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Going  
Down Under

*Honey*  
TRAP

## **Honey Trap**

Alexis Fleming

*A book in the Going Down Under series.*

Seductive scents...torrid suspense...

For Australian scientist Kyla Harris, danger is not her middle name, but when she invents cologne that acts as an aphrodisiac, she becomes embroiled in a CIA case. Sexy American agent Logan Matthews is assigned as her bodyguard when someone tries to steal her sensual formula. Kyla finally has the edge in the war of the sexes and Logan Matthews is her target. A little fun in bed...on the desk...in the Aussie bush—what better way to test her cologne?

It's just a shame Logan's only reacting because of the formula...or is he?

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Honey Trap

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# ***HONEY TRAP***

**Alexis Fleming**

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## **Chapter One**

"Oh. My. God. He's sucking my big toe." Kyla shuddered and tried to pull her foot away. "Leave off, okay? And give me back my shoe."

"This is hysterical." Lisa Barlow, Kyla's best friend, burst into laughter. "Kyla Harris, big-time scientist, tries to invent a tactical weapon and ends up with an aphrodisiac. I'm not certain the bigwigs at the DSTO will take this as a serious achievement."

"No, this is so not funny. It's a complete farce." Kyla groaned and crossed her arms over her chest in an effort to avoid the groping fingers of the two men kneeling in front of her. She tried to stand, but hands grasped her shoulders and a wet tongue trailed down the side of her neck.

"Kyla, honey, I'll give you anything, tell you anything, if only you spend some time with me."

She twisted in the chair to find an old codger called Greasy hanging off her neck. Weathered and wrinkled, he smelled of day-old garlic. "Eww! Get off me, Greasy. You're old enough to be my dad."

"Don't listen to him, Kyla. I'll give you whatever you want if you let me come home with you," said one of the guys on his knees in front of her.

She glared at the man. He now had his hands wrapped around her thigh, the fingers intent on creeping under the hem of her cotton shorts. She slapped his arm, hoping to discourage him.

"No, no, choose me, Kyla." This from his sun-bitten mate who still had possession of her toe.

Lisa, head down on the table, continued to laugh, the chuckles bubbling up and erupting in loud guffaws. "Man," she gasped, "this is too funny. I never thought I'd see the day when anything fazed you."

"Enough already! Help me get 'em off." Kyla managed to push Greasy away and went to work on the men at her feet, kicking out until she dislodged her toe from the cavernous maw of the man on the left. "Manny, we need you. *I need you,*" Kyla yelled at the top of her voice.

The bartender and owner of the small establishment just waved to her from his seat at the scarred timber bar top. Like a large number of the old-timers in Alice Springs, he sported a long, matted beard and floppy moustache. His skin looked dry and leathery, the price for living in the harsh heat of outback Australia. His faded blue eyes twinkled amid a roadmap of creases and crow's feet crevices around his eyes.

"No way in hell, darlin'. You're on your own. Whatever that perfume was you used sure did a number on those closest to you. One whiff and they've turned into your lapdogs. I'm not about to be caught in the same honey trap."

He chuckled, ending in a snort. "Just got rid of one woman who wanted to run my life. Not about to go the same route again."

"But, Manny, I need you." Kyla managed to get up from the seat after kicking away the two men at her feet. Before she could escape, Greasy came after her again.

"Kyla, me little heartthrob, come home with me. I'll treat you like a queen. You'll have the run of the house, I promise."

Lisa finally stopped laughing long enough to try to help. "Greasy, you live in a grotty, one-room humpy down by the cemetery. That's not exactly a palace." She pulled at his arm, but he twisted away and went for Kyla again, hands outstretched to clutch at her.

"Enough!" Kyla jumped on the chair and then onto the table. "You stay away from me, Greasy." She stomped on the fingers creeping across the tabletop. The man she'd kicked in the mouth had finally recovered.

"I'll tell you all my secrets if you'll only come home with me," Greasy said with a lunge at the table.

Oh God, Lisa was right. The DSTO—the Defense Science and Technology Organization—wouldn't be impressed at all if they heard about this. She normally worked in the tracking and detection technologies section down in Melbourne, but she was sick to death of doing nothing but analyzing boring algorithms. Hence the year's sabbatical she'd taken from work.

She'd needed the break, but hadn't been able to discipline her mind. She'd wanted to get back to simple inventing. Use her science background in a way that fed the need to be useful and productive. And given she worked for the Department of Defense, her mind had immediately zeroed in on something that could help soldiers in the field.

How about cologne that disguised a man's scent—sweat, cigarettes, fear, excitement—from the enemy? She figured it had to be a winner. Now look where it had led her.

With a yell, she stomped on the hand inching toward her right ankle. "Get off, you morons. This is not funny."

"Ah, yeah, it is." Lisa laughed again as she dragged Greasy away from the table.

"Seems you could use some help over here, ma'am."

Kyla groaned and closed her eyes a moment. *Not another one. Enough is enough.* She bared her teeth in a growl and turned to face the owner of the voice.

"Now listen here..." The words petered out and her mouth fell open as she caught sight of the man in question. Tall—at a guess, she figured six-one, six-two. Dark hair cut short, military style. Maybe he was in the Marines, what with the American accent. Chocolate brown eyes under thick brows. Eyes that at that moment twinkled with suppressed humor. A kick-ass smile that curved his sensual lips. *And a hero to boot.*

Everything Kyla liked in a man, as far as looks went anyway. *Yeah, baby, you can come park your shoes under my bed any time you like.* Well, a girl could dream, couldn't she?



Reality kicked in when Greasy made another lunge at her and grasped hold of the bottom of her shorts. Kyla tried to twist away, but she didn't have enough room.

"I don't think so, buddy. The lady isn't interested. Time for you to leave." Her rescuer grabbed Greasy by the back of the collar and yanked him away from the table. There was only one problem. Greasy still had hold of her shorts. Kyla gasped as her elasticized-waist shorts slid down to her knees, exposing the tiny black thong panties she had on. She didn't know whether to play the outraged virgin and cover her pubic area or try to tough it out.

"Oops." Her hero turned to her and grinned. "Sorry, ma'am."

He frog-marched Greasy out the door before dealing with the other two men. When he was done, he brushed his hands together and returned to the table, running his gaze over Kyla. "Anything else I can do for you, ma'am, now that I've taken out the trash?"

Kyla came to her senses and yanked her shorts back up to her waist. "They're not really... Damn, it was all my fault. Shouldn't have tried out that cologne." She clambered down from the table and fished around on the floor until she found the black ballet flats she'd been wearing before that idiot had attacked her toes.

"Sure you're okay, ma'am?"

"It's Kyla. Kyla Harris." She pushed the hair back from her face. "And yes, I'm fine. Thank you for your help, Mr. —"

"Logan Matthews, at your service." He held out his hand.

Kyla backed up a pace. "Ah, maybe you shouldn't touch me."

"Huh?" He frowned. "Is there a problem?"

She sniffed at her wrist, her nose twitching as she caught a faint trace of the bergamot and lemon oil she'd added to the cologne. Had the aphrodisiacal properties evaporated yet? Logan still stood there with his hand outstretched. He'd think her incredibly rude if she ignored him. Keeping her distance, she stretched out her arm and

gripped his hand. A shiver trickled down her spine as he slid his palm across hers. *Hmm, nice. Firm but gentle. Warm and inviting.*

She shook her head. She was acting like a bimbo. "You're American. Been out here long?"

"Nope, arrived yesterday. I'm still trying to find my way around."

"I figured you were new." She pointed to his dark suit and the business shirt and tie he wore.

"Hey, who's your friend?" Lisa interrupted.

Kyla indicated the other woman. "Meet my house buddy Lisa Barlow. Lisa, this is Logan Matthews, a visitor from the States."

"Not so much a visitor." He nodded at Lisa. "I'm here for the next few years."

"In that case, you must be stationed out at Pine Gap. Military?" Lisa stared at him as if avid for information.

"Ex-Marine, ma'am, now working for the government."

"Don't tell me you're one of those eggheads?" Lisa groaned. "You know, the guys who can't think of anything else but the next project they have to complete. Nothing but statistics and figures." She plopped down at the table Kyla had been standing on and propped her chin on her hand. "Time we got a few fun-loving men to liven up all the locals. New blood, that's what we need."

Kyla smacked her on the shoulder. "Hey, don't be rude to our guest." She turned back to Logan. "You want to join us for a drink?"

"Why, thank you, ma'am...er, Kyla."

"You sit over there by Lisa. I'll take the chair on the opposite side of the table."

"You got a problem sitting by me?" He lifted his arm and drew in a breath. "No BO smells here."

Embarrassment sliced through Kyla. Oh God, the man probably thought she was a total dimwit. With a sick grin, Kyla dragged one of the chairs around to the opposite side of the table and sat. Logan shrugged and took the seat beside Lisa.

Lisa signaled Manny for service. "Hey, Manny, can you bring us three pots?"

"Pots?" Logan raised his eyebrows in question.

"That's a glass of beer for someone who doesn't understand Aussie slang," Lisa said.

"Not likely, me darlin'," Manny replied. "I'll pour them and you come and collect them. No way am I gettin' any closer to that mantrap there."

Kyla snorted. Mantrap? *Yeah right. Only in my dreams.*

With a roll of her eyes, Lisa headed to the bar and grabbed their order. The frothy foam capped the glasses and oozed over the tops to slide down the sides and mingle with the beads of condensation already forming on the outside.

Logan leaned forward and snagged one of the beers, lifting it to his mouth and taking a healthy draft. Kyla found herself focusing on the movement of his throat as he tilted his head back and finished half the drink in one deep swallow.

"I guess you needed that."

Logan grimaced as a bead of sweat rolled down his face. With the back of his hand, he swiped at the drop of moisture before it dripped off his chin.

"Too hot for you?" Kyla took a sip of her own beer before continuing. "If you're going to spend time in Alice, you'd better think about doing something about those clothes. The new guys out at Pine Gap learn quickly that people just don't wear suits out here. It's okay inside because most places are air-conditioned or have ceiling fans, but go outside? It's a whole different story." She paused and took another sip of her beer. "This your first trip to Australia?"

Logan nodded and eased a finger inside the collar of his blue shirt. "Yeah, I arrived late last night. I stayed at the motel up the road until I could get a rental vehicle.

Unfortunately, they didn't have any free at the airport when I landed." He slipped the knot on his tie and pulled it off, stuffing it in his jacket pocket.

Kyla smiled. "Well, that's a start, but you might want to get yourself some khaki shirts and shorts. Way more comfortable in this heat."

"Is it normally this hot?"

"This isn't really hot. Hmm, maybe thirty-five degrees, if that. Wait until we get a scorcher. The temperatures top forty or more then."

He took another gulp of the amber-colored alcohol in the frosted glass in front of him. "Hmm, that's —"

"Around about one hundred and four Fahrenheit," Kyla interrupted.

"Well, that's impressive." He shucked his jacket and draped it over the back of his chair. Then he rolled his sleeves up to his elbows and opened the top four buttons of his shirt. "You a math whiz?"

"No, she just has a calculator for a brain." Lisa lowered her voice. "She's supposed to be on holiday, but she can't leave the facts and figures alone. Once a scientist, always a scientist. Although if tonight's experiment is anything to go by, she's about to be kicked out of the big-boys' club."

He raised his eyebrows and stared at Kyla, a small grin kicking up the corners of his mouth. "Is that why those men were crawling all over you? Some experiment? What did you use on them?"

Kyla found her gaze fixed on the vee of his shirt. A trickle of sweat rolled down his neck and disappeared among the dark curls now showing. She had an insane desire to lean over and trace the same path. Taste him. Breathe in the scent of him. Tease him until he begged for more.

Heat flared in the pit of her stomach. It surged through her blood and made her body tingle. She gasped and squirmed on the seat, conscious of a persistent ache

centered between her thighs. She wanted to grab Logan, toss him on the table and have her way with him. And right at that moment, it wouldn't have mattered who watched.

*Whoa, Nellie, hold your horses.* Damn, what had just happened? The first good-looking man to pay her attention and she turned into a raving nympho? Okay, so she hadn't had sex in a while—a long while if she was being honest—but that was no excuse. She drew in a shaky breath and released it slowly with a stern admonition to her hormones to stand down. With a shake of her head, she tried to concentrate on the conversation.

"See, she invented this male cologne she thought would disguise all human smells. Instead of that, it turns out what she came up with is something that draws the men to her, kind of like an aphro—"

"Lisa!" Kyla grimaced. Damn it, Lisa should know better than to talk about what Kyla was working on. "Sorry, Logan, but it's not something I can share."

"She works for the government and everything is hush-hush. Stupid if you ask me."

"Enough, Lisa. I'm sure Logan isn't interested in any of that." Kyla cast Logan a surreptitious look from under her brows to find him watching her, a smile on his lips.

"A perfume that acts like an aphrodisiac, eh?"

Kyla shook her head. "No, it's a cologne, not a perfume. There *is* a difference, you know."

"Give me a whiff and I'll tell you if it works."

Before Kyla could react, he scooted his chair around to the other side of the table and leaned in close. Then he buried his face in the curve between Kyla's shoulder and neck and gave an exaggerated sniff.

She shivered as his warm breath wafted across her neck. Damn, so much for keeping her libido in check. Her mind kicked into gear and she remembered the effects of her earlier experiment. She had no idea how long this stuff would last. She didn't

want Logan attracted to her because of some aphrodisiac she may have invented. She jerked herself away from him.

"Hey, no sniffing. I'm not some bitch in heat."

"I can assure you, *darlin'*, there's no way I would compare you to a female dog." Logan grinned and went back for another sniff.

All of a sudden, Kyla smelled the rancid odor of old garlic and onions and felt the sloppy, wet slide of a tongue trailing up the opposite side of her neck. She jumped to her feet so quickly her chair overbalanced and crashed to the floor. Spinning around, she found Greasy on his knees, his hands clasped in prayer supplication.

"Come home with me, Kyla. I'll tell you anything you want to know."

"That's it! Enough already." Kyla bent down and grabbed her purse from under the table. "I'm going home to have a shower."

"Hey, it's okay. I can deal with this old fellow." Logan stood and faced Greasy. "You remember me telling you the lady isn't interested? Well, the same still holds. Now how about you be a good boy and head off?"

Greasy looked crestfallen, but he stood and shuffled out the door. Logan slid his arm around Kyla's waist and sniffed at her neck again. "See? All over and done with. Now you can stay and we'll get to know each other better."

She shrugged out of his hold and stepped back, hand held up to ward him off. "Nope, this night is over. I'm heading home." She looked at her friend. "You coming, Lisa?"

"Sorry, Logan. You're on your own. Why don't you join the guys at the bar? They're having a contest to see who can drink the most piss in an hour."

A look of horror flashed across Logan's face. He opened his mouth to respond then slammed it shut. After an audible swallow, he tried again. "Ah...I, ah...I don't drink *urine!*"

Kyla pressed her lips firmly together in an effort not to grin. Then she made the mistake of glancing at Lisa. They both dissolved into laughter. When Kyla finally caught her breath, she wiped the tears of mirth from her eyes and faced Logan.

