focused on what was at stake. "I need you to continue dating her, but you must be less charming, less sensitive, and less attractive... less you."

## Chapter Eight

### Lasting Memories

She came to a stop several feet away from the table the waiter had pointed out. Daniela should have known that the date was going to go badly the moment she drove into the eating establishment's parking lot.

Eating establishment? She mentally snorted as she looked around at the rodeo-themed bar/diner. It was more bar than diner.

And even then it looked like people were taking shots rather than actually drinking. She'd finally stumbled into hell. It was a cowboy hangout.

Lord almighty! And Keegan had set her up on a date with the one and only African American cowboy in California.

Daniela suddenly found herself wondering if she was asthmatic. She couldn't seem to take in enough air. Keegan was a dead man.

She lowered her head and pivoted, striding through the dining area. The moment she was out of her date's eye range she rummaged through her purse and pulled out her phone. She pressed number two and groaned.

She could not believe she had that jerk on speed dial. And on number two at that!

"What's up, pumpkin?"

She started to smile when she remembered where she was. She was standing in a bathroom stall, hiding from her date because of him. "Get your tight ass over here right now!"

There was a deafening absence of sound in response. After three heartbeats he spoke. "The date just started. What did you do?"

"What did I do?" she shrieked. How dare he? "What did you do, well, except for sign me up for a date with a cowboy?"

"And I distinctly remember that someone had a thing for cowboys."

Daniela felt her face heat up as a searing memory of a game she'd played with Keegan flashed through her mind. She'd played a Madam who had crossed the line one too many times, and he'd been the good sheriff trying to straighten her out.

The night ended up pretty high on her list of great nights.

"On occasion I like to pretend I'm... you know with a cowboy. In reality they are not my style and you know that," she whispered harshly into the phone.

"Daniela --"

"No, you listen to me. Get your ass over here right now."

"And do what?"

She chewed her lip. He had her there. What exactly was he supposed to do to help her in her fucked up situation? "Help me. That's what you're going to do. Did you ever talk to this guy face to face?"

"No..."

"Well, then get your ass over here and make sure to get a table where you can see me. If I get up, you get up."

She gave him the name of the restaurant and hung up before he could talk himself out of coming to her rescue. Then she took a deep breath and strode back toward her waiting date. "Hi, you must be Michael."

He stood and flashed a smile. "Yes, ma'am. And you must be Daniela."

When he was standing right in front of her Daniela realized just how bad her date was going to be.

She was dating a child. She sent a silent prayer above that her date was at least twenty-five. She was terrified her prayers would go unanswered.

Daniela took a seat immediately. The waitress manning their section showed up just as she unfolded her napkin. She looked up at the woman, but her gaze skidded past the waitress to the bar.

"Would y'all be having drinks first or just dinner?"

"Drinks. Tequila sunrise... in a big glass and keep it coming."

"I'll have the same."

She turned and glanced at her date.

She had to give him one thing. Michael was handsome. Very handsome. She gave him another bright smile. "Hard day?" he murmured softly. There was a world of understanding in his topaz eyes.

Daniela couldn't help smiling back. "Yes, and unfortunately it's not over."

"I take it you weren't expecting me."

She looked up and caught his knowing gaze. "I'll admit I wasn't expecting someone quite like you and I'm sure you weren't expecting me, but that doesn't mean we can't have a great evening."

Ten minutes later Daniela looked up just in time to see Keegan take a seat at the bar. She kept her face free of all emotion as she caught his gaze. He nodded almost imperceptibly. Daniela turned back to her date and smiled. In the quarter hour since she'd called Keegan, she'd discovered her date was not so bad.

Michael was turning out to be much more intelligent and engaging than she'd originally thought.

"California's a long way from Austin," she said as she reached for the Tex-Mex meal Michael had insisted she order.

Michael grabbed a piece of lime and leaned over his food. "It is..."

She stared at him and slowly lifted her gaze to the area he was gazing at. A very large, formidable black man stood beside her. He was handsome and young, just a few years older than Michael.

Tension hung in the air.

"What are you doing out, maggot?" The man built like a bodybuilder barked out the words in a dark voice that brooked no argument. Daniela's jaw dropped. Michael popped out of his seat in perfect attention form.

She turned to her date and gaped at him.

"I'm sorry, Line Leader, sir."

"You did not answer my question, maggot. What are you doing out?"

Michael glanced down at Daniela for a scant moment. "I am out on a date, Line Leader, sir!"

She'd had enough. She stood, forcing the giant to back up a step. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Keegan making his way toward her. She ignored him to focus on the man ruining the closest thing she'd had to a decent date since Taylor. "Who the hell are you and what are you doing here?"

Two dark eyebrows lifted. "I am Dwayne, Michael's Line Leader."

Daniela folded her arms across her chest. "And what exactly is a damned Line Leader?"

Beside her, Michael flinched.

"I'm in charge of his pledging. I'm the one who gives him the tasks and ultimately decides if he makes it through the pledging process and becomes part of the frat."

She whipped around and glared at Michael. "How old are you?"

Michael opened his mouth, ready to answer her when Dwayne spoke. "Did I say you could speak, maggot?"

Michael's mouth snapped shut.

Daniela looked over her shoulder and caught Dwayne's gaze. "Boy, don't make me hurt you."

She tried not to smile when Dwayne took two steps backward. Yeah, she was mad and she wasn't afraid to whoop some ass. She turned back to her deep-in-hot-water date. "How old are you?"

He glanced behind her and swallowed thickly. "I just turned twenty-one, ma'am."

She stared at him for several seconds, feeling her eyes bulge out of her head in utter disbelief. She was almost fifteen years older than he was. "Keegan!"

He appeared beside her. "Don't get all bent out of shape."

"Don't get bent out of shape! You set me up with a child."

"I'm not a child, I'm twenty-one," Michael chimed in.

Daniela balled her hands into fists and whipped around to face Michael. "You --" She was cut off when Keegan grabbed her arm and dragged her out of the dining area. She managed to hold her tongue until they were alone in the area in front of the restrooms. "You are a dead man."

"Remember if you kill me, I can't spend the night." He whispered the words against the area right below her left ear.

*Shit! Focus, girl. Focus!* "What makes you think I want you to spend the night after you pulled this shit?"

"How was I supposed to know Michael was a cub? When I spoke to him over the phone he seemed so sincere, so eager... so ready for a relationship."

She snorted and shimmied her hips, seeking out the bulge she knew was growing between Keegan's thighs. "He's ready for a relationship, all right, with a fraternity, not with a woman. You didn't think it was odd that a twenty-one-year-old wanted to be set up with a grown-ass woman?"

He shrugged. "I figured he was following in Ashton's footsteps."

"Do I look like Demi?"

He ignored her question and licked a heated path that led to her cleavage. She groaned when his tongue left her skin. "When I asked you about age, you said, and I quote, 'age is just a number'."