"Looks like we'll have to educate you. Here in Australia, if someone asks if you want to go drink piss, they're asking if you want to go out for a beer."

"You're kidding, right?" Logan shook his head. "This country is crazy."

"You think that's bad? Do you know how many ways we use piss over here?" She held up one finger. "Someone is pissed at you? They're mad at you."

Lisa held up the next finger. "Someone is taking the piss out of you? They're making fun of you."

"I'm pissed off? I'm angry." Kyla waved a hand at Lisa.

"Or you're going to go out and get pissed, as in you're going to go get drunk."

The two women continued to bounce Aussie slang phrases off one another, laughing all the while. Logan stood there with a bemused look on his face.

"Or get into a pissing match. Get into an argument or contest."

"It's pissing down."

"Pissing against the wind."

"Or you could tell someone to piss off."

Logan waved his hands in the air. "No more. I give up. I'll never understand Aussie talk."

Kyla gave him a pat on the arm. "It takes time to understand us, but you'll get there eventually." She turned and walked toward the door of the bar, Lisa at her side. "Good night, Logan," she called over her shoulder.

She sighed as she opened the door to the white utility truck at the end of the parking area. She wrinkled her nose. It was definitely time to go home and have a shower. Gunning the engine, she peeled out of the parking lot, making for the main highway. "I reek of cheap toilet water."

"Yeah, you do." Lisa chuckled. "But at least you know it works. Wonder how long the effects last?"

Kyla shuddered. "Not too long, I hope. The last thing I want is Greasy hanging around." She paused a moment before flicking a hasty glance at Lisa. "You reckon Logan was reacting to it?"

"Well, he sure seemed taken with you, although he wasn't humping your leg like those other guys were. Maybe the smell wasn't as strong by the time he joined us."

"Damn," Kyla muttered on a soft sigh.

Lisa twisted around in the seat. "You don't want him to respond to it? Or..."

Kyla didn't need to see her friend's face to know Lisa had read her right.

"Aha, you fancy him, but you want him to be attracted for all the right reasons. Not because of some icky-smelling cologne. Right?"

Kyla grimaced. "I refuse to answer on the grounds that it may incriminate me."

"But he pushes your buttons, right?"

*Oh yeah, he sure does that.* But did she want a man who only came on to her because of an experiment? Not bloody likely. She wanted Logan to desire her for herself, not because of what she could or could not do. Been there, done that, bought the t-shirt. Not about to happen again.

\* \* \* \* \*

Logan waited until the women disappeared before grabbing his jacket and following. He had to duck behind the door when Kyla glanced back toward the bar. When she finally drove off in a white truck, Logan sprinted toward the four-wheel-drive vehicle he'd rented earlier.

Night had fallen while he'd been in the bar, dealing with amorous suitors for the attentions of the fair Kyla. A lone street light lit up the area where he'd parked his vehicle. He pulled out the car keys and tried the electronic opener. It wasn't working. He fumbled with the unfamiliar keys for a moment before finding the right one. When



he finally had the door open, he jumped into the driver's seat and quickly started the engine. Then he reversed out of the parking space and followed the white truck.

Kyla turned west and Logan followed. A glance at the GPS navigator mounted on the dash showed he was heading in the direction of Pine Gap, the joint Australian-American base he'd been posted to. He kept his gaze riveted on the red taillights in front of him and when Kyla turned off the main highway, he quickly switched off his headlights and slowed his speed. Wouldn't do to let her know he was following her home.

He watched her pull into a driveway up ahead and drew to a halt at the side of the road. Turning off the overhead light, he eased the door open and entered the yard on foot. He felt like a louse spying on her, but he had to find out what she was up to. He'd heard Lisa mention the DSTO and he knew darn well they worked with numerous security ratings for their personnel. No way in hell should Kyla have been conducting experiments in one of the local bars.

The sounds of dogs barking met him as he sneaked up to the house. It was hard to see in the dark, but he could tell the house had a verandah that ran around the perimeter. He stepped up, grimacing as old floorboards creaked under his weight. Lights switched on in the house and he ducked down so he wouldn't be seen. On hands and knees, he crawled to one of the front windows and strained to hear what was going on inside above the noise of the dogs.

"Come on, boys. Give over. I know you're excited to see us, but quit it, okay?"

Lisa was obviously talking to the dogs. They calmed down for a bit before resuming their barking. Closer now. Right near the window he crouched under.

"What's wrong with the dogs?"

Okay, that was Kyla. Her voice floated out to him from behind the window. He eased back a bit, grimacing when his foot hit something metallic on the verandah. The sound reverberated through the night air, ringing like a bell. Logan turned and quickly

placed his hand on the metal milk churn shoved up against the wall of the building, hoping to deaden the sound somewhat.

"Hey, I heard a noise outside. I think someone's there." Kyla pressed her face against the closed pane of glass.

"Not again," Lisa responded. "I told you I thought I heard someone sneaking around last night."

Logan backed up even farther, sliding one foot over the edge of the verandah. Time to beat a hasty retreat. Before he could do that, he heard Kyla speak again.

"I've had enough of this. I'll bet it's Brian. He won't stop ringing me to find out what I'm working on and he's constantly threatening to come up here. Asshole." She pushed the window up. "Go get him, boys."

*Oh shit!* She'd set the dogs on him.

As Kyla shooed the dogs out the window, Logan scrambled off the verandah and headed at breakneck speed toward the entrance to her property. The dogs chased after him, barking and snarling at his heels. He almost made it, the breath rasping in his throat as he raced toward his vehicle. Almost, but not quite.

He ground to a halt beside the driver's door, fishing in his pocket for the keys. He palmed the electronic opener attached to the key ring. "Fuck, fuck, fuck, open, you bastard."

This time it worked. The lights flickered on and off. The lock beeped. He wrenched open the door and prepared to fling himself inside. Then he felt the hot breath of the first dog. It growled and locked its teeth onto the back of his ankle.

"Ah, shit," Logan yelled as he tried to shake the animal off. Before he could take evasive action, the second beast launched itself at Logan and fastened onto his rear end. Not just his trousers, but a goodly chunk of his ass.

He didn't want to hurt Kyla's dogs, but a man had to defend himself, right? He kicked out and dislodged the animal on his ankle. Swinging around in a wild circle, he

spun his rear-end attacker off. The dog hit the ground, tumbling over and over in the dirt.

Logan threw himself into the vehicle and inserted the key in the ignition, revving the engine until the roar filled the night. He paused a moment to check both dogs were on their feet and unharmed, and then took off, pedal to the floor. Gravel spun under the wheels and the tires screeched as they made contact with the tar-sealed road. He reached the highway and pointed the vehicle in the direction of Pine Gap.

When he was far enough away that Kyla and Lisa wouldn't be able to see him, he pulled to the side of the road. Leaving the engine idling, he turned on the interior light and slid a hand under his butt.

"Damn it, this is a new suit," he complained when he felt the tear in the fabric. Worse was the fact his boxers were wet. Blood coated his fingers when he looked at his hand "Shit, that means a tetanus shot. Damn it, that woman owes me big-time."

He wasn't really certain what had taken place tonight in the bar, but the effects on the men around Kyla had been astounding. Someone needed to investigate this. Time to have a discussion with his immediate superior.

He grabbed the new cell phone he'd purchased in Alice Springs and tapped in the number for his boss.

"Duty officer. Can I help you?"

"Officer of the Station, please," he snapped, drumming his fingers on the steering wheel while he waited.

"Purdy here."

"Sir, this is Agent Matthews."

"Thought you'd be here by now, Matthews. What kept you?"

"I got caught up in a slight drama in town, Sir. I think we might have a situation here. Something that I think the powers that be might be very interested in."

"Nine hundred hours in my office. You can fill me in then."

Purdy rang off. Logan cut the connection and tucked the cell phone in his pocket. He sighed and rested his head on the steering wheel. He hated to report Kyla, but this really did need to be looked into.

Pine Gap was a joint Australian and American intelligence and surveillance base, although the Americans had funded most of it. Kyla was bound by the Secrets Act, given she worked for the DSTO. She shouldn't be doing this type of experiment under less-than-optimal conditions. If what she'd invented was stable, he could see many serious applications for it, particularly when it came to gaining information the military needed.

He felt guilty for a moment. Kyla was a nice woman, one he wouldn't mind getting to know better. But he couldn't let this go. He had no choice. He worked for the United States government. There was no doubt he was attracted to Kyla, but his duty was clear. Maybe when all this was sorted out, she'd let him take her out and make amends.

"Yeah, in your dreams, buddy. She's as likely to rip your balls off."

Well, he'd just have to come up with a surefire way to get her to agree. Besides—he slid his hand under his ass again and fingered the tear in his trousers—she owed him now.

## **Chapter Two**

Kyla wiped her hands on a dirty rag she pulled from her rear pocket and surveyed the quad bike, looking for any random streaks of oil she may have missed. She'd inherited the four-wheel bike when her parents had passed the property on to her and moved to the city. Guess they figured she needed a place to call her own after she and Brian divorced. She was grateful to them. It was nice to have a bolt-hole when she needed it.

"Hey, you want a cold drink?" Lisa stood on the verandah, waving an empty glass and holding up a jug of homemade lemonade.

"You bet. It's really starting to get hot out here." Kyla tossed the oily rag on the backseat of the bike. Skip, the old black-and-white Border collie farm dog she'd also inherited from her parents, jumped up and snagged the rag with a snap of his teeth. He raced across the yard and Jem, an Australian cattle dog or blue heeler, chased after him, barking his delight at the game. Kyla grinned and left them to it, heading for the house.

Three steps up and she sighed as the shade enclosed her. Grabbing the glass from Lisa, she waited while her friend filled it and then took a seat on the love swing. She downed half the lemonade in one gulp. "Bliss. Thank you for making it. I meant to do it when I first got up but forgot."

"Too busy worrying about who tried to jimmy the door to your workroom, I suspect." Lisa sat on the opposite end of the loveseat and, using her toes, set it swinging gently. "You reckon it was whoever we heard out here when we got home from the pub?"

"No way." Kyla shook her head. "The dogs saw him off the property. And given that tiny strip of fabric hanging from Skip's lower canines, I'll stake a bet that the prowler is walking around with a crease in his rear end right about now."

She stood and placed her glass on the little table perched at the end of the swing. "I'm guessing it was Brian, trying to steal whatever I was working on."

"Why the hell would –"

"He did it before, that's why." She leaned back against the post supporting the roof that overhung the verandah. "Yeah, he was an asshole when it came to the marriage bit, but he was more than that. He was a thief. I knew we were heading for the rocks way before it happened, but the final straw was when he stole my research and presented it to our boss at the DSTO as his own work."

"And you let him get away with that? Ackkk, girlfriend, why didn't you denounce him? The man is an idiot, full of his own importance, and a control freak to boot. And you didn't turn him in? I thought I'd trained you better than that."

Kyla chuckled. "All water under the bridge now. I remembered what you said about using whatever I could to get out of the marriage when he knocked me around that first time. This was just the knowledge I needed. I used it to force him into selling the house and giving me my cut. Then I took twelve months off work and ran back home, tail between my legs."

"But if you think it's Brian hanging around here..."

"I'm betting he figures he needs an edge at work and thinks I'll provide it. If I actually catch him at it, I'll have him charged. He sure as hell is not getting his hands on any more of my work." She drew in a deep breath. "Not that it's going to matter after my boss reads his mail anyway."

Lisa frowned. "What do you mean?"

"I made a decision after we got home last night, something I've been thinking about for a while."

"Well, don't keep me in suspense."

She grinned. "Patience, girlfriend. I've been having so much fun creating this cologne. It's like the old days, before I got involved with the DSTO and analyzing boring figures. I want to go back to simple inventing, soooo..."

"You quit?" Lisa sat there with her mouth hanging open.

"Yep, fired an email off to my boss last night before I went to bed."

Before she could say anything else, the dogs started to bark, forgetting their game of tug-of-war with the cleaning rag. They both raced toward the entrance to the property. Kyla frowned and stepped down from the verandah to face the driveway.

Over the din of the dogs' barking and growling, she heard the distinctive sound of a vehicle going over the speed bumps that guarded the gateway. A black four-wheel-drive kicked up a plume of red dust as it careened too fast up the rutted drive. Two Jeeps closely followed it. Jeeps Kyla had seen before. Jeeps with the insignia of the Pine Gap base plastered on the doors.

*What the hell...*

The first of the vehicles screeched to a halt within inches of Kyla's feet. She jumped back a pace, coughing and waving her hand in front of her face as the dust lodged in her throat. Her mouth dropped open when she spied Logan sitting in the driver's seat.

"These dogs bite?" he asked.

For a moment, all she could do was stare at him. Then she shook her head and called the animals to her with a snap of her fingers. "Lisa, could you lock the dogs inside, please?"

Lisa whistled. Skip and Jem jumped up onto the verandah and followed her inside. She reappeared moments later, minus the dogs. "I've shut them in the laundry for the moment. I doubt they'd bite anyone but you never know."

Logan slid out of the vehicle and waved a hand at the Jeeps parked behind him. Four men climbed out, all dressed in the tan, brown and gray of the American Marines' desert uniform. They converged on the steps and surged up the verandah.

"Hey, what the hell is going on?" Lisa jumped in front of them, hands on hips, as she demanded a reason for this invasion.

The first Marine pushed her out of the way and the tide of men flowed on into the house, Lisa trailing them. The dogs set up a cacophony of sound, whining and barking for release from their temporary imprisonment.

Kyla swung her gaze back to Logan, eyes opening wide as she recognized the second man alighting from the vehicle.

"Mr. Grace?" She shook her head, trying to take it in. What the hell was her boss doing out here in Alice Springs?

"Hello, Kyla." He closed the distance between them, Logan at his side. "Thought you were supposed to be taking a break from scientific work. I hear you've been doing some experimenting up here."

"What? This is crazy. What has this got to do with you?" She didn't dare look at Logan. She just might smack him one if she did. Because without a doubt, there was only one way her boss could have known about her cologne trial from last night.

Mr. Grace motioned to the verandah. "Shall we get out of the sun?"

Kyla wanted to tell him to go stuff it, pompous little worm. He was another made in the same mold as her ex-husband. In his mid-fifties, balding head, pinched features, this man seemed to think women had no place in the scientific field. He'd been an absolute pain to work for, constantly putting the females on staff down as if they were too stupid to do the job correctly. Which was why he'd been so quick to believe Brian when he'd passed her work off as his own. *Chauvinistic bastard.*

He didn't wait for her response, simply climbed onto the verandah and made himself at home in the very center of the loveseat. Which left only one other chair. Logan appropriated it, dropping down with a sigh. He immediately jumped up again, hand held to his butt.

"Problem, Mr. Matthews?" Grace twitched an eyebrow at Logan, an enquiring look on his face.



Logan flushed bright red and cast a quick glance at Kyla. "Ah...no problem. Just thought I'd play the gentleman and offer the chair to Kyla."

*Yeah right, you lying bastard.* One guess who got his ass chomped by the dogs last night. Kyla frowned. Had he been spying on her, or was this the result of the cologne? Maybe it *had* affected Logan after all.

She pushed the idea from her mind for the moment and concentrated on her boss. "Mind telling me what business of yours it is what I get up to on my holiday?"

He gave her a grin filled with sardonic satisfaction, as if just waiting for that very question. "Did you forget you worked for the government, my dear?"

*Damn it, I really will belt him one if he calls me "my dear" again in that smarmy voice. I've listened to that the whole time I've worked for him and I'm sick to death of it.*

Pressing her lips together, she chose not to answer. Instead, she raised one eyebrow and stared at him, waiting for him to drop his bombshell. And she was sure there was going to be one. That was the way the prick operated.

"You may be on sabbatical, my dear, but you are still an employee of the DSTO. Still bound by its secrecy laws. Anything you work on belongs to the department." He paused a moment and then went on, a sneer on his face. "And what's this I hear about you shooting off your mouth in the local bar last night?"

Kyla glared at Logan before turning back to Grace. "This is nothing to do with the DSTO. It was cologne, for crying out loud. Isn't a lady allowed to use a little cologne now and then?"

"From what I understand, it could well have defense applications when it comes to interrogation. I'm confiscating the formula and taking it back to Melbourne. I'll expect you in the lab bright and early Monday morning to start working on it."

Well, damn, she'd forgotten the DSTO owned the rights to anything their employees came up with while contracted to them. Not that it was going to do them much good right now. She chuckled. "Not going to happen, Grace, old boy."

He scrambled from the swing seat and pulled himself up to his full height. Which was about three inches shorter than Kyla.

"Mr. Grace to you, Miss Harris. And seeing I'm your boss, I suggest you take note of what I'm saying."

"Still not going to happen. I'm on leave. Plus, if you check your email when you get back to the office, you'll find out I handed in my notice last night. I'm not coming back."

Grace blustered for a few moments as if struggling to get the words out. His face reddened and his lips took on that pinched look. "Be that as it may, you are still bound by the terms of your contract until your leave is up. I'll have that formula and get someone else to work on it. Probably your ex-husband," he finished with a snide grin.

Anger burned in Kyla's gut. Damn Grace and damn her ex too. Well, this time they'd both lose out. She looked out the corner of her eye at Logan. He still hadn't said a word, although his jaw was clenched as if he didn't care too much about the way Grace spoke to her.

"Aww, what a shame. Mr. Grace, you're just plain out of luck. There *is* no written formula." She tapped her forehead. "It's all up here. So what are you going to do about them apples?"

"I'll have you arrested under the Secrets Act. You'll soon give it up when you find yourself languishing in jail."

Logan took this opportunity to step forward and enter the conversation. "That's not going to happen either, Grace. I have my orders and I'm afraid they supersede yours."

At that moment, the Marines came tramping out of the house, their arms filled with boxes of essential oils, bottles and flasks, and everything else they'd confiscated from Kyla's makeshift laboratory. Logan held up his hand. "Hold it, men."

He ignored Grace and faced Kyla. "I take it you have no desire to return to Melbourne to work on this formula?"

She didn't answer, just stared him in the face.

"So be it. We do it my way."

"I'm in charge here," Grace spat out. "I'll decide what happens to her." He jerked a thumb in Kyla's direction.

"Not so. Pine Gap may be a joint American-Australian venture, but it's pretty much funded by the American Department of Defense. My boss contacted the powers that be last night and the Australian government has given us *carte blanche* to handle this as we see fit, provided they share in the discovery, of course."

Grace's jaw worked as he ground his teeth. "Thought you were taking over as head of security? How come they didn't put someone else on this?"

"Someone you could manipulate easily, Grace?" Logan shook his head, a slight grin on his face. "I've already made contact with Kyla so my boss decided it would be better if I handled it."

"And who the hell do you think *you* are?" Kyla planted her hands on her hips and glared at him.

Logan pulled a wallet from the back pocket of his jeans and flipped it open so she could see the identification card inside. Kyla's eyes boggled. What the hell...

"CIA? Are you kidding me? What the hell does the CIA want with a stupid cologne?" She glared at him. "I suppose *you're* going to cart me off to jail too?"

"No point in that, ma'am. You can't work on the formula for us there. And if you think about it, you'll understand why we're interested. A cologne that makes men beg to tell you all their dirty little secrets? Imagine how it could be used in covert operations."

He waved a hand at the Marines. "Put it all back, men. And don't leave a mess behind. Treadner, leave your box there. One of the other men can move it. I need you here. I have a job for you."

When the Marine joined him, Logan pointed at Grace. "Take one of the Jeeps and drive Mr. Grace to his motel in town. He'll be flying back to Melbourne today."

"You can't do this." Grace glared at Logan and then turned his gaze on Kyla. "Someone has to guard this woman. Who knows what she'll do without supervision."

"And that would be me." Logan waved the little man away. "Off you go, Treadner. We'll see you back here when you're done. Oh, and better bring back some food—extra groceries plus sandwiches and drinks maybe—from one of the shops in town. I doubt Miss Harris has enough food stocked here to feed you hungry Marines."

The Marine marched Mr. Grace back to the last Jeep and urged him inside. They took off in a swirl of dust that left Kyla's vision hazy. That wasn't the only thing hazy. Kyla felt as if her mind was as blurry and distorted as her eyesight. This was just too surreal.

*The CIA, for God's sake?*

Logan waited. He knew it was coming. The look on her face told him that. It just depended on how long it took Kyla to marshal her defenses. Okay, so he'd only just met her, but he'd bet that red hair meant a hot temper. *And what else, bud? Maybe hot passions?*

His sister would smack him upside the head and tell him to be more observant if she were here. Kyla would most likely kick his butt if he called her a redhead to her face. Women were funny about those types of things. Her hair was more blonde with lots of red and copper highlights. What the women's magazines called strawberry blonde. Given the fair eyebrows, he'd bet it was natural too.

Whatever the color, he found himself with a need to pull the band from her ponytail and see how long her hair was. Sweep it around her face so it framed her exquisite green eyes. Not hazel but a true garden green, a color he'd never seen before.

He liked the fact she was tall. No need to provide a box if he wanted to kiss her good night...or good morning, hello, happy lunchtime, or happy any other part of the day for that matter. Damn, he had it bad. He'd never been so attracted to a woman so quick. Something about her made his lower body tighten as all the blood from his brain rushed south.

It didn't help his equilibrium much when he ran his gaze over what she was wearing either. Those skimpy hipster shorts just begged him to rip them off. And the black halter-top made no bones about the fact she wasn't wearing a bra.

"Just what the heck is going on, Logan? I thought you said you were Marine, not CIA," Lisa said as she joined them.

Logan jerked his gaze away from Kyla and eyeballed Lisa. He had to shake his head to get his gray matter to engage so he could come up with a satisfactory answer. "Um, I said ex-Marine. I went from the Marines to the CIA."

Kyla took that moment to explode. "I don't care what the hell you are. What gives you the right to spy on me?"

She spun around and smacked him on the rear end. When he yelped and jerked out of her way, she chuckled, although there was nothing even remotely funny reflected in the sound. "I bloody well knew I was right. It was you the dogs took a chunk out of last night."

Lisa got in his face. "You followed us home, didn't you? So, it serves you right."

Kyla punched him on the arm with a clenched fist. "Damn it, Logan, you scared the crap out of us. Why didn't you make yourself known? We thought it was whoever has been lurking around for the last couple of weeks."

He opened his mouth to speak but she cut across him.

"And what's this about you being the one to keep an eye on me? Who the hell are you to tell me what I can or can't do?"

Logan reached out and grasped Kyla's shoulders, giving her a small shake. "Be quiet long enough and I might actually be able to answer your questions."

He hadn't raised his voice—well, not that much—but it sure seemed to work. Kyla and Lisa stopped talking and stared at him. He was surprised to say the least. Kyla didn't strike him as someone who would bow down to any type of caveman tactics.

"This person? The one you think has been hanging around? Was this before or after you tested the cologne?"

Kyla shrugged. "Before. It's been going on for the past couple of weeks."

"Right! All the more reason we need to be here. Whatever was in that sample you used last night affected those men. They would have given up anything or anyone just to spend time with you. Think of the—"

"I don't need a lecture about the various ways something like this could be used when it comes to the military," she snapped. "I'm smart enough to work it out for myself. But where the hell do you come into it?"

He ran his hand across his crew-cut head, grimacing at the sweat that coated his palm. Even in the shade it was damn hot. Hotter than yesterday. Maybe he'd take Kyla up on her advice and get himself some shorts instead of jeans.

"I've just been appointed the new head of security out at the base. I'm sorry if it upsets you, but you violated all types of security issues when you experimented with that cologne last night. It's my job to protect you until you perfect the formula and hand it over to us. With your government's blessing, of course."

Kyla opened her mouth to speak, but he cut her off with a slash of his hand. "I know you don't like it, but that's the way it has to be. Either I haul you off to Pine Gap and have you restricted to base while you work on the formula—"

"Not bloody likely," she spat out.

"Or you work on it here and I stay to protect you," he continued, ignoring her interruption.

Lisa clapped her hands and jumped into the conversation. "Oh goody, does that mean we get to keep the Marines?" She cast a glance over her shoulder where three Marines stood at attention in front of the open door to the house.

Logan couldn't help but chuckle. No putting down *this* woman. "Yeah, I guess we're going to have to roster them on two at a time to protect the house. With all those

doors opening out onto the verandah," he pointed at the French doors on the old homestead, "we'll need them."

With a sassy grin, Lisa wagged her fingers at Logan and Kyla and turned toward the house. "Guess I'll go introduce myself to our guards. Ooh, it's so nice to have a man about the house. Maybe one or two of them might like a little hands-on instruction concerning...housekeeping."

Kyla groaned. "Damn it, Lisa, is that all you can think about? Sex, sex, sex and more sex?"

"Hey, don't knock it, girlfriend. It's good for the waistline."

"How do you make that out?"

"Don't you know sex burns off more calories than anything else? I'm all for getting fit and healthy." Hips swinging, she sashayed up to the men.

A gurgle of laughter burst from Kyla. She shook her head and turned back to Logan, her face now wiped clean of all hilarity. "I suppose I can't change your mind?"

"Sorry. I'm just doing my job."

"I take it you're not on duty twenty-four hours a day?"

He shook his head and grinned. "I know I sometimes think I'm Superman, but even I need time to sleep. Which is why we'll have the Marines on guard duty outside the house."

"Okay, here's a newsflash. There are three bedrooms. One is my temporary laboratory. One is Lisa's room. The other is mine." She arched her eyebrows. "So where does that leave you? I hope you brought a sleeping bag with you."

"I guess I'll just have to share with you. After all, I'm here to guard you. Can't do that from another room, can I?"

Logan felt his blood heat up at the mere thought of sharing a bed with Kyla. His cock sprang to life, fully engorged. He glanced down, not at all surprised to find the denim stretched tight over a rock-hard erection.

*Down, boy!*

He had to keep this professional. He had a job to do. But, damn it, he wouldn't mind getting personal with the lovely Kyla. For some reason, she intrigued him. Made him hunger to get down and dirty with the Aussie broad. Fuck the living daylights out of her until they both screamed out their satisfaction.

Ah, shit, he was in trouble here. Now he was sounding like some testosterone-ridden teenager. Come to think of it, that's exactly what he felt like.

Logan drew in a deep breath and released it slowly, trying to control the mad urges sweeping through him. He glanced at Kyla, surprised at the speculative look in her green eyes and the suggestive smile curving her mouth. He gulped as she stepped up to him and slid her arms around his neck. Then she proceeded to rub herself against his erection. So much for telling his body to stand down.

"And what if you get caught in my little *honey trap*, as Manny calls it? You think you're immune?"

The blood thundered through his veins and he had to work hard to keep his hips still. He opened his mouth to speak, but his throat had dried up and all he did was send out a pathetic croak.

He swallowed and tried again. "Want me to tell you all my secrets?"



## Chapter Three

"What are you going to do?" Lisa lounged on the double bed that took up most of the space in Kyla's room.

Dressed in a short cotton nightie and her hair up in pigtails, Lisa looked like a little girl...until Kyla caught sight of the mischievous smile on her face. She grinned. "You, my dear, are a brat."

Lisa chuckled. "Who? Me? Nah, I just want to know if you're going to get horizontal with our new resident. One of them anyway. You can have the boss man. I've got dibs on the boys. They're not as uptight as Mr. CIA."

"He just needs to loosen up a bit is all. Who knows? He might actually be fun under that stiff, I'm-in-charge attitude." Kyla dropped the towel she'd used to dry her hair on the brass bedrail. Still dressed in the nothing but the towel she'd wound around her body after her shower, she grabbed a brush off the bedside table and stroked it through her long hair in an effort to avoid Lisa's gaze.

"Hah, I thought as much. You should see your face. You fancy him big-time." She bounced up onto her knees. "So...answer the question. Are you going to put the moves on the man?"

Kyla turned and fetched an old t-shirt from the top drawer of her dresser. Dropping it over her head, she smoothed it down to the top of her thighs before whipping the damp towel out from underneath. Then she donned a brief pair of bikini panties.

"Well, hell, you're not going to wear that old t-shirt to sleep in, are you? You have masses of sexy nightwear. Why choose that? Do you want to turn the man off?"

"The operative word is *sleep*. And that's exactly what I plan to do." She grabbed the towels and tossed them into the clothes hamper in the corner of the room. "Besides, I don't even know if the man is turned-on, so what I wear is irrelevant."

Lisa dropped all teasing, her face taking on a serious cast. "Kyla, honey, you haven't been with a man since your divorce, and I'm not just talking sexual. And if what you tell me about your ex is true, there was no sex for a while before you guys split."

Kyla snorted. "A damn long while."

"I saw the way Logan was with you today. He fancies you like mad. Hell, those tight jeans of his not only make his butt look great, they sure do cuddle his cock nicely. Hard not to miss the blatant erection he was sporting."

With a chuckle, Kyla rolled her eyes. "Girl, you are so bad."

"Forget me for the moment. I've got two Marines waiting in my room right now so I'm doing okay. This is —"

"You haven't!" Kyla dropped onto the bed beside Lisa, a grin on her face. "How the heck did you manage that?"

"Ahh, okay, they're just camping on the floor in my bedroom, but a girl can dream, right?"

Kyla burst out laughing. "I knew you were a fast worker but damn. So tell me, how the heck can you fit even one man, let alone two, in your room? It's crammed to the roof with all your painting gear."

Lisa shrugged. "Hey, where there's a will there's a way. I put the easel out in the living room and shoved the rest of my stuff in the hall cupboard." She grinned. "Plenty of room now for a couple of sleeping bags. What the hell, they can share my bed if they really want. I'm not about to object."