She glared at him. "Yeah, and I thought you'd have the good sense to know that some men are outside my age range."

"I'll note that next time. Ignore the client's requests."

She snorted and tried not to laugh. "Bastard. Shut up and take me home."

He lifted his head. "My home or your home?"

She smiled. "That depends on where you left the handcuffs. You owe me."

## Chapter Nine

### Slippery When Wet

She froze at the sound of the bathroom door opening. She knew exactly who was standing in the doorway, and the knowledge made tentacles of unease slither down her spine. She stilled, breath cloudy in the misty shower air, as she waited for him. After an eternity, the glass door to her shower slid open.

Smoldering, half-lidded blue eyes stared down on her.

"Hi," she murmured shyly.

"Hello." Keegan's voice was gravelly and thick. Daniela didn't need to glance down to know he was hard. His arousal was evident in his tone. She found the answering heat between her own thighs.

Even though she'd spent the whole night in his arms, Daniela was still surprised by the amount of desire his simple presence evoked.

And that passion made her nervous. She'd never felt anything quite so raw and profound before. She was in love with Keegan Lionheart. During their bout of lovemaking she'd realized just how much she cared for the man.

Too bad caring was all she could ever do. He'd made it clear that he didn't feel anything tangible for her, nothing remotely close to love.

She couldn't have Keegan. Both her mind and heart knew that. A few more weeks and they'd have to part. She had to make the most of the time they had left together and hope she didn't fall any deeper in love with the man.

Because she knew when the time came, she would be the one left in pain. She was hoping and praying that she'd meet someone between then and now. Someone who would love her like she deserved to be loved.



She was in love. But she couldn't be. They weren't even in a relationship, and then there was Tomas to think about.

Tomas, the sweet, caring man she'd met at the department store. Tomas, the man who after only a week and a half had told her she was something special. *Special*.

Keegan stepped into the shower and slid the glass door shut behind him. She took an instinctive step back. But like a great hunter stalking its prey, he followed, taking a single step forward.

He held her gaze for several moments, searching her face for something she couldn't name. She in turn held her breath, waiting for his judgment. His golden lashes fluttered shut, shielding her from whatever he'd found.

"I missed you," he whispered as he dipped his head and nuzzled her. She froze for a moment, chilled by the emotion she thought she heard in his voice, by the emotion she felt inside.

Keegan Lionheart was a playboy in the strictest sense of the word. And she wanted someone to come home to, someone to call her own. She wanted commitment and that was the last thing he could give her.

She'd fallen in love with a flirt once before. Her stupidity had nearly cost Daniela her soul. There was no way in hell she was going down that road again. She sighed as his hand moved up her torso to cup one aching breast.

"Hmmm, did you really?" she moaned as she bowed her back, brushing herself against his hairless chest with the act. Her lonely nipple seemed to be reaching out for his contact, looking for any piece of the man who had loved her so well.

"I did." A hand cupped her sex; fingers parted the fleshy lips of her cunt. "I woke up hard with no woman to love."

Daniela smiled to herself even as his touch seemed to send heat straight through her core. She shivered as he found her clitoris and pressed one blunt finger to the already swollen bud. "And here I thought I was special."

He circled her clit before moving south, teasing the entrance of her sheath. Dropping to his knees, he lifted his head. Her gaze caught his. He slid one finger into her pussy. "You are special."

The intensity of his gaze and the heat in his vivid blue eyes told her that he, at least, believed that. "Thank you. You're not so bad yourself."

The finger inside her was joined by a second. "Try not to forget that."

The soft way Keegan uttered the words made Daniela think he was asking her not to forget who he was, that he wasn't every other man she'd been with. Daniela pushed the thought away almost immediately. She was hearing things when no sound had been made, seeing things that weren't there.

She was ready for love and commitment. Keegan was only capable of lust. She had to remember that for her own sake. "Oh my... Keegan." He pressed the pads of his fingers against the walls of her cunt. The most intimate of touches.

"I like the way you say my name." Smoldering, wet heat caressed her when he flicked his tongue across her clitoris. His fingers pumped in and out in a steady rhythm that left her gasping for air. "God, you're wet." She felt her pussy gush moisture almost immediately. The slick sounds of his thrust and withdrawal pattern followed his statement, almost as though in testament to his words.

"Shit!" she shrieked and squeezed her eyes tightly shut as her legs shook. "Ohfuckohfuckohfuck!"

"That's it, pumpkin. Come for me." His softly uttered words drifted over her slick flesh just as Daniela broke out in shivers. She parted her lips and let out a shuddering breath as her orgasm pounded through her veins. She slowly opened her eyes to find Keegan watching her.

"Beautiful," he murmured before standing and pressing a kiss to her lips. Daniela instinctively stood on her toes to brush her mouth across his.

"We're going to have to talk about the nickname," she whispered as she dropped down to stand beside him.

"Why? You don't like it?" He watched her face as he reached behind her and grabbed the body wash and sponge.

"It's not that." The truth was she loved the nickname. It sounded personal, much more intimate than sweetheart or sugar, especially when he put that slow, rolling drawl in the word.

And that was the problem.

Their relationship wasn't supposed to be personal or intimate.

*Sex. Sex is all it is supposed to be.*

"Then it stays." He squeezed a large amount of body wash onto the loofah. Daniela quickly found that she didn't have the strength to argue with him. She instead waited for him to make his move.

"Turn around."

She smiled. She didn't have to wait long. She turned slowly and pressed her hands against the slick wall. She rolled her hips, finishing the sensual act with a hip pop that thrust her butt back and out, toward him.

Daniela's yelp of surprise cut through the moist air when Keegan's palm landed on her right cheek. She glared at him over her shoulder. "That wasn't very nice."

He snorted and looked down. She followed his gaze and grinned. He was hard. Of course. Keegan lifted his head and held her gaze. "You're giving me very little reason to be nice, Daniela."

She shuddered. "I'll behave." She turned back and waited for him to touch her. The heat in his blue eyes had promised her so much pleasure she found herself waiting with bated breath for the shower to end.

She needed him inside her. Again.

The slow glide of the sponge on her moist skin settled deep in her gut. Air hissed through Daniela's lips as the heat from his hands, the warmth of the water, and the slickness of the soap all tortured her senses as Keegan mapped every plane of her body, using the sponge as a vehicle.

The loofah moved down her spine, touching every nerve ending, leaving her shaking with need. By the time he reached her ass, she was biting her bottom lip to keep her moans inside.

"Oh God." The sponge moved to her front, teasing the soft mound of her belly as one large palm cupped a tit. "Keegan..." The name was slow and airy to even her ears. It was full of all the need she felt burning inside.

"Say it." Long fingers captured her pebbled nipple, teasing it between hard pads. "Say it, pumpkin, and I'll give it to you. I'll give it to you just the way you like it."