She leaned over and smacked Kyla on the hand. "Anyway, enough of me. This is all about you. Honey, you can't let your experience with Brian sour you for all men."

"I'm not, and if we're being serious here, I'll pull on my big girl panties and admit I do fancy Logan something bad. In fact, if I didn't think it was that damn cologne affecting him, I'd drag him into this bed and fuck the living daylights out of him."

Lisa hooted. "Yeah, baby, I knew you had it in you."

"Well, I don't have it in me right now, but I sure wouldn't mind if it *did* happen." Kyla slammed her hand over her mouth as she realized what she'd said. *Bugger, you're getting as bad as Lisa.* She gave her friend a pained look. "I don't believe I said that."

"Finally!" Lisa grinned at her and punched her lightly on the arm.

"What?"

"I love you like a sister, but I have to tell you you've been a miserable pain in the rear end since your divorce. You've shut yourself off emotionally from everyone. It's time you lightened up and started living life again. Brian destroyed all your confidence in yourself as a woman and you need to get it back."

Lisa slid off the bed and bent to give Kyla a hug. "So what if it *is* the cologne working on Logan? My advice? Vamp the man. Screw his brains out. Let him make you feel like a desirable woman again."

Pigtails bobbing, she pranced over to the bedroom door. "Well, I'm off to entertain my boys." She waggled her eyebrows. "At least until the shift changes and the next two come off duty."

She turned back at the last moment. "Oh and get rid of that ratty old t-shirt, okay?"

Kyla chuckled as she rose from the bed and checked the French doors that opened onto the verandah before pulling the drapes closed. Then, turning the ceiling fan to high, she flicked off the overhead light, leaving only the bedside lamp to illuminate the area for Logan. She slid into bed and pulled the sheet up to her waist. Normally, she slept in nothing but a pair of panties and didn't worry about any coverings. It was just too damn hot at this time of year. But with Logan sharing her bedroom...

She groaned. She couldn't believe she was about to take Lisa's advice. She climbed from the bed and rummaged around in her dresser drawer until she found what she was looking for—a skimpy baby-doll nightie Lisa had given her for her birthday a couple of years ago. Virginal white, it hugged her breasts and hinted at the darker

areolas underneath. The hem barely covered her girly bits and made her legs seem a mile long.

For a moment she contemplated going back to the t-shirt and then shook her head. "Nothing ventured, nothing gained," she whispered as she stared at her reflection in the mirror.

A noise from the living room alerted her that Logan must be on his way to bed. She bent down and grabbed the quilt and sheet she'd laid on the floor for him earlier. Shoving them into the wardrobe, she jumped back into bed and yanked the sheet up to her chin before pushing it back to her waist. Hell, if she was going to vamp the guy, she may as well do a good job of it.

She rolled over and turned the lamp down so only a dim glow warmed the room. That done, she kicked the sheet to the bottom of the bed and lay on her side, one leg pulled up to balance herself. Lifting her head slightly, she spread her unbound hair over the pillow. With a chuckle, she closed her eyes...and waited.

\* \* \* \* \*

Logan took a final drag on his cigarette and flicked it out into the night. It sailed through the air and landed about six feet from the verandah.

"Might want to make certain that's out, Sir. It's as dry as tinder around here. Don't want to cause a bushfire." Don Treadner stepped into the light that flowed out from the living room.

"You're right." Logan grimaced as he jumped down from the verandah. He strode across to the cigarette and ground the tip out with the heel of his shoe. "I should have remembered it's summer out here in Australia."

The Marine chuckled. "I'm not certain they actually have a winter here, Sir. I've been out here three months now and it just seems to be varying degrees of hot. Takes a bit of getting used to, but it sure as hell beats the snow and ice storms they're getting back home."

"Drop the 'Sir', Don. I might be in charge of this operation, but I'm not your boss. First names are fine with me. I don't tend to stand on ceremony."

"I thought all you suit guys were arrogant assholes full of your own importance."

Logan laughed. "Well, I have to admit, I do know a few like that."

Don snorted. "More than a few if you ask me. I've seen those guys out at the base. It's sure not like being in the Marines, I know that."

"Maybe it's the ex-Marine in me. I lived the life too many years to forget it now. I still miss the camaraderie at times." Pushing back old memories, Logan focused on the present. "You guys sorted out a roster?"

"John and Leon did the first shift. Marty and I will be on until seven in the morning. We'll split the twenty-four hours up between us. If necessary, I can bring in a third team from the base, but we should be okay."

"Good. Hopefully, whoever has been hanging around will try again. Then we've got him. You all sorted out for sleeping arrangements?"

Don laughed, although he stifled the sound. "That Lisa's a character. She's got us all bunking down in her room. Said the dogs had the run of the living room and if we camped out there, we'd end up with them in our bedrolls. I think she figures she's going to get lucky. I have to say that little nightie she almost has on is not a bad sight to go to sleep on."

He flicked Logan a quick grin. "Time to check the perimeter. You should get some sleep. I don't think you've had any down time since you got off that plane."

*Yeah, Don's right. I'm whacked. I need to get to bed.* So why the hell did he find himself standing here in the dark, scared out of his brain about entering that bedroom?

"For fuck's sake, she's just another female." Right! A female who, for some reason, spiked his libido. Every time he thought of her, testosterone surged and fueled myriad scenarios where he had her naked and begging. Crying out for him to bring her relief.

“Ah, shit, this is getting me nowhere. It’s nothing but lust, you moron. Now get your ass in there and get some sleep.”

He debated having another cigarette. Nah, it was just procrastinating. Damn, what the hell was he? A man or a freakin’ coward?

“Me big CIA Special Agent,” he mumbled, and thumped his chest as he stepped up onto the verandah. Then the idiocy of his actions caught him and he shook his head and chuckled.

Kyla’s dogs lifted their heads and stared at him when he entered the living room. Jem had hunkered down on the mat in the center of the room. Skip, the older dog, curled up on the couch. Logan’s lips twitched. He’d heard Kyla warn Skip off numerous times during the afternoon. The animal looked at him with a hangdog expression as if convinced Logan was about to roust it out of its comfortable position.

“I won’t tell if you don’t,” he whispered.

Now he was talking to the mutts? Hell, this job would send him crazy if he wasn’t careful. It was time to get his act together. He dragged his professionalism about him like a solid cloak and opened the door to Kyla’s bedroom.

He stopped on the threshold. The breath exploded from his chest in a loud whoosh, as if someone had landed a solid punch to his gut. He gasped, the sound a raspy wheeze in the quiet of the room. His knees weakened and he had to clutch at the doorframe to stop himself from sliding onto the floor.

*Flippin’ hell, I’ve died and gone to heaven.*

Okay, so much for professionalism. His lower body tightened with need. His cock stood up and waved its little head to let him know that it was happy with the way things were panning out. Logan dragged in a shaky breath and took a second look at the vision laid out before him.

He’d checked the bedroom out earlier. The homestead was old, built around the turn of the century, and the décor reflected that. Old colonial at its best. The walls of the room were tongue-in-groove timber painted a soft eggshell color with a polished wood

picture rail set about three feet from the ceiling. The polished wood floors gleamed in what little light the bedside lamp shed. Two thick rugs, one beside the bed and the other flush with the French doors, broke up the area that wasn't taken up with antique furniture. He could appreciate the fine workmanship of the stained dressing table and matching bedside tables, but it was the brass bed and what—or who—it contained that drew his eye.

Kyla lay on her side, one leg drawn up, the covers tossed to the end of the bed. One hand rested palm-up on the white sheet. The other cradled her cheek. He'd seen kids sleep in the same position, but there was nothing childlike about the rest of the picture. Her nightie, stark white but thin enough he could just see the outline of her body through the fabric, had ridden up. It hugged her waist and offered him a tantalizing view of her hips and the itty-bitty scarlet panties she had on. To complete the picture, red-blond hair framed her face and spread out over the pillow.

How in the name of all that was holy was he supposed to get into that bed and keep his hands to himself? Maybe he should join the guys in Lisa's room. He groaned. That wasn't the answer either. He was supposed to protect Kyla and no way could he do that from another part of the house.

"Professionalism, bud, professionalism," he muttered. "You're a big boy. You can do this."

With a fatalistic sigh, he pulled his handgun from the back waistband of his jeans and slipped it under the free pillow. Then he stripped to his boxer shorts and turned the lamp down until just a soft sparkle around the bulb remained. He slid in beside Kyla, hugging the very edge of the mattress.

Every muscle was tense. *Including* the one between his legs. His cock was so damn hard it was a wonder he hadn't done himself an injury when he'd wrenched off his jeans. Damn thing had a mind of its own and no amount of disciplining on his part was about to make it stand at ease and go back to sleep.

He let out a soft huff of laughter. Christ, now he was thinking about his cock as if it were alive. A separate entity, divorced from the rest of his body. Damn, he had to get over this or he'd get no rest. He slid over a little on the bed, just enough that he could get comfortable. Expelling a deep breath, he closed his eyes and consciously willed his body to relax.

Before he could achieve any degree of success, he felt Kyla move. His eyes snapped open, but he didn't dare turn his head toward her. One look and he'd be lost.

She rolled over and plastered herself to his side. She flung her arm across his chest and rested one leg over his thigh. Her nightie was still twisted about her waist because the bare skin of her belly branded his hip. She slid her leg closer to his erection and angled her hips to press against him.

Then she started to move. Lithe undulations that drove him crazy. Made the blood surge through his body and the breath snag in his chest. With every tilt of her hips, she ground her pussy on his hip and brushed her knee against his cock. A breathy sound rumbled from her throat. With her breasts pressed to his chest, it vibrated through him and drove him to answer with a hungry growl.

He lifted his head to stare into her face. She had her eyes closed but a sexy smile tilted her lips. Either she was caught up in an erotic dream with him in the starring role, or she wasn't asleep as he'd thought.

"Um, Kyla?" Heat seared him when she answered by rolling her body so more of her weight rested on him. He struggled to keep his hips still when she slipped her leg between his and proceeded to ride his thigh. "Kyla, you awake?" *Please, please, let her be awake.*

"Hmm?"

He grasped her hips and tried to stop her movements. Only problem was, that left her straddling his thigh, her pussy pressed hard against the muscle. The muscle that jumped as nerve endings reacted to the dampness of her panties. Shit, she was as aroused as he was.



"Kyla, you know what you're doing?"

"Oh yeah, my momma didn't raise no dummies." Despite his hold on her hips, she managed to drag her damp pussy against him again.

Logan groaned, loud and long. His hands slid a little farther around her hips. Fingers dug into the fleshy cheeks of her ass. "Um, maybe you should think about this first. I'm supposed to be your bodyguard."

"Ooh, please guard my body." She released a soft chuckle. "Anyway, I'm done thinking. Now I'm experimenting."

"Huh? What—"

"Well, you do want to know if this cologne works, don't you? Let's see if it affected you." She arched her hips and rubbed her pussy against him again. "And I'm thinking it's time we got beyond this dry-humping stage. It's a turn-on but hardly satisfying."

Logan gulped. "So you're just using me?"

"You bet your buns I am. You complaining?"

He let out a strangled chuckle. "Not likely."

Before he could say anything else, Kyla moved, slipping her leg from between his and angling it over his hip. Then she pushed herself upright and perched atop him.

"You know, there's something to be said for being on top." She wiggled until his cocked nestled between her thighs.

Another growl rumbled up from Logan's throat. Jesus, talk about unprofessional. If he were any type of man, he'd get out of this bed and demand she behave herself. Hell, if he were any type of man he wouldn't be able to walk away from what was on offer. What would a red-blooded Aussie do in this situation?

Ahh, fuck what anyone else would do! He wasn't strong enough to deny himself this time with Kyla. Something about her had gotten under his skin from the moment he'd seen her in that bar.

"Lady, you're dangerous. You want to experiment, I'm your man."

He reached up and wrapped his arm around her neck, pulling her down to him. He took her mouth in a kiss designed to brand. She immediately opened to him. He grabbed at the proffered invitation, slid his tongue along her bottom lip and delved into the welcoming wetness. She met his every stroke, twining her tongue with his. When he retreated, she thrust forward. Then she teased him and withdrew, forcing him to follow.

She sucked his bottom lip between her teeth and bit down gently, drawing a guttural groan from him. His lower body arched, pushing his engorged cock against her silk-clad pussy. She ground her hips down on him, letting him feel the heat that seeped through the thin barrier of her panties. Tension tightened the muscles in his gut. The breath caught in his throat. He wanted nothing more than to bury himself deep inside Kyla and fuck her until she cried out for mercy.

Kyla broke off the kiss and grinned, her tongue lapping at her lips as if savoring the taste of him. "So far the experiment seems to be well on track. Want to take it further?"

She didn't wait for his answer. Instead, she slid down his body until she was face-to-face with the tented fabric of his boxer shorts.

"Hmm, interesting bulge you have there, my friend. But I do think he needs to be liberated."

Kyla grabbed the front of his shorts and pulled, sliding them down his legs. His cock sprang free, just begging for her ministrations. She didn't disappoint. She swooped, her hand clasping the base of his erection. Then she licked at the bulbous head, running her tongue around the ridge before sliding her mouth over him and taking him deep. She swirled her tongue around the thickness of his cock. Probed at the tiny opening in the swollen head before easing down to the base again. And all the while, her hand played with his testes, rolling his balls between her fingers.

Logan found himself panting. His hips jerked, matching the rhythm of her mouth. Holy fuckin' Christ, he was ready to lose it. He'd never been so turned-on in his life. Much more and he wouldn't be responsible for what happened. And damn it, when he

came, he wanted to be buried deep inside her. He wanted her with him every inch of the way.

“Enough already,” he groaned, knowing he was almost at the point of no-return.

She lifted her head and grinned. “Nowhere near enough,” she promised.

Without giving Kyla time to react, he surged up, tipping her onto her back. Before she could move, he came down over her, using his weight to keep her in place. He straddled her hips, settling his cock between her thighs. The white nightie twisted around her waist, affording him the perfect view of the skimpy bikini panties that barely covered her mons.

Kyla caught her lower lip between her teeth as she felt Logan’s erection nudge at the damp crotch of her panties. Goose bumps pebbled her skin, but inside she was burning up as if her blood had turned molten. Tension gnawed at her, burying itself in the pit of her belly. Moisture seeped between the swollen lips of her pussy. An ache started deep inside and Kyla knew without a doubt there was only one way to stop it. But first...

“Lift your weight a moment,” she whispered.

When he did so, she snaked her hands down her body and grabbed the hem of her nightie. She pulled it up and Logan rushed to help her dispose of it. Before she’d even dropped it over the side of the bed, he lowered his head and nuzzled her breasts. Her nipples hardened, an ache arcing from her chest to her vagina as if the two were connected by an invisible string.

Logan probed at one hard crest with the tip of his tongue, flicking and licking until Kyla thought she’d go mad. What did he think she was? An ice cream? When she was ready to scream if he didn’t follow through, he sucked her nipple into his mouth, kneading her other breast with his hand.

Warmth streaked through Kyla’s body. She arched her back, trying to get closer to him. The feel of his mouth suckling at her breast was almost too much. She closed her eyes and rolled her head on the pillow, hands clutching at Logan’s shoulders. A moan

slipped from between her lips when he bit down gently, abrading the sensitive flesh and sending fire flashing through her veins. Her hips jerked. She lifted her lower body and rubbed against the hard ridge of his cock. The tension built. Nerves wound tight. Tremors slid up and down her spine and her hands shook as she grasped the curve of his ass.

He broke off, giving her nipple one final stroke with his tongue. Lifting his head, he stared at her, a slight smile on his face. "I think turnabout is fair play, don't you?"

She was incapable of answering. All she could do was whimper as he slid down her body, taking her panties with him. He used his broad shoulders to wedge her legs farther apart and blew a soft puff of warm air across the sensitive flesh. Kyla came up off the bed. She dragged in a deep breath. Or tried to. It was impossible. Sensation overwhelmed her. Heat spiked, burning like a bushfire through her veins.

It was a struggle to get her breathing under control. Just as she felt she was approaching some semblance of normality, she lost the ability with one swipe of Logan's hot, slick tongue along her vulva. He parted her swollen lips and dragged the tip of his tongue along the length of her. He flicked at her clit, igniting nerve endings and driving the tension higher. Then he settled in, grabbing her hips and pulling her closer.

His tongue stabbed. Licked. Drove deep in a rhythm that imitated the ultimate act of carnal desire. The new growth on his whiskered chin scraped against her inner thighs, adding to the emotions tumbling through her. Moisture pooled in her pussy and Logan lapped it up, pushing her higher and higher.

Fire burned. Blood turned into red-hot lava. Normal cognitive thinking disappeared. And all Kyla could do was clasp her hands about his head and hang on as the world tipped off its axis and she hurtled over the edge into the most cataclysmic climax she'd experienced in a long while.

The tension burst. Spasms started deep inside her pussy. Spread out to encompass her whole body. Pleasure surged, slicking her body with sweat. Limbs trembled.

Panting breath erupted from her throat. Her mind felt as if it had shut down and all she could do was concentrate on the blinding flash of endorphins that swamped her brain as the orgasm swept through her.

When she finally felt able to string two words together, she opened her eyes and stared at him. He'd lifted his head from between her thighs and directed a satisfied smile at her. She swallowed and dragged in a shaky breath.

"Well, fuck me!" she whispered, her body still dealing with the surfeit of emotions charging through her mind.

Logan dipped his head and probed at her clit with the tip of his tongue again. "Oh honey, I plan to do just that."

## Chapter Four

Logan grinned at the bemused look on Kyla's face. A warm glow resided in the pit of his stomach. Her response made him feel about ten feet tall. *I'm da man!*

He shook his head and snorted. Lord help him, he was acting like a teenager with his first score. The fiery burn in his gut was probably nothing more than a reminder that he hadn't gotten his rocks off yet. Pushing himself up onto his hands, he lifted his weight off her and rolled to his side, gathering her close. He nuzzled his chin in the crook of her shoulder. "You okay?"

Kyla opened her eyes and rolled her head to look at him. Her mouth tilted upward into a delighted grin. "Oh yeah, I'm more than okay. Damn, but you American Marines sure know how to use your...weapons...to great advantage."

He burst out laughing. "Ex-Marine, ma'am, and you haven't seen anything yet. Wait until I bring out the...big guns."

She rolled herself over until she balanced atop him, legs spread on either side. Laughter curved her lips and put a sparkle in her eyes. She leaned down and nipped him on the shoulder then laved the bite with the tip of her tongue. "Pretty up yourself, aren't you?"

"Isn't that a physical impossibility?" He raised his eyebrows.

"It means confident. Sure of yourself."

He grimaced. "Well, I thought I was, but there's one little problem I can't do much about right now."

"Oh, I wouldn't say it was little." She wriggled her hips until he felt the dampness of her pussy along the ridge of his erection.

His heartbeat slammed into overdrive. He arched his hips, pushed his cock closer.

Slick. Hot. Wet fire that drove the blood through his body and hardened his dick even more. He clenched his hands on her ass and struggled for control. He wanted nothing more than to drive himself deep inside her. Fuck her until his eyes crossed and he lost the ability to do anything but feel.

In a dim, darkened corner of his mind, he knew he should put a stop to this. Totally unprofessional. Well, fuck that too. He'd gone way beyond the point where he could exercise that degree of restraint.

"Condom," he groaned. His voice was a strangled thread of sound.

Kyla lifted her head from where she lapped at his chest with delicate swipes of her tongue. "You don't have any? I thought every guy these days carried condoms in his wallet."

"I didn't think I'd run into an Aussie—what's the word over here?—sheila who would turn me on my head."

She let out a chuckle. "If you plan to get on with the natives, at least the female ones, I suggest you don't call us sheilas. Yeah, it means a woman, but it's old-fashioned and most of us find it kind of patronizing."

"Chick. Hot stuff. Broad. Woman." He groaned. "I'll call you anything you like as long as you provide me with a condom. I'm dying here."

Now Kyla laughed for real. Not a catchy chuckle. This was a belly laugh that did as much damage as her husky humor. His hips jerked in response, his cock twitching as blood surged, straining to get closer. He grabbed for a shaky breath and fought for a measure of equilibrium amid the carnal sensations coursing through him.

"Top drawer." She pointed to the bedside table. "I do believe in being prepared."

Without looking, he reached out, grabbed the ornate knob on the drawer and yanked it open. A quick scrabble around in the contents and he came up with a small box. Holding it front of his face, he peered at the label in the dim lighting. Then he gave a heartfelt sigh. "Thank God."

“You’re not bad for a girl’s ego, you know that?”

Kyla dropped a kiss on his lips, slanting her mouth over his and demanding entrance. Logan gave it to her, meeting every thrust of her tongue with a deliberate parry. Testosterone raged. His blood heated up, pulse pounding in his head. She moved her body on his, setting up a rhythm that threatened to drive him to the brink of insanity if he didn’t take her soon.

Gasping for breath, he tore open the box of condoms and pulled one of the foil packets free. Beyond finesse, he ripped it open with a savage slash of his teeth. Extracting the prophylactic, he rolled Kyla onto the bed and set about sheathing his hard cock.

“Hey, let me.” She sat up and helped him roll the condom down over his erect penis. The job done, she grinned, flicking him a sexy glance. “Ooh, here comes the main course.”

A knock on the bedroom door suddenly cut through the tension that filled the bedroom. “Logan, someone’s creeping around outside,” a sibilant whisper announced.

“Fuck nooo.” Logan dropped his head back onto the pillows and cursed the fates that reality should intrude at that specific moment. He jumped out of bed, grabbed his jeans from the floor and stepped into them, not bothering to remove the newly applied condom. By the time he’d managed to encase his rock-hard cock behind the steel teeth of the zipper, Kyla had scooted across the room and donned the shorts and halter-top she’d had on earlier.

He shoved his feet, minus socks, into his shoes and pulled a t-shirt over his head. Then he slid his hand under the pillow on his side of the bed and retrieved his weapon—the real one. The one he’d totally forgotten about in the heat of making love to Kyla. Some fuckin’ professional he was.

With a silent wave at Kyla to remain where she was, he opened the bedroom door. Don Treadner met him on the other side. With hand signals, he indicated the direction of the intruder. The two of them crept from the house and slipped along the verandah.



There was no sign of Marty, Don's partner, but Logan had no doubt he was in position, ready to jump the bastard sneaking around.

When they rounded the corner and peeked along to where the French doors of Kyla's bedroom opened out onto the timber decking, Logan spotted the intruder. A darker shadow bent double, fiddling with something he'd placed up against the doors.

Anger sizzled in Logan's gut. Rage such as he'd never known surged through him at the thought of someone threatening Kyla. He struggled to bank it down. Called on every lesson he'd ever learned in the military. Losing control was not the way a soldier worked. *Get even, not mad!*

Jaw clenched, he crept up behind the shadow and, two-handed, braced his gun against the back of the guy's head. "Hold it right there, bud!"

At the same time, Marty jumped to the verandah and pointed his rifle at the figure. Don hit the light fixture fastened to the wall of the house and the area flooded with brilliance as the overhead globes winked on.

Marty grabbed the man by the arm and thrust him up against the wall. "Don't move, asshole."

Wrenching the drapes aside, Kyla opened the French doors with a crash. She stumbled as she stepped out into the light and stared at the person Logan had in his sights.

"Greasy!" Kyla's eyes opened wide and then she seemed to recover herself. She marched up and shoved Marty out of the way. "Greasy, what the freaking hell do you think you're doing? You scared the crap out of me." She punctuated every word with a poke of her finger into his flabby stomach.

The old codger cringed, arms around his gut to protect himself. He was no cleaner than he'd been when Logan has seen him at the bar. And he smelled just as bad. Logan wrinkled his nose in reaction. "Answer the woman, old man, before I kick your ass for you."

"I-I only wanted to bring you some flowers, Miss Kyla." He pointed toward her bedroom doors. "See, I wanted you to know I was thinking of you."

Logan scooped up the foot-long, newspaper-wrapped bundle Kyla had stumbled over when she'd left the room. He unwrapped it to find about a dozen stalks of wilted flowers, certainly not the bought-from-the florist type. They looked more like weeds.

Kyla grabbed the bundle and stared at them. "Oh Greasy, you went out and picked me some wildflowers. They're lovely, but why didn't you bring them out during the daylight instead of creeping around at night?"

Greasy mumbled something, but Logan didn't catch it.

"I'm sorry, Greasy, but I don't understand," Kyla responded.

The old man hung his head. "Sorry, Miss Kyla, but I wanted to show you how serious I was. That's why I brought the flowers. I know I'm old and not very pretty to look at, but I can give you a good life."

Kyla glanced at Logan, eyes wide and mouth hanging open. Then she turned her head back to Greasy. "Are you telling me you want me to be your kept woman?"

Greasy snatched the wilted bunch of wildflowers from her hand and dropped to his knees. He raised the floral offering to her, the other hand held over his heart. "I'd never disrespect you that way, me darlin'. I'm asking you to be me wife. And it wasn't just that rush of blood to me head from last night—"

Logan snorted. "Yeah, one *head* in particular," he mumbled half under his breath.

Greasy glared at him before continuing. "Even before last night, I've been thinkin' it's time to get me some companionship for me old age. You're a fine woman, Miss Kyla. I'd be honored to have you for me wife. I'll even buy a real house for you if that's what you want."

"Holy crap," Kyla whispered. "I've created a monster." She backed away from Greasy and turned to face Logan. "You handle it, but don't hurt him. He means no harm. It must be the cologne still working somehow."

"You want to marry him?" Logan fought to keep the grin from his face.

Kyla turned her back on him. "Sorry, Greasy, I don't plan on marrying anyone right now. You're a sweet man, but you need to find someone your own age." She grimaced as Greasy's face fell.

Don stepped in. "You want us to lock him up, boss?"

Logan shook his head. "No point. We know what he was after. Take him into town—" He stopped and focused on Greasy. "You got a vehicle out here?"

He shook his head. "I walked. Took me bloody ages."

"Take him into town and drop him off at the bar. He can walk home from there." With a growl, Logan lunged and twisted his hand in the grimy fabric of Greasy's shirt. "I catch you anywhere near this place or Kyla again, I'll rip your fucking arms off, you hear?"

Greasy scuttled off the verandah before Don could even grab his arm. Marty disappeared, no doubt going to call one of the other Marines to take over until Don returned. As he rounded the corner, he hit the lights and the area darkened, except for the soft illumination from the lamp in Kyla's room.

Kyla stood at the entrance, the glow outlining her body. Logan felt his heart kick in his chest. Or was that just another rush of testosterone? His cock, which had settled down during the altercation with Greasy, sprang to life again, blood flowing south to aid in the effort. He wanted nothing more than to go back inside that room with Kyla, strip off their clothes, throw her on the bed and gorge himself on the taste and feel of her.

"You coming back to bed?" She undid the ties around her neck, but held the front of her top in place.

Logan gulped. His pulse sped up. He opened his mouth to answer and had even taken the first step toward her when his conscience dragged him to a stop. Ah, hell, he couldn't do this. He was on an assignment and he couldn't do his job properly if he was

curled up in bed with Kyla. Because the moment he got close to her, he forgot everything but how she made him feel.

Look what had happened tonight. If his mind had been on the job, he wouldn't have allowed an intruder to get as far as Kyla's bedroom door. He would have been on the ball, and given his training, would have spotted Greasy before he'd gotten that close. Okay, so the old coot was harmless, but this night could have ended so differently. And all because he couldn't keep his mind on the job. Damn it, he deserved a swift kick in the ass for letting his attention be diverted from the one thing that was important—keeping Kyla safe until they had a working formula of the cologne in their hands.

Swallowing down the intense disappointment that swelled in his gut, he looked at her from under his brows. "Sorry, Kyla. Duty calls. I'll be out here the rest of the night." He gave a weak smile. "At least you won't have to share your bed."

"Hey, your loss." She shrugged and dropped the front of her top, giving him a glimpse of bare breasts before turning into the room, closing the French doors and twitching the drapes across to shut him out.

Logan groaned. He could have sworn he'd seen a flash of hurt cross Kyla's face. He was tempted to say to fuck with the job and follow her. Then the old loyalties for his country, the ones he'd grown up with, the ones he'd valued while in the Marines, rose to the fore. With a shake of his head, he wandered off to find Marty. "Ooh-rah," he muttered, full of disgust with himself.

\* \* \* \* \*

Kyla threw the sleeping bag and waterproof groundsheet in the back of the truck. She'd already loaded the quad bike plus two large planks to use as a ramp. "So is it or isn't it?"

Lisa picked up the box of cooking paraphernalia and tucked it in beside the bike, along with the rest of the camping equipment. "Forget the cologne. Greasy told you last

night he'd been thinking about this for a while. And as for Logan... What the hell does it matter? He fancies you. Go with it. See where it leads. Can't hurt."

"Um, yeah it could. If I find out he's only attracted to me because of how I smell, it could rip the heart out of me."

"That bad, eh?" Lisa turned to face her friend. "This is all because of that stupid ex of yours, isn't it? He beat up on your ego so bad you just can't believe a man could be attracted to you for yourself."

Kyla busied herself stuffing dried foods into a backpack. Then she added a couple of packets of frozen meat to the mix, along with bottles of water. Filling a canvas water bag from the garden tap, she clipped it onto the grill at the front of the truck. With extra jerry cans of both fuel and water stowed in the back with the rest of the camping gear, she was about ready.

"You're not going to answer me, are you?" Lisa stood in front of her, hands propped on her hips.

"Not much to say. Last night Logan and I started to get down and dirty, and yeah, it was pretty fantastic. A girl should have orgasms like that all the time." She grinned and jammed a wide-brimmed bush hat on her head, tilting the front down to hide her eyes. "It's just a bloody shame Greasy interrupted us before we got to the main event."