Something soft and wet, the loofah, landed on the shower floor. One hand settled between her thighs, parted the lips of her sex, and toyed with her clit.

She took in a shuddering breath and let the words out she'd been holding. "Give it to me, damn it."

"Such a good girl."

Bastard! Her eyes slammed shut as thoughts of doing Keegan damage slipped into her mind. Daniela figured he was lucky she was too turned on to walk out of the shower and leave him holding his cock in his hand.

"Hmmm." Her moan was low and deep when he thrust deep into her with a slow, teasing stroke. Fast and rough. Slow and soft. Keegan always knew how to give it to her. He always read her properly.

Like now.

He took his time withdrawing from her, drawing out the moment until she felt her breath hitch at the aching glide. "Right there," Daniela murmured as she pushed her hips back to meet his thrust.

"Here?" Keegan moved his hips, pushing past the tight muscles of her sex. Laughter danced on the edges of the single word.

"Shut up." She spit the words out, even as she focused on the heat his stroke ignited deep in her belly, heat that seemed to curl around her nether regions before spreading through her veins.

She loved and hated the fact that he and he alone could make her feel so much passion.

"Why, when *you* scream so loudly?" Fingers sifted through the midnight hairs at the apex of her thighs and teased her pussy, fingering the moist flesh, toying with the swollen lips of her cunt, before testing the tightness of his entrance. "Come on, pumpkin. Give me what I want. Scream for me."

Daniela gritted her teeth as searing pleasure sliced through her. She took a deep, shaky breath when Keegan's finger moved over her clit just as he thrust into her. She was going to come. She could feel the unyielding heat at the base of her spine and low in her gut blossoming as her legs began to shake.

"Give it to me." He slowly withdrew from the slick muscles of her sex, caressing flesh already inflamed as his finger flicked her engorged clit.

*Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.* The silent litany echoed through her mind as he pushed back into her pussy. She was coming. And she was coming hard.

"Come for me."

"Oh shit." She threw her head back and screamed the words as her body erupted, lightning flashing behind her eyes when every muscle in her sex tightened around the turgid length of his cock.

"Daniela." Her name was groaned against the shell of her ear when he jerked above her.

"I hate you," she growled softly when the last of his shudders had subsided.

His lips brushed across her neck, sending new shivers of need through her body. A soft moan drifted through the air. Too late she realized the sound of pure need came from her. "I know," Keegan murmured softly as he moved his hips. He was hard. Again. Already. Her eyes drifted shut, partly in thanks, partly in mortification. A gush of moisture washed through her. He wasn't the only one ready for another round.

"I know you hate me. It's part of what makes the sex so good."

He withdrew from her sheath. She reached behind her and grasped his hips when only his cockhead was inside her. "This time --"

“I know.”

She smiled and gripped the sliding door’s handle when he thrust into her hard and quick. Yes, he did know exactly what she wanted.

## Chapter Ten

### Unspoken Promises, Broken Promises

His awesomely great idea was turning out to be too good to be true. For the third time that week, Daniela begged him to do a better job of finding her eligible men as she pressed her lips to his. She took a step back and looked up at him, a curious glint in her dark eyes. "If I didn't know better, I'd swear you were sabotaging my love life."

Daniela stood right inside his condo doorway. She was still dressed in the business suit she'd worn to work. She had come straight from the firm. He took her in, from her head to her comfortably shod feet. For one moment he focused on the hands on her lovely waist.

He cocked one eyebrow in silent answer to her presence. In the few weeks since they'd started seeing each other they'd settled into a comfortable rhythm.

A rhythm that constantly made Keegan think of actual, legitimate relationships. Like marriage.

His arm snaked out and captured her around the waist. He pulled her to him and slammed the door behind them. "Why would I want to do that? We both know what you're looking for in a relationship."

She smiled as one small dark hand slid up his torso. "And you're completely incapable of committing to a woman." She reached behind them and locked his front door.

He stilled as he felt a wicked frisson of anger fill his veins. He breathed deeply and counted to three. His reaction made no sense. He *was* incapable of committing to a woman. Wasn't he?

"Keegan?" He caught her gaze as the confusion in her voice slid through his veins. He was making Daniela uncomfortable with his unreasonable reaction. He gave

her a slow smile that was meant to be reassuring. "You're right, pumpkin. I'm not ready to stand at the end of any aisle."

She leaned back in his arms and stared up at his face. "Then why do I get the feeling you're offended by what I said?"

"I'm not. I just realized something about the file I'm working on. I'm sorry I was thinking about work, but I had one of those ah-hah moments."

She pursed her lips and watched him. She didn't believe a word he'd said and he couldn't blame her. So he decided to turn her attention to something more satisfying.

Their shared passion.

Keegan kissed Daniela hard, capturing her lips in an almost bruising kiss. But the moment Keegan pressed his lips to hers, he wasn't sure which one of them was more shocked by the intensity of his kiss.

His tongue thrust into the deepest recesses of her mouth and captured the distinctive taste of Daniela. Fingers sifted in her hair, destroying the chignon she'd worn to work as he held her head still for his drugging kiss.

Her fingers worked the buttons on his dress shirt until Daniela could place her soft palm against his erratically beating heart. He broke off their torrid lip-lock as the warmth from her hand seemed to sear him. Keegan tried to take a step back, away from his raging desire, but Daniela followed him, brushing her mouth across his parted lips.

"Hmmm." He felt her smile before a soft chuckle drifted from her lush mouth. She leaned up and whispered into his ear, "I like when you give it to me rough," before nipping his lobe.

A shiver ran through him as smoldering heat surged in his already aroused body. "Damn!" he growled softly before picking her up and carrying her across his living room.

He was suddenly very pleased this woman, this delectable piece of exquisite femininity, was his mate, because he didn't want to think that there was another woman out there who could get so deeply under his skin so quickly.



Didn't want to think that there was another woman who had that much power over him.

He started to head to his bedroom when he realized he would never make it. He was too hard, too far gone to walk those few feet. He had to get inside her.

Keegan placed Daniela on his couch and took a step back. His hands immediately went to his pants. "Take everything off now!"

Daniela didn't blink at his tone. She had her jacket and blouse off before he managed his belt. He quickly jerked his zipper down and pushed his pants off his hips.

Finally, totally naked, Keegan took a moment to stare down at Daniela. She gave him a smooth, wicked smile that promised an endless night of passion. It was one of the things he liked about her, the fact that she gave as well as she took. Because of her enthusiasm their sex got better and better.

*Too good to walk away from.* He pushed away the wayward thought and focused on the gorgeous woman before him. "Touch my pussy."

Daniela froze and slowly lifted her gaze. He knew what she was thinking. It was the very same thing he was wondering. Why and when did he start to think of her as belonging to him?