She held her hand up when Lisa opened her mouth to speak. "After Greasy left, Logan stayed on duty for the rest of the night. Beyond being disappointed, I didn't think anything of it at the time."

"And today he's being a total pain in the rear end, yes? I noticed he's avoiding you."

"Yeah, I get the feeling he's regretting what happened last night. I deliberately brushed against him earlier this morning and you'd think I'd given him some dreaded disease or something. Now it's all orders and 'I'm the big CIA protective dude' and I'm sick of it. I'm going bush for the day. I have some thinking to do. Besides, I have to get more flower petals for this cologne. You'll be all right on your own?"

Lisa chuckled. "I'm teaching Don Treadner how to make a camp oven today. Then I thought we'd pitch one of the tents in the far paddock and I'll show him how to stay warm and survive in the bush. That man sure does have a sexy body. He can hold it against me any time he likes."

Kyla burst out laughing. "Lisa, it's the middle of summer. No one is going to freeze to death in this heat. The guy is more likely to suffer heat stroke."

"And I plan on being the source of the heat," Lisa said with a wink. "Hell, I might even get him to pose for me."

"You've forgotten one little thing, Lisa, my friend. You don't do portraits."

"Hey, painting's a flexible medium. I thought it was time to branch out a bit."

"Yeah, I can just see it. A sexy Marine standing in the middle of an outback landscape."

Lisa grinned. "Use a bit of imagination, girlfriend. One sexy, *naked* Marine lounging on a bed of Australian wildflowers holding his...weapon in his hand."

She tilted her head toward the vehicle. "Now get out of here and go lick your wounds while I decide how to ask Don if he wants to pose in the buff for me."

Kyla was still laughing when she jumped in the driver's seat and fired up the engine. She popped her head through the window to have a final word with Lisa.

"Where the hell do you think you're going?" A loud thump sounded on the driver's door. A hand snaked in and turned off the ignition, removing the keys.

She turned her head in the sudden silence and stared at Logan. "Give me back those keys," she said through gritted teeth.

"No, you're not going anywhere, and certainly not on your own. I'm here to protect you until you finish that formula."

"Fine. I don't need the keys." Kyla thanked God her father had taught her to hotwire a car. Good thing the truck was an older model. Not so easy to do this with the new ones. She ducked her head under the dash and pulled out two of the wires. When

she touched them together, the engine fired. She planted her foot on the accelerator and let it roar.

"You want your bloody formula?" she yelled over the sound. "Then get in the vehicle. Because I'm heading up into the MacDonnell Ranges to get some fresh flower petals for the bloody thing and I'm going with or without your consent."

"How long do you plan on being gone?"

"Overnight. Now, you coming or not?"

"Don," Logan called over his shoulder, never taking his eyes off Kyla.

The Marine jogged around the side of the house. "Yeah, boss."

"I'm going with Kyla. You're in charge until I get back."

Don nodded and retreated to the other side of the house.

Kyla glanced at Lisa. "Grab another backpack and throw some extra food and water in it. And an extra sleeping bag. Oh, and get Mr. CIA here a shady hat. The last thing I need to deal with is sunstroke."

Lisa tore off to do her bidding. Kyla fumed as Logan rounded the truck and climbed in the passenger side, handing over the keys as he took his seat. Her and her big mouth. She should have just taken off and damn the consequences.

She relaxed her grip on the steering wheel and surreptitiously wiped her sweaty palms on her shorts. Taking in a deep breath, she exhaled, hoping it would dissipate the anger building inside. Anger at herself. She'd turned into a quivering mass of hormones over a man she'd just met. One who made her panties wet every time he looked at her. Lord, she was a freakin' idiot. Last night he was all over her like a rash and then today he treated her like something the cat dragged in.

And she'd committed herself to twenty-four hours alone in the bush with him? Crap, maybe she should just do what Lisa suggested. Go with the flow and see where it went instead of trying to analyze it. Maybe she should show this stuffed-shirt American just what Aussie girls were made of.

A grin surfaced through the swirl of emotions inside her. She took a peek at Logan from under her brows. He sat poker-stiff in the passenger seat, seat belt snapped into place and hands clasped in his lap. He looked as if his face would crack if he so much as smiled. Sweat rolled down his cheeks and with an impatient huff, he lifted one hand to wipe it away.

Her lips twitched. Obviously, the heat was getting to him. He had a lot to learn about living in Australia *and* about Australian women. He thought he was hot now?

*Logan, you ain't seen nothing yet.*



## Chapter Five

After about an hour and a half of driving up into the ranges, Kyla turned off the main highway and onto a rutted dirt track. Another mile or so and she drew the vehicle to a halt beside a barbed-wire fence. Without a word, she slid out of the driver's seat and rounded the back of the truck. Logan joined her, helping her to offload the quad bike from the *ute*, as she called it.

Strange people, these Australians. He'd always figured English was English, but he was learning that wasn't the case when it came to the Aussies. Most of the slang terms totally confused him, as did the Australian penchant for shortening everything, including peoples' names. He grinned. Not much they could do with Logan though.

"You going to stand there smirking all day, or you going to help earn your keep?"

He shook his head and focused on swapping the supplies from the truck to the quad bike. Kyla dragged the full backpack out and set it aside. He lifted out the rest of the stuff and helped her stow it in the luggage compartment and side pockets of the bike. She even packed the empty backpack Lisa had included at the last moment. The final thing to go in was a small black briefcase. Logan frowned. He'd heard of people wanting to get away from it all, but office work in the bush?

She raised her eyebrows at his stare. "It's a satellite phone. Required luggage for a trip anywhere in the outback."

He patted his hip pocket. "I've got my cell phone with me if we need it."

Kyla shook her head as she tied the sleeping bag onto the back of the bike. "Probably won't do you much good. The signal is notoriously bad out here, fading in and out, and that's when we can actually pick it up. Sat phones are far more reliable." She paused and stared in the back of the ute as if looking for something.

"What's the problem?"

"Lisa was supposed to throw in a second sleeping bag. Looks like she forgot." Kyla locked the truck and pocketed the keys. "You'll have to share mine."

Hundreds of little testosterone buddies reared their tiny heads at the idea of snuggling down in a sleeping bag with the delectable Kyla. He dragged in a shaky breath and willed his body to behave.

"Okay, you get to carry the full backpack. Jump on." She mounted the bike and turned over the ignition.

He slid his arms into the straps of the backpack and settled it comfortably before climbing onto the pillion seat behind Kyla, his thighs spread, boots propped up on the footrests. His pulse was doing crazy things at the idea of being so close to her. In the interest of self-preservation, he scooted back on the seat, allowing a few inches of space to separate them.

"Slide forward, put your hands around my waist and hold on tight. That shouldn't be too hard for you."

*Oh yeah it is.* Blood surged and his lower body responded. As he slid closer to Kyla and wrapped his arms around her, his cock grew even harder. *Get it together, Logan. You're a grown man, it shouldn't be that hard.*

There was that word again. He rolled his eyes and groaned.

Kyla looked over her shoulder. "You okay back there?"

"Ah, yeah, just fine." He scrabbled around in his mind for another topic to focus on. "You going to leave the truck here? Will it be safe?"

"This is aboriginal land. The gorge we're going to isn't open to the public, but I have permission to be here. Don't ask me how, but the Elders always know when I arrive and someone will keep an eye on the truck." With that, she revved the engine of the quad bike and took off.

As they cut through the bush, Logan clutched Kyla around the waist. Head tucked into the curve of her shoulder, he ignored the scenery and concentrated on giving his body a stern talking-to. Useless. Absolutely useless.

The vibration of the bike shuddered through him, his cock and balls tightening in response. Every rut they bumped over pushed him closer to the soft curve of Kyla's ass. Without his brain giving the order, his hands flattened against her middle. He slid one down until it sat low on the curve of her stomach. Another inch or so and he'd be able to cup his palm over her pubic area.

*Christ, you're turning into a degenerate bastard.*

He lifted his head from Kyla's shoulder and dragged in a deep breath in the hope it would steady his racing pulse. If he didn't get it together before they stopped, he'd never be able to get off the bike. She wouldn't even need to ask how he was feeling. One look at the front of his jeans and she'd know.

He ran military terms in his head. Every blessed thing he'd ever learned during his time in the Marines. Until his pulse slowed and his mind started functioning again. At least his cock was now standing at ease instead of snapping to attention.

"Okay, this is as far as we can go. Now we have to climb down to the gorge."

At Kyla's words, he looked around as she guided the bike under the hanging branches of a large tree. Once she'd turned off the engine, he dismounted and stood on the edge of a deep cut in the landscape.

The panorama before him was breathtaking. Rough and wild but with a charm all its own. Sandstone cliffs, shaped by nature and weathered through age, formed the sides of the gorge. Where the sun struck, the rocks glowed a fiery red with a softer ochre color to give contrast. Trees and shrubs clung with tenacity to the walls where patches of soil lingered amid the rocky outcrops. A tall ghost gum tree, recognizable by its papery white bark, grew at an angle and hung out over the chasm as if defying gravity.

Logan stepped closer to the edge and stared down. A creek cut through the towering sides of the gorge and ended in a pool of water that, given the blue-green color, was quite deep. The sun glinted off the surface and turned the vista into a visual oasis of relief from the harsh outback sun.

"Great watering hole, isn't it?" Kyla stepped up beside him, wiping the sweat from her forehead with the back of her hand before tilting the brim of her felt hat down so it shadowed her face.

"Is it safe for swimming?"

"You bet. It also contains a stack of freshwater fish. I didn't bring any fishing gear so it's sausages for dinner. Come on, let's get down there." She cut a path to the edge of the gorge, weaving her way through a gap in the boulders. "Work first and then we can play."

He followed Kyla as they climbed down into the bottom of the gorge. It didn't take long and wasn't hard going—steps had been cut into the sandstone, probably by the aboriginal owners of the land—but sweat beaded Logan's brow and soaked his t-shirt. That swimming hole was looking more inviting by the minute.

Kyla skirted the pool and headed for a strip of sand that stretched from the rock wall to the water's edge. There she dumped her backpack and the sleeping bag and turned to Logan.

"First thing is to get a camp set up and lay a fire for when it gets dark." She glanced up at the sky. "And that's not too long away so let's move it. You look after collecting the firewood and I'll start here. If you head around the cliff face, you should find plenty of dry branches that have fallen from the trees."

Logan shrugged out of his pack and went to do Kyla's bidding. He'd just reached down to pick up the first branch when Kyla called out to him.

"Hey, watch out for snakes. Don't go rolling over rocks or large logs. Never know whose home it might be."

He froze, hand outstretched as he angled a glance over his shoulder at Kyla. "Is this one of those Aussie jokes?"

"Nope." She chuckled. "But it's okay. Snakes are usually only aggressive during breeding season, so you're safe."

"Unless you disturb old man snake's nesting place, of course."

At the sound of the gravelly male voice, Logan spun on his heels. Kyla jumped to her feet and rushed over to the black man rounding an outcropping of jagged rock, one arm full of sawn logs and the other wrapped around what looked like a homemade spear.

"Brought you some firewood, Kyla," the man said as he dumped the timber beside the backpacks. "Bit thicker than what you'll find around here. The boys and I have been cleaning up the last of the debris from that gum that came down when we had that storm a couple of months ago."

"Hey, thanks, Albert. It'll mean I won't have to get up during the night to feed the fire." Kyla waved Logan over. "Albert, this is Logan Matthews. He's working out at the base for the moment."

Albert shook Logan's hand, his white teeth flashing in his dark-skinned face. "Saved you a job, man. Now you only have to collect enough kindling and lighter wood to get the fire started."

"I appreciate it," Logan replied. "Not certain I want to run into any of your slithery friends."

The aboriginal man burst out laughing. "Sorry about the snake joke, although I wasn't really fooling. You just have to be on the watch. Most snakes will run from you as soon as they feel the vibrations of your movement."

"It's the ones that don't run I'm worried about."

"Common sense, man. Like Kyla said, don't put your hand in any hollow logs or holes in the rocks and you'll be right." Albert flashed another smile at Kyla. "You want

some fish for dinner? I'm going to get some to take home for the family so I can do a few more if you want."

"That would be great. I'll save the sausages and steaks for tomorrow in case we stay out a second night."

Kyla settled down on the sand and arranged a ring of rocks before laying out a ground sheet and the sleeping bag. By then Logan had collected a sizeable amount of twigs and thin branches for the fire. As soon as he dumped them down near Kyla, she set about making a fire within the ring of rocks.

"What else do you need me to do?"

Kyla lifted her head at his question. "Haul over the pack you carried down and drag out the cooking equipment. Take the billycan and one of the enamel plates down to Albert."

Finding the metal plates was easy. It was the billycan that gave him trouble. "Ah, one question. What's a billycan?"

She grinned and pointed to the blackened pot he held in his hand. "*That* is every Aussie camper's best friend. A can with a handle, used for boiling water and making tea. There's nothing like good old billy tea."

"I'll take your word for it," he said, levering himself to his feet and striding off to take the plate and can down to Albert.

Albert had moved farther around the hole to where a group of rocks extended out into the water. He stood about three feet from the edge, motionless, one arm extended over his head with the spear trained on the water's surface. Logan opened his mouth to say something, but before he could, Albert flowed into action. He drove the spear down and quickly held it aloft again, a sizable fish flapping on the pointed end.

The aboriginal man flashed his white smile. "Dinner. Nice size yellow belly. That's a golden perch if you really want to know."

He flipped it off the end of the spear and over onto the sand to join the other half dozen fish already there. Tossing the spear after it, he held his hand out for the pot. "I'll catch you some yabbies to go with the fish."

Logan handed over the billycan, a grin on his face. He no idea what yabbies were, but he sure wasn't about to ask. He felt like a big enough dummy as it was. No doubt he'd find out at dinner. He stood and watched Albert until Kyla appeared at his side, a plastic bag fluttering from her hand.

"Albert, I'm off to get some more Glory. I want to harvest them before it gets dark. I only took one of each last time and I need more if I'm going to make this cologne work."

"You be careful of that Glory, Kyla. You know what the old people say about it." He chuckled. "And I heard all about Greasy lusting after you. I'd say that cologne is working fine."

Kyla groaned. "How is it you hardly ever go to town and you still hear all the gossip?"

She shook her head. "Don't tell me. The old bush telegraph, right? So, okay if Logan stays with you? I won't be long."

"I have no idea who or what glory is, but you're not going anywhere without me." Logan turned toward Albert. "One little detail Kyla forgot to tell you. Someone—besides Greasy—has been hanging around her place. I'm her bodyguard until she perfects the cologne."

Albert grinned and ran his gaze over Kyla. Logan felt his hackles rise as jealousy surged. Damn it, he didn't like the idea of anyone else looking at Kyla like that. He shook his head and reminded himself he was here on a job and it would stand him in good stead to remember that.

"Some *body* you've been assigned to protect, mate," Albert said. "Some people have all the luck. And, Kyla? I'll get the boys to keep a check on the homestead for you."

"Not necessary," Logan intervened. "I have four Marines guarding the place."

Albert gave him a fierce scowl and turned back to his yabbie catching. "Just tell 'em not to shoot any black fellas 'cause my boys are going to be there. We look after our own out here."

Logan held up his hands and retreated. No point in taking it any further. He could see Albert was determined. He'd just have to make certain the Marines weren't trigger-happy.

He fell into step beside Kyla as they trudged across the sand. "So what's a glory?"

"It's actually called Glory of the Center. It's a very rare plant that doesn't grow anywhere else in Australia but the MacDonnell Ranges. The Elders of the tribe who own this land believe it has aphrodisiacal properties."

"Which is why you used it in your cologne." He followed Kyla as she cut through a break in the sandstone cliffs and started to climb. "Makes sense, I guess."

Ahead of them, hanging off the side of a small, flat area of the cliff face, Logan saw a couple of shrubs. With gray-green spindly leaves, they looked unprepossessing, until he spotted the creamy-white, star-shaped flowers covering the bushes.

Kyla pulled herself up onto the flat shelf. Logan started to follow when Kyla looked down at him. "Maybe you should stay down there until I bag the flowers. They...ah, might affect you."

"I'm sure I'll be fine." He quickly joined her on the ledge. He reached out to the first bush. "How many do you want?"

"We're limited to taking six male and six female flowers because they're so rare."

Eyebrows raised, he grinned. "Male flowers? You're kidding me, right? They all look the same to me."

"Check again. *Goesinters* and *goesouters*. With this plant, nature has followed the human example. Or is that the other way around?"

"Goes what? Hey, I know I don't understand a lot of the Aussie lingo, but you lost me there."



Kyla burst out laughing. "Goesinters, as in *goes into*. And —"

He held up his hand. "Let me guess. *Goesouters* means *goes out*, yes?"

She grinned. "Now, keeping that in mind, look at the flowers again."

Logan stared at the flowers then reached out and plucked one gently from the bush. The creamy petals felt waxy-smooth when he rubbed his thumb and finger over one. The center of the flower had a bulbous growth from which six thin-leafed petals grew in a cup-like formation, their color a bright golden yellow.

He shrugged. As far as he could tell, a flower was a flower. Nothing to suggest the sex of the flower.

Kyla snapped off another bloom and handed it to him. "Check this one out."

Balancing both flowers on the palm of one hand, he compared them. The same creamy petals. The same yellow —

"Holy crap, this one has a little hairy penis in the middle." He roared with laughter. "Damn, a male flower. Who would have thought it?"

"The stamen of the male flower, or penis as you called it, extends for about half an inch usually and all those yellow hairy bits contain the pollen. The birds cross-pollinate the female flowers by taking the pollen from the male flowers and then feeding on the nectar of the female flowers."

"Ain't nature grand," he quipped. He rubbed his thumb and forefinger over the smooth petal of the male flower.

"No, don't..."

He stared at Kyla. "What?"

She grimaced. "According to the Elders of the tribe, the aphrodisiac only works when you mix the male with the female petals. You might have just started the process."

"I don't feel any different. I'll let you know if I suddenly decide to ravage you, okay?"

Hell, he wanted to ravage her right now. She looked so damn sexy standing there in her brief shorts and t-shirt. But he had to remember one thing. This was a job and he'd already broken the most important edict in the agents' rulebook — *Don't get involved*.

Shame of it was, his body wasn't doing much in the way of listening right now.

"How about we collect what you need and get back down to the camp? It's getting a bit hot up here." He swiped a hand across his sweaty forehead, fully aware the sweat had more to do with the state of his libido than the Australian weather.

He quickly snapped off the required number of flowers of both sexes and dropped them into the plastic bag Kyla held open. He climbed down, Kyla following him. Once back on the sand, Kyla strode across to the campsite. Tying off the plastic bag of blooms, she gently placed it inside another pot and trickled water from their supply around the bag.

"That will keep them fresh until we get home." She looked down at the campfire that now smoldered with red coals. "Looks like Albert lit it as soon as we left. *And* he has prepared dinner for us. I didn't realize we'd been gone so long."

Logan checked out the billycan that hung suspended over the fire on a long branch. "So now I know what yabbies are. Freshwater crayfish, yes?" About a dozen or so of the crustaceans, their shells a deep red, floated in the bubbling water. "But where's the fish?"

Kyla moved the pot of yabbies off the fire and set it aside. "We could have used the frying pan, but this is the way the old people cook them. Wrap them in mud and place them among the hot coals. The mud dries out and when you peel off the mud, the skin comes away too, and you're left with the flesh."

She tossed her hat on the ground near the sleeping bag and pulled her t-shirt over her head. Logan gulped as a lacy black bra came into view.

"I'm going for a swim before dinner. You coming?"

Swallowing became difficult as Kyla unclipped the bra and dropped it near the edge of the water. Back to him, she shimmied out of her shorts, leaving them on the sandy bank. Next, the matching black bikini panties joined them.

As he watched her wade into the water, the breath gusted from Logan's mouth. His heart thumped. Temperature spiked as the blood pooled low in his body and his cock sat up and took notice. Oh crap, he was in trouble here.

"Logan?" Kyla looked back over her shoulder, a frown on her face.

He linked his hands in front of him to hide the bulge in his jeans. Then he dropped down onto the sand, legs spread to accommodate his rising erection. "I think I'll rest for a bit. Not used to all this climbing and hiking." *Wuss!*

She shrugged. "Suit yourself."

Kyla wanted to yell at him to get his ass down to the water, but she restrained herself. *Bloody hell, I strip myself naked and still can't get a rise out of him?* Damn it, what the hell had gone wrong since last night? This morning he'd either ignored her or ordered her about as if she were one of his Marines.

Well, the ride out on the quad bike had certainly turned him on. It may well have been ages since she'd indulged in a bit of the down and dirty, but she'd recognize a hard cock anywhere. Particularly when it had been nestled up against her rear end. And since they'd arrived at the gorge? Nothing. Nada. Yes, he'd been pleasant, but the man was out of his element here in the outback so he had no choice but to defer to her.

Now she had an even bigger problem to worry about. The Glory of the Center flowers. She'd assumed they were the ingredient in the cologne that had attracted Greasy and the other men at the bar. She would have bet her last dollar on it. But Logan had handled both the male and female flowers, rubbing the essence of each together, and he was still sitting on the freakin' beach. If the bloody stuff worked as the Elders had told her, he should be champing at the bit to get close to her.

With a frustrated sigh, she waded farther into the pond until the water was level with her hips. Bending forward, she splashed water over her chest. Her nipples, already

hard, tingled. Kyla moaned, hands covering her breasts as a streak of hot energy shot down to her pussy. Her skin felt so hot it was a wonder steam wasn't rising from the water. She needed to cool off and damn quick.

Taking a deep breath, she plunged under the water and swam across the pool. Once there, she turned and made her way back to the shallows fronting the camp. She found her footing on the sandy bottom and stared across at Logan. He was still sitting there, his legs pulled up and arms crossed on his bent knees. One hand cupped his mouth and nose.

Kyla closed her eyes and thought back to the flower-picking expedition. *Yes!* He used the same hand to rub at the waxy petals. She frowned. What if the oil from the flowers just needed time to work? A grin surfaced as a new thought filtered through her mind. Maybe she could do something to hasten things along a bit. Because damned if her ego could take much more of this.

Moving so the water just covered her pubic hair, she cupped her breasts. "Ooh Logan, you really need to come in for a swim. It's fantastic."

He dropped his hand from his face and stared across at her.

She tweaked at both nipples until they were hard and throbbing. "Not that it does a lot to cool my blood," she gushed in a sultry voice. "I'm just so hot inside."

*That is so corny, Kyla.* She groaned. Hell, she was no vamp. She should just give this up right now. The only problem was she was now so damn horny she'd be a basket case before the night was done.

With a deep sigh, she slid her hands down her sides and fisted them on her hips. Maybe she should give up on this whole cologne idea. It might have worked at the bar, but today...

A noise from the beach had her raising her head. Well, how about that? Seems Logan was paying attention after all. He stood about three feet from the edge of the water, reefing his t-shirt over his head and dropping it onto the sand. He ran his gaze across her bare breasts and then lower to where the water brushed at her hips.

Kyla gasped. It felt as if he'd flicked her with fire. Her skin grew sensitized, nerve endings springing to life with the force of an electric charge. Heat swam up from her chest to her face. She licked her lips and slid her hands across her stomach, snagging her fingers in her pubic hair. "You like what you see, Logan?"

For answer, he undid the stud at the top of his jeans and lowered the zip. Then he just stood and stared, his eyes narrowed.

*So get on with it!* Kyla gritted her teeth as she waited for him to make a move. When he remained where he was, she muttered under her breath. She'd gotten him this far. She wasn't about to give up now. She wanted him with a hunger she hadn't known in a long while. Maybe the Glory essence was working on her too, although the Elders assured her it only affected men. Why else would she be this crazy about a man she'd only just met?

*Damn it, if he doesn't get in here this minute, he can stand there and watch me take care of matters in my own way.* It wouldn't be the first time in her self-imposed sexual drought that she'd resorted to a little bit of manual stimulation.

"I'm getting lonely in here. Aren't you going to join me?" She lowered her voice to a husky drawl. "I promise I don't bite...much."

Logan's response was a raspy clearing of his throat. Kyla smiled as his jeans slid lower on his hips. Low enough she could see the swirl of dark hair disappearing into the top of his underwear.

"Ooh, I'm so wound up, there's no way I'll sleep tonight if I don't get rid of some of this tension." Sensation hit her when she slid her hand between her legs and lightly touched the swollen lips.

Despite the coolness of the water, she was hot. A contradiction because shivers slid up and down her spine, making her conscious of every part of her body. Holy crap, she was so turned-on it wouldn't take much to make her come.

"I don't mind doing this myself, but it would be so much more enjoyable if it was your hand teasing my pussy."

She parted her vulva and slid one finger inside. A moan escaped at the creamy dampness. She inserted a second finger and pumped her hand, the movement driving the blood through her body as her heart sped up. Angling her head, she gazed across at Logan, surprised he'd now shed his jeans. She'd been so intent on pleasuring herself, she'd been unaware of his movements.

Black boxer shorts hugged his hips and outlined the bulge of a rigid erection. She wanted to cup her hand over his cock. Take him into her mouth and make him groan with need. The same type of need that shafted through her body and made her feel weak at the knees.

He shuffled closer to the water's edge, his hands on the band of his shorts. "Woman, do you have any idea what you're doing to me?" he asked, his voice a low growl.

"So what are you going to do about it, Marine? Are you a man or a mouse?" Kyla continued her movements, driving the tension higher in her body. She felt like a coiled spring ready to snap. The water may have looked a blue-green from above, but it was crystal clear where she stood and she had no doubt Logan could see every thrust of her fingers.

Before she could say anything else, he bounded into the water, catching her up and dragging her close to his chest. "You are driving me crazy," he ground out through clenched teeth. Then he pulled her closer still and slammed his mouth down on hers.

Kyla's insides melted. It suddenly felt as if a thousand elephants were stomping through her stomach. Her pulse pounded as her heart set up a wild clamor in her chest. Oh God, she'd wanted this. No, she'd needed it. Needed to feel his arms about her and his mouth settled over hers. As the breath hitched in her throat, she gave herself up to the sensations tumbling through her.

Logan took her mouth in a heated kiss, his tongue slipping along her bottom lip before delving inside. Kyla met him, stroking his tongue with hers. Darting forward and then retreating. Teasing him until he growled in the back of his throat and released

her lips. He slid his mouth down her neck, nipping at the sensitized flesh and then feathering soft kisses across the bite. At the same time, he slid one hand down and cupped her between the legs, his fingers caressing the slick folds.

She angled her head back, shivering as Logan licked his way toward one breast. Her eyes closed as she gave in to the need to concentrate on the feelings Logan wrung out of her. She moaned and clamped her teeth on her bottom lip when he parted her and sent his fingers questing.

First one finger. Probing. Thrusting. Then a second finger. Stretching her until she felt the tips brushing against the inner walls of her sex.

Kyla gave in to her body's demands and pumped her hips, wanting to drive him deeper. Needing to satisfy the hunger that drove the blood through her veins.

Logan nibbled his way back up to her chin. "Is this what you want, Kyla?"

He pulled his fingers out and thrust again. Withdrawing. Plunging deep. Until Kyla was panting and clutching at his shoulders. The tension built, coiling in her gut, driving down to tighten the muscles of her sheath. Until it snapped and convulsions rippled out from where Logan's fingers penetrated her. Kyla screamed as she went into sensory overload. She lost sight of the real world. Could only focus on the tumult of emotions tumbling through her. On the lingering spasms of the earth-shattering orgasm Logan had induced.

Her arms hung limply around his neck. Good thing Logan was supporting her weight or she may well have disappeared beneath the crystal water, never to be seen again. When she finally regained a measure of composure, she lifted her head and grinned. "Wow, that's way better than doing the job myself. Much more satisfying with two."

He chuckled. "Glad you see it that way. Now put your legs around my waist. It's my turn."

## Chapter Six

In the heat of the moment, Kyla had forgotten about Logan's needs. Now she pressed her lower body against him and felt the hard bulge of his cock confined by the stretchy fabric of his shorts. She smiled at the idea that he'd bolted into the water without removing his underwear. She must have done something right. Who would have thought she could play the vamp? *Yay me!*

"Come on, woman, I'm starving here." Logan bent his head and gave her a hard kiss. "Legs around my waist."

With a grin, she complied, rubbing herself against his hard cock. Logan groaned and clasped his hands under her rear end, holding her weight. Then he turned and started wading out of the water. She kept up her torture, grinding herself against him. Heat built up again inside her. The blood pounded through her body, driving the fire before it.

God, she couldn't get enough of him. Sex had never been like this with her ex. Maybe that's where they'd gone wrong. With Logan, she seemed to be constantly on the boil, ready for anything. She pushed her body close again, rubbing the dampness of her pussy against the head of his cock.

Logan stumbled and went down on one knee beside his discarded jeans. "At this rate, we'll never make it back to the sleeping bag. If you don't want sand in places it should never be, quit it. Now grab those jeans for me." He gave her a light tap on the ass.

Kyla burst out chuckling and reached over to snag his jeans. Logan pushed himself upright and headed for the campsite. "I'm not certain why you need them. I had other things in mind rather than getting dressed."



He lowered her to the quilted sleeping bag. "My wallet's in the rear pocket and it has a dozen new condoms in it. I plan on using a fair share of those tonight."

"Promises, promises," she teased.

Logan pulled out his wallet and dropped it beside her head. Then he reefed the wet shorts off and tossed them aside. Kyla drew in her breath at the sight of him standing there, legs apart, his cock rising from a nest of dark curls. He was so damn sexy he about blew her mind. She lifted her arms. "Come here," she whispered in a subdued voice.