Keegan could feel his beast rising to the surface. The lion inside was tired of denying that Daniela was his mate, and the human part of his soul was too tired to fight the beast. He growled, "When we're together, that pussy belongs to me. And me alone."

She licked her lips as heat blazed in her warm, brown gaze. "Okay."

His chest rose and fell as he watched her hands drift to her pussy and part the fleshy lips of her sex.

She chewed her bottom lip, nervous, as she circled the entrance to her cunt. A slight shiver ran through her body, making her breasts jiggle as she sensually rolled her hips. Keegan grasped his cock and palmed his length as he looked down at her. He suddenly hated the space that separated them. His gaze drifted from her breasts to her pussy. Swollen and wet, it seemed to call his name.

"Play with my clit."

Her full lips spread into an impish smile as her eyes opened and caught his gaze. "You play with it."

Keegan walked across the space that separated their bodies. Long fingers wrapped around her upper thighs and dug into the soft flesh as he widened the area between her legs. He held Daniela's gaze as one hand slipped between their bodies to place his swollen length against her. "I'd rather fuck my pussy," he whispered harshly before thrusting deep into her. Just before he closed his eyes, he saw her eyes widen in surprise.

He filled her with one stroke.

"Yes," Daniela gasped as her short nails ran down his back. He bared his teeth in an act that could barely be called a smile as the slight pain wormed through his system. He took delight that come the morning he would have marks.

Marks from his mate.

He slowly opened his eyes as he took his time withdrawing from her sheath. Daniela's nails dug into the full cheeks of his ass. "Stop playing and give it to me," she moaned as she rocked her hips.

One hand lifted from her waist to tighten in her hair. "Look at me." Her gaze lifted to his. He held it as he plunged back into her. A shuddering breath drifted from her parted lips. Keegan stifled the urge to kiss her sweet lips. "Say it."

The blunt nails cutting into his buttocks dug deeper. "Make me."

He leaned low and pressed his lips to hers in a savage, hurried kiss. He could no longer ignore the allure of her lips. When he broke it off, they were both breathing hard. "Yeah?"

"Oh yeah," Daniela groaned as he pushed past the tight walls of her cunt. He could feel her rhythmically clenching around him. She was going to come soon. And unless he kept his control so would he.

Keegan tilted her head and licked the column of her exposed throat. She keened his name when he nipped the base of her throat. Right above her pounding heart.

"Yes. Yes. Yes," she panted as her hips met his every thrust.

He removed the hand in her hair and allowed it to drift low and to her back. He lifted her torso as his head descended. Keegan suckled her swollen nipple for three heartbeats before releasing the nub. "Say it."

"God, no," she shrieked as her pussy tightened around him. Keegan captured her nipple and suckled it harder as he pulled out of her, just far enough that only half of his length was embedded inside her cunt.

"Say it, pumpkin." He breathed the words against the wet tip of her breast. She shuddered as a groan drifted above his head. He lifted his gaze to hers. Her fingers threaded through his golden hair.

Her eyes tightened in irritation. "Only you, asshole. Only you make me feel this good. Now do me."

Keegan flashed his hellcat a smile as her nails raked down his back. "My pleasure, my love." A harsh chuckle cut through the air just as he thrust back into her.

"Grand finale," Daniela whispered as she lifted her hips for his stroke. Keegan captured her lips just as she moaned his name. The sound was muffled as he thrust his tongue into her mouth. Keegan drank deeply of Daniela, taking in the unique, sweet taste of her lips as need and desire filled his veins.

He felt the ripples of her second orgasm flutter around him just as he realized that he needed this woman. That he desired her with his whole soul.

"Shit." He broke off their burning kiss to shout the word as pleasure pounded through his veins. Below him, Daniela shrieked as her cunt tightened around his cock.

"Harder. Come for me harder." He withdrew from her contracting pussy and thrust back in with a powerful stroke that seemed to drive her hips up the couch.

"Yes. Oh God, yes!" Daniela screamed as he plowed deep into her, increasing the speed and depth of his thrusts until he felt as though he was hitting her cervix with every thrust. "Give it to me. Give. It. To. Me."

"Daniela," Keegan groaned when his orgasm tore through him. The relentless pleasure seemed to pour into him forever. Long moments later, he looked down to find Daniela watching him with warm, emotion filled eyes.

"Keegan?" she said softly.

"I want you, Daniela."

She gave him a slow smile. "Talk about recovery time."

Keegan cupped her face and held her gaze. He watched her eyes slowly widen in surprise and confusion. "I. Want. You."

Her full lips opened once, twice, before words came out of her mouth. "You do?"

"Yes."

"You can't."

He froze. "Why, because you don't want me back?"

She pushed at his shoulders. "Damn you. No, it's because you can't give me what I want. What I need."

He didn't budge. "What makes you think I can't give you what you need?"

It was Daniela's turn to freeze. She stared up at him with wide eyes. "Are you telling me you're ready to settle down, give up all other women for one, get married and have children? Because that's what I need."

He got off of her and sat down on the armchair across from the loveseat. He ran his hands over his face. "I'm not sure," he growled softly as he admitted the truth. The beast in him wanted her and only her. The man was not ready to give up his freedom.

The man made him extremely nervous.

Keegan knew that as a mated lion, he would never be able to physically cheat on Daniela. As a Lionheart male he had a year from the day he'd first slept with his mate to convince her to spend the rest of their lives together. If he didn't gain enough of his mate's love and respect to receive a binding in that year's time, he would effectively become a eunuch. Although the male was technically free, able to sleep with any woman he wanted until the female consummated the mating ritual, once he was mated he would be entirely bound to his mate.

But Keegan was afraid of being forced to give up his bachelorhood. The last thing he wanted to do was to end up hating his mate because he hadn't sown enough oats.

“‘I’m not sure’ is not good enough, Keegan. I need reassurances. Hell, you of all people know that.”

His head snapped up at her words, the unyielding tone of her words. “I know exactly what you need, Daniela.”

“Then tell me, Keegan,” she forced through her clenched teeth as she quickly dressed. “Can you give me what I want?”

He stared at Daniela for several moments, unsure how to answer her question. Could he be the man that she wanted and needed? Was he strong enough to be the man she came to night after night? Could he love her as she deserved to be loved?

But the few moments were seconds too long. She flashed him a smile that didn’t reach her eyes and bent low. She grasped her heels and jammed her feet into them with such haste, he flinched. Pulling on her clothes, she immediately headed for the door.

His phone rang. He ignored it as he tried to stave off her departure. He met her at the door, just in time to push it closed before she slipped out of his apartment and out of his life. He knew what the look on her face said. If he couldn’t give her the answer they both knew she desired she would end their “relationship.”

He’d pushed her too far, pushed her to consider a future he wasn’t sure he was ready to give her. He understood Daniela enough to know that she wouldn’t react well to that.

She whipped around, face stoic. He could feel the turbulent emotions emanating off of her small frame. “So what’s your answer?”

He’d just opened his mouth when his answering machine kicked in. He cursed sharply when he heard the voice. Veronica. His date.

“Sexy K, Nica here. I’m just calling to let you know that I’m going to be thirty minutes late for our date. Our third date. I got off work late, so I’ll be seeing you at seven-thirty, rather than seven... until then.”

The cold, sharp smile on Daniela’s face was damning. “I guess that’s my answer. I hope you have fun on your... third date.” She turned and grasped the doorknob.

He held his stance, keeping his hand against the door. "You're not being fair. You're seeing other people!"

Every muscle in her body tightened. Even though he couldn't see her face, Keegan knew Daniela was livid. He tried to get her to turn around, but she shook off his hands. "Because I'm looking for someone to love, not because I'm trying to get laid. You on the other hand..."

He squirmed inside. She was right. He had been just looking for sex from her. But now...

She stilled. "The horrible dates, they were on purpose, weren't they?"

His eyes closed and his head tipped back. Pain laced his heart. He was going to lose her. Lose her before he ever had her. "Yes. I didn't want to --"

"Risk the chance that I might actually find someone who wanted me for more than sex? Someone who thought I was better than a booty call?"

*No, I didn't want to risk the chance that I might lose you before I was ready to become the man you needed.*

"You don't want me, Keegan, so let me go."

He removed his hand from the door and took a step back. Every moment seemed to drag by slowly. "Daniela?" he called softly when she stepped into the doorway. She shook her head slowly. Midnight hair flew around her face. He couldn't see her eyes, but he didn't need to. He knew she was crying silent tears.

He had hurt her.

The one thing he'd never wanted to do.

"We should have known better." Her softly uttered words drifted to him as she walked away.

He knew they would haunt him for eternity.

## Chapter Eleven

### Spies, Sparks, and Trouble

Keegan glared at his father and considered the benefits of patricide.

"Well?" Lancaster said in an exasperated voice that grated.

Keegan was not in a good mood, had not been in a good mood for a week. Saying he was having a bad day was an understatement. He felt like he was having a bad life. His hangover and his father's questions were definitely not helping his disposition.

He tried to think of how much alcohol he'd had last night and came up short. "What do you want me to say?" he murmured, unconcerned about the answer.

Lancaster sighed and sat on one of the cherry wood seats in front of his desk. "How about you tell me you can fix this?"

He thought for a moment, trying to process the words. All too quickly their meaning came to him. *Daniela*.

"I can't tell you that," Keegan growled as he reached for the super-sized cup of coffee to his right. In the past few days he'd found it was the only thing he could keep down.

That and scotch.

His appetite had been nonexistent since he'd come to work on Monday to find out that Daniela had resigned. He'd tried to talk to her that night. She hadn't even bothered to open the door. She'd simply told him he had not upheld his part of the bargain. She was still single.

"I really wish you hadn't slept with her so quickly."

His father's words sliced through the alcohol-fogged memory of his last interaction with Daniela to bring him to the present. "What? What makes you think I slept with her?" he said slowly.

Lancaster gave him an undignified snort. "A, I'm your father. B, I'm not stupid. There was a reason I asked you to get her to take back her original resignation and it wasn't because you're the firm charmer."

Keegan glanced at his palm. "You always knew she was my mate."

"Always? No. I got a little message from the powers that be after Kaden was mated. Plus, I suspected it since you couldn't read her."

He gaped at Lancaster. "You knew I had no empathic abilities around her and yet you asked me to help."

"Yes."

"So you decided to get started on daughter-in-law number four."

"Yeah, well, I figured it would be a simple thing, but I forgot to factor in that you're an ass."

"What?" Keegan's head snapped up and his gaze caught his father's. The emotion and wisdom swimming in the elder Lionheart's gaze unnerved him.

"I saw her face when she resigned, Keegan." He stood and walked toward the door. He stopped halfway to the exit and looked over his shoulder. "I suggest you take some time off. Less than an hour after Davis quit, word got out. She had three offers for partnership that same night. One at a New York firm."

"She loves California. She wouldn't take off just because..."

Lancaster flashed him a smile devoid of all emotion. "Does she? Wouldn't she? I've known that girl for some time now and I'm not sure how to answer those two questions. You might know her better. What do you think will be *her* answers to those questions?"

Keegan blinked when his door closed. He'd forgotten his father was still in the room. He'd been too focused on the thought of Daniela across the country.



The pain he'd felt when he realized he wouldn't be sneaking kisses to her in the firm halls had been shocking, but it was nothing compared to what he currently felt. A ball of unease settled in his gut at the searing memory of a conversation he'd had with Daniela a week before they'd stopped seeing one another. She'd told him about a nice gourmet chef she'd met in a department store. Keegan had been a little worried at first, especially when he saw the look on her face when she spoke about the guy. Thankfully, the cook hadn't been in the area for more than a week.

Yet, he and Daniela had gone on three dates in that one week. He wracked his brain trying to figure out where the bastard was from. "Shit!" It came to him like a strike of lightning, just as searing and just as painful. The chef was from New York.

He stood and paced, considering the probability that Daniela would take off for greener pastures with a man she barely knew.

"So good. So good. So fucking good." He'd come to know Daniela enough to understand that she would not run across country to avoid anything, but if she thought there was nothing left for her in California and had an opportunity, any opportunity, in New York, she would grasp the chance for happiness with both hands.

Keegan started to sweat.

And he'd driven her straight into the arms of another man with his lies and fear of commitment. *Now you don't have any commitment to worry about!*

Because he didn't have a mate. At least, he wouldn't have a mate if he couldn't get Daniela to forgive him.

\* \* \*

There was no denying the fact that she was on the worst date of all time. And Daniela didn't know how to fix it.

"What's wrong?"

Daniela mentally groaned. She'd hoped Tomas hadn't noticed just how horribly their night was going. She knew now that she'd been foolish to think such a thing. The man was too perceptive for that. Too attentive.

Hell, he'd taken a flight across the country to spend the weekend with her.

*I don't deserve him.*

Despite herself she immediately thought of a man who didn't deserve *her*. A man she wanted. She looked up and caught Tomas's gaze. He was watching her intently. Too intently. She broke away from his gaze. Daniela shrugged and gave him what she hoped was a soft smile. It felt flat to her. Lifeless. Dull. Like everything else she'd done lately.

"What's wrong, Danielle?"

Daniela stifled the urge to scream her name at him. Tomas was great and didn't deserve her unnatural wrath, especially when he'd already told her he considered Danielle a nickname.

She was in a bad mood, had been in a bad mood... for a week. *Damn!* She tried to think of the reason for her poor attitude and not conjure up the image of a roguish blond. She quickly found the act was impossible.

"Are you worried about the move?"

Looking up, she gave Tomas an honest smile. She doubted he knew she was silently laughing at herself. Yes, she was worried about the move, but for all the wrong reasons. "I'm trying not to worry."

He smiled and leaned forward, pressing his soft mouth against hers. "You'll love New York and I will be there to guide you through it."

"Hmmm, so true," she murmured as she closed her eyes and leaned forward. He moved his lips across hers once, twice, thrice before pulling away.

"I'm sorry," she groaned as she placed her palms over her face. She was doing them both a disservice pretending that she could feel something for him.

Before? Maybe. But not now, not when she knew what real passion, pleasure, and pain felt like. She didn't have it in her to go through that with another man. Even one who was willing to walk onto that dangerous ledge with her.

She felt Tomas move beside her. "Why do I get the feeling you're talking about more than your attitude?"

"God, Tomas, I really am sorry."

The dark fan of his lashes slowly lowered until she could no longer see the sheen of honest pain in his eyes. "I know. I know, Daniela."

"I thought..."

His lashes lifted and compassion-filled eyes caught hers. Fingers intertwined with hers. "It's okay. I know he hurt you. A lot more than you were willing to admit even to yourself."

Her eyes widened in surprise. She hadn't thought he knew anything about Keegan. She knew she didn't owe him an explanation. Their relationship had not progressed to the point of exclusivity.

It still hadn't. They were only dating. They'd agreed to continue dating now and when she moved to New York. Although he'd talked to her about their future, she'd agreed to nothing. Made no commitments.

And now they never would make any commitments to one another. Daniela knew she couldn't give Tomas what he needed, what he wanted.

He leaned forward and pressed his lips to her forehead. "I hope in time you'll consider me, and how much I've come to feel for you. You're special, Daniela. If he can't see that, know that I can."

"Tomas --"

He stood and shook his head. "Just... don't forget me."

She rose and walked him out. At the door he pressed a soft kiss to her lips and gave her a soft smile. "Lock the door behind me." He turned and strode down the hall. She watched him for several moments, knowing that it would probably be the last time she would see Tomas.

She closed her condo door when she could no longer see him and leaned against the cool wood panel. She groaned and placed her hands over her face. Tears leaked from her eyes as she slid down the door. Daniela was exhausted, emotionally and physically. She couldn't seem to find the energy to move. Ten minutes later, when someone knocked on her door, she was still sitting against it.

“For the love of Christ,” she cursed lightly before wiping her face and standing. She darted a glance at the small decorative mirror beside the door. Her eyes were red and her face was puffy.

There was no denying that she had been crying. Hard.

She took a deep breath and twisted the knob and came face to face with the very last man she wanted to see.

“Don’t go.”

## Chapter Twelve

### In and Out of Love

Keegan stared at Daniela, eyes wide with surprise at the words that came from his mouth. They'd been torn from his very soul. They were the truth, the closest words he could come up with to describe how he was feeling.

"Don't leave me." He knew he wasn't being fair asking her to give him another chance when he'd done what he'd done, but he couldn't let her go.

She stared at him for several heart-pounding moments before turning away. He stood in the doorway trying to figure out what to do. Then his beast roared the answer. *Don't let her go!* He managed to keep his emotions under control just long enough to soundlessly close the door behind him before chasing after his mate. "Daniela!"

She turned and glared at him over one softly rounded shoulder. "What do *you* want?"

"You." He took one step toward her. She froze as her eyes widened and her lips parted. He walked across the remaining feet that separated them to clasp her shoulders and turned Daniela so she faced him. "I want you, Daniela. I want you more than I've ever wanted a woman before."

One dark eyebrow lifted in patent disbelief. "Oh really? You've got an interesting way of showing it."

"I was scared and so I acted like an ass. You were always upfront about what you wanted in a man, from your relationships, from your life, and I was unsure if I could be the man you wanted." Keegan entwined their fingers and held their joined hands against his beating heart. "But I knew that given time I could learn to be that man."

"How long?"

"How long do I think it will take to be that man?"

"No, how long have you known you weren't ready to give me what I needed? How long were you going to play games with my future, with my emotions, just to satisfy your needs? How long were you going to drag this out?"

"I didn't think I was dragging anything out. I was trying to give us time."

She took a step back and shrugged out of his arms. "You bastard! Time to do what? Learn more about each other? Talk about our goddamned future? I kept trying to convince myself that there was nothing going on between us, that it was just sex. And to make matters worse we talked about us or the lack of us and you said nothing. Nothing about how you felt, nothing to make me think we were in anything close to a relationship."

"Daniela --"

"Shut up. I'm not done. I met a nice guy, one who was looking for that special someone and get this, he thought I was good enough to be her, and I couldn't allow myself to feel anything sincere for him because I was in love with you."

He took a step forward, unable to believe his ears. "You love me?"

Daniela snorted. "I don't think you want to know how I feel about you right now."

"Do... you... love... me?"

Her tongue slowly glided over her bottom lip. She looked him up and down before shaking her head. "How I do or don't feel about you doesn't change what you've done, Keegan."

He gave her a slow smile. "No, but it might give me hope that you'll forgive me one day."

"You want my forgiveness?"

"I want anything you will give me. I'm sorry for hurting you, pumpkin."

She turned suddenly, giving him her back. Keegan found the strength to take a deep breath then. He wrapped his arms around Daniela. "I love you, Daniela, and I

don't want to lose you because I've been too stupid to realize just how much you mean to me."

Warm breath wafted over the sensitive flesh of one arm. He tightened his grip and felt a soft shudder run through her lush body.

"I'm not so sure you deserve me."

He smiled weakly. "We both know I don't deserve you... but I need you."

"Do you? Need me, that is."

A soft chuckle drifted from his lips. "Honestly, it's you and air, pumpkin."

Warm liquid splashed on his arm. Daniela was crying. Once again he'd made her shed silent tears. Keegan felt his heart break just as she took a deep breath. "Makes me sound important."

He nuzzled her slowly, softly. "You're the most important thing in my life. I realized that when you left me... I almost realized that too late."

She turned to face him. He brushed the pad of one thumb across her cheek, capturing the moist trail of her tears. "And now that you know..."

"I'm never letting you go."

Her arms wrapped around his waist. He moved closer to the warmth and comfort of her body.

"You better not... If you do, I'll kick your ass." Her muttered words echoed against the wall of his chest.

"I know." He smiled and tightened his hold around her as his beast roared. He finally had his mate. Now all he had to do was figure out a way to tell her about his shape-shifting tendencies.

"I missed you."

He brushed his lips against her forehead. "I missed you too, pumpkin." Keegan sucked in a deep breath when she pinched one ass cheek.

"Show me how much you missed me."

He took a step back and cupped her face. Keegan looked deep into her eyes. "I think we should talk before we..."

She flashed him a heart-stopping, wicked smile. "All of a sudden you're talkative, huh?"

"Daniela!" he groaned when he saw the smoldering light in her dark brown eyes. He knew that look. He found it impossible to resist and Daniela knew that. Just to make things a little more tempting she rolled her hips against the quickly growing bulge between his thighs. She stood on her toes and nipped his earlobe.

"Stop that. I'm trying to have a serious conversation here."

Daniela leaned back in his arms and looked up at him. "I need you to love me."

"I do love you, pumpkin."

"Then show me," she whispered across his parted lips before placing her mouth against his. The simple touch was too much and not enough. He never had a chance.



## Chapter Thirteen

### Want to Be Starting Something

Two whole weeks. Two whole weeks of bliss!

Daniela almost couldn't believe her luck. In the month and a half since she'd made her bargain with Keegan Lionheart, Daniela had been on one hell of an emotional rollercoaster. But for the past two weeks, she and Keegan had been journeying on one hell of a sweet ride.

Two weeks wasn't a long time, but it had been long enough for the two of them to get close. *Soul mate close*, she thought with a smile. In the last few days Keegan had dropped several statements about their future.

*Hope we have a girl.*

*I bet it'll still be this good in fifty years.*

*You think you'll still be this mean to me when we're ninety?*

Christ! If a girl wasn't careful she'd start picturing a white picket fence, 2.5 kids, and a big shaggy dog in her future the way he talked. Daniela's smile got wider. Who was she kidding?

She was already picturing their children. Hoping they had their father's charm and their mother's stubbornness.

She was so... attached.

Daniela tried not to think about the upcoming holiday as she passed a red and pink heart display for chocolates. Valentine's Day was less than a week away. She'd almost forgotten about it. She'd been too preoccupied with moving out of her apartment.

And into Keegan's.

He'd kept his promise. She was no longer single and definitely had someone to come home to.

When Daniela had told her landlord that she was moving, the old bat had gone and immediately found someone willing to move in on the 15th. She was homeless.

Gracious sweetheart that Keegan was, he'd pretty much begged her to move in with him rather than have her out looking for a last minute apartment. And she hadn't had the strength to turn him down.

Plus, they spent every waking moment not at work together.

Half the time, Daniela was genuinely surprised either of them could walk.

"You haven't heard a word I said, have you?"

Daniela turned and glanced sheepishly at Sabrina Noelle, Kaden Lionheart's wife. Sabrina had been married to Kaden, Keegan's older brother, for only a few months, but Daniela felt as though the dark, lush beauty had always been part of the Lionheart family.

Even though she wasn't part of the Lionheart family, the fact that she was an attorney at the firm made her feel like one of the gang. It was the way Lancaster treated all his employees. And she had a feeling that their impromptu shopping date had been an attempt on Sabrina's part to foster Daniela into the family.

She had a sneaky suspicion the Old Man was trying to get each of his sons married to the female employees.

*Lucky women!*

Daniela sighed. "No. I'm sorry. I haven't heard a word you've said."

Sabrina flashed a blinding smile and wagged her eyebrows. "Daydreaming, huh? The Lionhearts will do that to you."

"Uh..." She felt her face heat up. Damn, she was a grown woman feeling like she'd been caught in the middle of class writing love notes. Was she that freaking obvious?

*Hell yeah!*

Sabrina's smile became wicked. "To be honest, I think the fact that they're shape-shifters has something to do with their... prowess. Hmmm, Lionhearts... it must be that gorgeous cat that lies inside of them. I mean I'm not cold-blooded, but... Are you okay? Jesus Christ, you look like... Shit!" Sabrina turned and reached for a plate set. "What do you think about this one?" she said in a rushed breath.

Daniela grabbed one shoulder and turned Sabrina around. "Oh no you don't."

"Don't you think they'll be perfect for the St. Patrick's Day dinner Kaden wants to host?"

Daniela ignored the pleading look in Sabrina's perfectly kohl-rimmed eyes and took a step forward. "What are you talking about?"

Sabrina gave her a shaky smile. "Me? Hallucinating, yeah, that's right. There's a reason why they call me Nutcracker. Several employees believed I'd cracked my skull. It explained the insanity."

Under any other circumstance, Daniela would have found Sabrina's explanation for her slip hilarious, but there was nothing funny about the way she was feeling. "Tell me. What's going on?"

Sabrina let out a heartfelt groan. "It's not my place."

Daniela looked her square in the eye. "I'm asking you as my new friend to tell me what you meant."

Sabrina's eyes closed briefly before springing back open. "That's not fair and you know it!"

Despite herself, Daniela felt a smile coming. Sabrina was right. She was fighting dirty, but no one in love ever fought fair. "Sabrina?" she murmured, heart pounding, afraid Sabrina would ignore her plea, and even more afraid she was going to tell her something Daniela couldn't handle.

"How about we take that coffee break now and get our stuff to go?"

## **Chapter Fourteen**

### **Ease on Down the Road**

Keegan closed the door behind him softly, making sure to hide the items he held behind his back. Daniela had taken the day off for a reason she refused to tell him. He knew it was because of the coming night.

It would be her first Valentine's Day with a significant other.

He was excited as hell to find out what his pumpkin pie had planned.

But first... he darted a glance around the room, trying to figure where to hide the gifts until he was ready to spring them on her. Keegan had planned the whole night and wanted nothing to go wrong.

He wanted to make sure tonight was a night they would remember for the rest of their unnaturally long lives. After a quick search he found the perfect spot to hide the gifts. They were going out for dinner. He would be giving her the flowers and candy in mere moments.

Keegan slowly made his way through the condo until he found his mate. She was in the kitchen. Cooking. He came to a dead stop.

"Daniela?"

She didn't respond. He realized she hadn't heard him. She was too preoccupied muttering the words on a wrinkled scrap of paper. He took another step into the kitchen. "Pumpkin," he called out with a little more force.

Daniela jumped and jammed the sheet into her back pocket with a quickness that almost made his head spin. She whirled to face him. "Jesus Christ, when did you get here? And why are you trying to scare me to death?"

He strode into the room. "I just got home and I'm not trying to scare you."

She stood on her toes and pressed a soft kiss to his lips. A pretty chaste welcoming on any occasion, but especially on Valentine's Day. He tried to reach out for her, to pull Daniela against his chest, but she took an evading step back.

"Hungry?"

He glanced at the pots on the stove and felt his lips turn down in a frown. He held up the flowers and candy. "Pumpkin, did you forget that I made reservations for tonight?"

She turned and opened one of the cupboards. "I cancelled them. I want to stay home." She pulled two plates down. "Is that all right?"

His gaze swept down her body. She was wearing a simple white short-sleeved tee and jeans. She looked good enough to eat. Staying home didn't sound bad at all. "It's perfect."

Daniela lifted one pot cover and he got a waft of strong herbs and spices. Damn, could the woman cook! His stomach immediately roared its approval.

"So when were you going to tell me you are a shape-shifter?"

His jaw dropped and his eyes widened in utter surprise. He knew he looked like he'd just been hit over the head with a beam. And that was exactly how he felt. But Daniela didn't see his face of disbelief. She didn't even glance up from the pot she was stirring to deliver the shocking statement.

"What?" he sputtered after a long moment.

She turned then. "Oh, I found out your secret." One hand strayed to her hip. The other twirled the wooden spoon in her hand in a dangerous circle. "And I'm just wondering when you were going to tell me about your tendency to change into a large, roaring cat?"

He closed his eyes for a moment and swallowed thickly. When he opened them he found her watching him with undecipherable eyes. "Tonight."

"Good answer," she said and turned back to the stove. Keegan got the distinct impression he'd been dismissed. "Take a seat at the table. I'll bring out the meal in a moment."

*Holy fucking shit. Holy fucking shit!* The words repeated over and over in a crescendo in his mind. Daniela knew he was a shape-shifter... and she seemed relatively okay with it.

He dropped into the chair and placed his hands over his head. He was well and truly screwed. He really had been planning to tell her about his shifting nature that night, but he'd waited too long. And Keegan understood his girlfriend enough to know she wouldn't appreciate hearing the news from someone else.

She was keeping it all inside because today was supposed to be her special day, but when she let it out...

"Shit!"

"What's wrong?"

He popped up like a jack-in-the-box. "Look, can we please talk about --"

She shook her head no, cutting him off. "After dinner," she said with a smile.

Dinner turned out to be the longest twenty minutes of his life. Keegan ate so quickly he was sure he was going to have a belly ache, but he couldn't slow down. He needed to get the air cleared and get started on convincing his mate to stay with him.

Darn it! Why did he keep screwing up with her? Some charmer he was!

He stared across the table at Daniela's face. After a moment she put her fork down and pushed her plate away. "Something tells me you didn't taste a single thing you ate."

*No shit.* He gave her a tense smile. "It was delicious."

She stood and headed for the door. "Come on," she threw over her shoulder just before she reached the doorway. "You look like a man sent to the guillotine. You know you're really taking all the fun out of this."

*What the hell is going on?* He kept his question to himself and followed her out of the dining room and came to a dead halt in the doorway of his, their bedroom.

Scented candles. New red sheets. Low lighting. And jazz music.

The perfect seduction scene.

"You're not mad?"

She reached for the hem of her tee. Warmth immediately started spreading through his system. He followed her into the room feeling like the moth flying to the flame. Her gaze met his. "You owe me, but am I mad enough to leave the man I love? No."

His heart started pounding so hard, Keegan feared it would rip out of his chest. He couldn't explain why the uneasy feeling didn't dissipate, it got stronger. He took two more steps closer to her. "I don't think you understand..."

The white shirt fell to the floor.

*Damn!* She was wearing a bright red and white glittery bra that did fabulous things to her beautiful breasts.

His gaze jerked up to meet her eyes. "You love me?" She hadn't said a single thing about her emotions since the afternoon he'd convinced her to come back to him.

She smiled and her fingers went to the waistband of her jeans. He gulped. He needed to focus and she was making it impossible.

"I thought I loved you before, but I didn't realize just how true my feelings were for you, until Sabrina explained what you and your brothers are."

"Sabrina!"

"Yes, Sabrina, Kaden's wife, the newest Mrs. Lionheart. And I still want you, Keegan, even if it means mothering a whole new generation of children with the ability to turn into big, golden cats."

"So you know..."

"That the tattoo on your rock hard chest is more than just a tat. That you can change into an African lion, that your people live for about two to three hundred years. That the mark on your left palm is there because we're mated, and that I'm the only woman you'll ever love; yes, I know."

He stared at her dumbfounded as she dropped her pants on top of her shirt.

She was wearing matching boy shorts. He loved her in boy shorts. Daniela had obviously thought this seduction through.

"Any more questions?"

His smile was slow, warm, and honest. He'd never been happier in his life. She loved him and accepted him just as he was. Lion and all.

"Just one." He pulled the small box he'd snuck into his back pocket before entering the apartment out and opened it to reveal the Ceylon sapphire engagement ring. He knelt on one knee and uttered the words he felt as though he had been waiting his entire life to say. "Will you marry me, Daniela Nicole Davis?"

It was her turn to stare at him in surprise. She glanced from the ring to his face and back to the ring. After a heart pounding moment she looked up. A sheen of tears glistened in her warm brown eyes. She gave him a shaky smile. "I'll have you know that I've been studying the words for the Spell of Joining for four days now."

The tightness in his chest started to ease.

"Yes, I'll marry you, Keegan Lionheart." She gave him a slow, sensual smile. "On one condition."

"Anything!"

Her grin widened. "I want you to change for me."

"You want to see me in lion form?"

She made her way to him. Her fingers traced the outline of the beast through his shirt. "Oh... yeah!"

"It's a lot to take in," he whispered softly.

"I wouldn't expect anything less from you."

He took a step back and proceeded to strip. When he reached his slacks, Daniela softly groaned, "My favorite part." He lifted his head and held her gaze as he removed the remainder of his clothing.

"Ready?"

Daniela's head jerked up and down as she nodded her agreement. Keegan smiled. He knew she was finding it hard to hold his gaze when he was naked. And hard.

Undressed as she was, he understood the feeling.



He took a deep breath and allowed the beast inside him to reign free and allow the magicks that lived within his veins to surge to the surface. Keegan's nose lengthened into a snout, his ears grew and curved, his teeth sharpened and elongated. His arms shortened into front legs, his spine contracted and a fur-tipped tail appeared at the end. His legs shortened and became less thick, but no less powerful. Finally, dense, golden hair appeared all over his body.

He shook out his honey brown mane and looked up at his mate. Her eyes were wide. He wasn't sure if it was from awe or fear. *Daniela?*

She smiled. *Oh my God. I really can hear you! I thought Sabrina and Nicollet were playing around.*

Warmth spread through his body. *Yes, a Lionheart can communicate with his mate telepathically.*

Her smile widened as she knelt before him. *That makes this so much easier to say. You're absolutely beautiful, my love.*

## Tuesday Morrigan

Tuesday Morrigan began her love affair with romance at an early age. As a child she was always infatuated with the romance novels she snuck from her mother. Later, in high school, the public library became her sanctuary with an endless array of romance novels. Tuesday is still an avid reader of books. Thanks to shows like *Buffy*, *Angel*, and her latest infatuation, *Supernatural*, Tuesday prefers her stories to have a little more grit. Her favorite genres have always been fantasy, mystery, romance and erotica, so as a writer, she tries to blend the genres to create her own personal niche.

You can learn more about Tuesday, including what's her latest project, at [www.tuesdaymorrigan.com](http://www.tuesdaymorrigan.com) and you can reach her at [tuesdaymorrigan@gmail.com](mailto:tuesdaymorrigan@gmail.com).