He dropped down beside her on the sleeping bag and rolled her toward him. Before she could say anything, he kissed her, tongue thrusting, playing with hers. She mimicked his every movement, joining in his game of sensual temptation.

When he broke off the kiss and rolled onto his back, Kyla felt as weak as newborn kitten. Her limbs trembled with the force of the emotions shafting through her. "Damn, that mouth of yours should be branded a lethal weapon." Then she burst out laughing. "Okay, yeah, I know that sounds corny, but you turn me into a blithering idiot."

He chuckled. "Lady, you're not doing too bad yourself. If I don't slow this down I'm going to lose it too quickly. A man has only got so much control."

Rolling onto his knees, he crawled across and threw fresh wood onto the dying embers of the campfire. While he was there, he picked up a stick and rolled the mud-wrapped packages of fish to the outer edge of the ring of stones.

Kyla grinned. Looked like it would be cold fish for dinner tonight. Good thing she'd taken the yabbies off the fire earlier or they'd be well and truly overdone.

In the time they'd been cavorting in the swimming hole, the sun had started to drop below the horizon. Although full dark hadn't arrived as yet, the high cliffs of the gorge cut off most of the remaining daylight. But not so much Kyla couldn't ogle Logan's bare ass. She had a sudden desire to lean over and lick her way across his sexy buns. Maybe take a nibble or two. She giggled at the thought of Logan's reaction.

He turned to look at her. "What?"

“Nothing.” She tried for an innocent look but couldn’t help grinning.

“You laughing at my bare butt stuck up in the air, woman? It’s not good to make fun of a man. We have such fragile egos.” Still on hands and knees, he moved closer. “You want something to laugh at?”

He pounced. Kyla rolled back onto the sleeping bag with Logan on all fours straddling her. A mischievous grin kicked up the corners of his mouth and made Kyla want to launch herself at him and brand that smiling mouth with a smoking-hot kiss.

Before she could follow through, Logan trapped her hips with his thighs and tickled her on the ribs. Kyla burst out laughing. “Get off,” she spluttered.

Logan ignored her. Kyla lost it. Given how ticklish she was, there wasn’t a thing she could do except try to avoid his teasing fingers. She squirmed about on the sleeping bag. Jerked her hips to try to dislodge him. Raised her upper body and plastered herself against him in the hope it would provide a distraction. Her laughter mixed with his chuckles as the two of them rolled around, fighting a childish battle for supremacy.

Then Logan grew still, his hands resting below her bare breasts. Kyla opened her mouth to say something, but the bright glitter in his eyes and a ravenous look on his face caught her instead. She sucked in a sharp breath. The hilarity faded away. Tension swept in to take its place. Gut-wrenching need filled her. Sexual hunger wiped out her normal controls and had her reaching for him.

“Christ, I can’t get enough of you,” he whispered. “In such a short space of time you’ve turned my world upside down.” He lowered his upper body and pressed a soft kiss on her mouth.

Kyla shivered at the feel of his chest brushing against her peaked nipples. She opened her mouth and deepened the kiss, her tongue scraping across his teeth to twine with his. Logan moved a fraction and she slid her hands around the back of his head to hold him. She didn’t want to let him go.

With a deep groan, he broke away, leaning across her to grab his wallet. “Sorry, at this rate I’m not going to last long.”

"So what's keeping you?" She ran the tip of her fingers down his sides, grinning when she felt the tremor that followed. "Because if you don't hurry up, I'm going to have to help myself."

He chuckled as he extracted a foil-wrapped package from the wallet. "Oh yeah? What makes you think I'll let you be on top? I'm the big macho male here."

"Them's fighting words, Marine." Kyla levered herself up and thrust hard. Logan, balanced as he was on his knees, didn't have a chance. He tumbled to his side, the condom still held in his hand. She quickly threw her weight over him and straddled his hips.

The brush of his hard cock against the slick folds of her sex had her biting her lip. She rocked her hips, dragging her own moisture across him, the movement creating friction against her clit. Now the tremors shot through her, bombarding every part of her. An ache started deep inside her pussy and she suddenly couldn't wait to feel him filling her.

"You still want to fight me, Marine?" She leaned forward and grabbed the foil packet from his hand.

Logan angled his hips so his cock nestled against her opening. "Wouldn't dream of it, ma'am. I'll just lie here and take my punishment."

Kyla's hands shook as she tore the wrapping from the condom. She slid down to the top of his thighs so she could wrap her hand around his cock. Logan bucked at the first touch of her fingers, another ragged groan emerging from his throat. She took the time to play, sliding her hand from the base of his cock to the smooth head and back down again. Then she delved between his legs and cupped his balls, applying a gentle pressure.

"Christ, woman, get on with it. I'm dying of sexual hunger."

"What a way to go," she whispered as she rolled the prophylactic down over his hard width.

She raised herself up on her knees and grasped his cock with one hand, positioning the head at the entrance to her body. She flicked him a grin. "No foreplay this time, I'm afraid. I can't wait any longer."

Lowering herself, she slid down his length. Her head dropped back and she moaned at the feel of him stretching her. God, nothing had ever felt as good. She held still for a moment and then, hands braced on his chest, slowly lifted up again until the head of his cock teased the opening of her pussy.

"Enough of the playing around." Logan grasped her hips and arched his lower body at the same time as he pulled her back down onto him.

Kyla took up the rhythm, her concentration focused on the sensations rising inside her. She fixed her gaze on Logan's face, mesmerized by the sheer unadulterated pleasure painting his features. Her breathing gathered pace until she was panting with every movement. Each time Logan arched his hips to drive himself inside her, the tension climbed higher, until she felt as if she'd snap in two if she didn't come soon. Right now she didn't care that it was the effects of the Glory driving Logan's attraction to her. She couldn't have denied herself this had she wanted to.

The night darkened around them. Bird sounds disappeared as the native parrots and kookaburras flew home to roost. The cracking of the campfire mixed with the slap of sweaty bodies, the husky groans of Logan and the breathy moans she couldn't control.

"I can't hold on much longer," he whispered, his voice strained and his face all hard planes in the light of the fire. He raised one hand and tweaked her nipple between thumb and forefinger. The other he slid between her swollen folds, searching until he found her clit.

Kyla cried out at what felt like lightning streaking through her bloodstream when Logan applied pressure on her clit. She drove herself downward, tensing her internal muscles, holding his hard cock deep within her. He flicked at her clit again and she came apart, screaming out her release as the climax hit her. Her body convulsed.

Spasms spread out like ripples in a pond until she shook with the force of her orgasm. Logan arched his hips and let out his own cry as he joined her in the wild ride.

When the spasms had faded away, except for a lingering convulsing shudder, Kyla drooped, falling forward onto Logan's chest. He wrapped his arms about her and dropped a kiss on her forehead.

"Oh wow!" She snuggled close, not certain she'd have the energy to move for some time to come.

He chuckled. "Oh yeah."

As she turned her head so she could kiss his neck, Kyla had a startling thought. She was wrong. She *did* care. A lot! She wanted Logan to like her for herself, not some stupid cologne she'd mixed up. How the hell was she going to deal when the effects wore off and he walked away?

\* \* \* \* \*

Kyla rolled over and stretched her arms above her head. Hmm, amazing how many muscles ached. A big yawn caught her unawares. Not surprising she was still tired. She and Logan had gone at it like rabbits during the night. She grinned and slid her hand out toward Logan. The sleeping bag was empty. Logan must already be up. She should have known that. The bag was made for one so it had meant they'd slept spooned together with barely a space between them.

She rolled to her side and pushed herself up on one elbow. Chunks of fish fell from her shoulders where she'd obviously tucked the top edge of the quilted fabric before going to sleep. She checked out the sand around her. The leftovers from their mud-wrapped fish, along with yabbie shells, littered the sleeping bag and the surrounding area. The sight made her burst out laughing.

"Oh boy, we sure made a mess last night."

Logan sent her a cheeky grin from where he crouched beside the campfire. "Must remember for the future. If we're going to eat in bed, don't leave sharp fish bones

around. They don't do a lot for certain tender areas of the anatomy." He rubbed at his rear end.

*Will I even have a future with Logan when the effects from the Glory flowers wears off?*

Kyla shook the thought from her mind and concentrated on Logan, not that it did much for her equilibrium. His jeans, zip undone, threatened to slide off his hips. He'd left his t-shirt off and she wanted nothing more than to trace a path with her tongue from his collarbone, across the sprinkling of dark hair that covered his pecs, and down to the treasure only just hidden by the denim fabric. Hell, even his bare feet were sexy.

He'd coaxed the embers back to life and had hung a billycan of fresh water over the flames. A battered frying pan filled with sausages and strips of bacon balanced on a couple of rocks at the edge of the fire. "You hungry?"

*Oh definitely, but I can think of other things I'd rather feed on.* "Ah, yeah, I guess I could eat something."

She unzipped the sleeping bag and climbed out. Logan had collected her clothing from the bank of the swimming hole and folded them neatly on the end of the bag. She grabbed her undies and t-shirt and shimmied into them before heading for the backpack where she unearthed another plastic bag.

"I'd better clean up the mess from our midnight feast." She bent and scooped yabbie shells and heads into the bag. "That's one of the rules of the outback. Never leave any mess behind."

By the time she'd shaken out the sleeping bag and gathered up all the remains, the smell of cooking bacon and sausages wafted in the air, making her mouth water. She joined Logan at the fireside and sat cross-legged in the sand. She drew in a deep breath and closed her eyes. "Hmm, that smells heavenly. I'm way hungrier than I thought I was."

Logan leaned over and gave her a quick kiss. "It's all that exercise. Amazing what it does for the appetite."

He licked his lips and came back for seconds, his tongue sliding between her lips to tangle with hers. "Good morning, Kyla," he whispered when he lifted his head.

"And a good morning to you too." Obviously the scent of the Glory flowers hadn't worn off yet.

"Want to hand me a plate?"

Logan's voice broke into her musings. She passed him one of the metal plates and watched as he moved the bacon and sausages onto it. Then he lifted the billycan and set it on the sand before using a slotted spoon to retrieve the vegetables cooking in the hot water. Dumping them into another pot, he added dried potato mash and mixed it all together with some of the hot water. He flipped the whole lot into the frying pan and set it back over the flames.

"Almost ready," he said. "Give me a minute and this'll be done."

Kyla raised her eyebrows. "Hmm, bubble and squeak as well as sausages and bacon. Not bad for someone who has never spent time in the outback."

Logan frowned. "Bubble and squeak?"

She pointed to the frying pan. "That's what we call it. It's usually made with leftover roast vegetables—cabbage, potatoes, carrots, whatever's going—but it works just as well this way."

"In my world, it's just called a fry-up. Something the guys and I used to do when we got tired of rations on deployment."

"Whatever you call it, it smells great. I'm starving."

Logan divided the bubble and squeak and the meat between two plates. He handed one to her before joining her on the sand. "Your breakfast awaits, ma'am."

Kyla dug in, enjoying not only the food, but the brush of Logan's shoulder against hers every time he moved. Lord, she had it bad. And it wasn't just the sex. Okay, so that had been outstanding—she waved a hand in front of her face as heat washed up into her cheeks—but it was more than that. She actually enjoyed his company, when he

wasn't being an arrogant ass, of course. Even when he was, verbally sparring with him was...exciting. It had taken on a sexual edge that drove her libido to incredible heights.

"Sooo...you want to play hooky again today?" Logan waggled his eyebrows at her. "We...er, we could go hunting for more plants."

She placed her plate on the sand and twisted sideways so she faced him. Leaning forward, she rested her forehead against his. "I think we have enough flowers for the moment, but I'm sure we could find something else to do. Instead of playing hooky, we could always play hide the sausage. We still have a few condoms left to use up."

Logan glanced at the half-eaten sausage hanging off the end of his fork and then across at the sleeping bag.

By now, Kyla was laughing so hard it was going to be difficult to explain what that delightful colloquialism meant. Then Logan suddenly tossed the fork and plate down and launched himself at her, pressing her back into the sand.

"Hah! You thought you had me there, didn't you? 'Hide the sausage' is a game all men are familiar with, regardless where they come from." He shifted over her and settled into the cradle of her thighs, pressing a steely erection against her core.

Eyes closed, she arched her hips and rubbed against him. Synapses fired and nerve endings came alive, and it was all she could do to find her breath. "You're definitely a quick study, Logan. But if we're going to stay out another day, I need to let Lisa know."

Logan rolled to his feet and extended his hand to help her rise. "You do that while I clean up breakfast."

Grabbing the black briefcase that contained the satellite phone, Kyla retreated to the sleeping bag. She extended the aerial and waited for it to warm up. Thank God she always kept the battery charged. It wouldn't do to be without communication out here in the outback.

Within a very short space of time, she was able to put a call through to the homestead. Lisa answered immediately as if she'd been waiting for Kyla to contact her.



"Hey, Lisa, how's it going?"

"Thank God you called, Kyla. Is Logan there? I need to talk to him."

She frowned. "What's wrong?"

"Just put Logan on, okay?"

With a shrug, Kyla called Logan back from the edge of the pool where he was washing the plates and cooking utensils used for breakfast. "Logan, I think there might be a problem. Lisa needs to talk to you."

Logan came at a run and squatted down beside Kyla. He took the handset and held it to his ear. "What's up?"

Kyla watched him, watched his face change as he listened to her friend. His eyes narrowed, jaw tightened, lips firmed. The CIA agent persona slid down to cover his features and she knew their idyllic interlude was at an end. She stood and started collecting up their camping equipment, keeping her ear tuned for Logan's side of the conversation.

"Is he okay? Has he been seen by a medic?" He tilted his head to one side and listened. "Lock the place up and you stay inside. The Marines will do patrol outside. Kyla and I will be there as soon as we can. Oh, and tell Albert thanks if he turns up again."

He hung up and snapped the satellite phone case closed. "We need to get back. Someone took another run at the house last night."

"Who got hurt?" Kyla asked as she shoved the cooking paraphernalia inside one of the backpacks.

Logan rolled the sleeping bag up and tied it to the back of the loaded pack. "Marty. He and Don were on duty when a vehicle pulled into the driveway. Marty stood watch near the French doors opening into your bedroom while Don went to investigate. Seems Albert is a man of his word. He arrived with half a dozen aboriginal men."

"But how did Marty get hurt?" Kyla frowned, trying to put it all together as she cleared the remains of the campfire, rolling the rocks back to the cliff side and throwing sand over the embers.

"He heard a noise on the other side of the house and when he rounded the edge of the verandah, he took a nasty smack over the head with something pretty heavy. When he yelled out, Don and the aboriginal guys came running, but whoever it was had taken off by then."

Kyla shook her head. "This is my fault. If I hadn't started this stupid cologne project, it would never have happened. Marty wouldn't have been attacked." *And I would never have met Logan.*

Logan shrugged into the heaviest of the backpacks and handed the other one to Kyla. "It's no one's fault. And the Marines knew the risk. It's part of their job."

He grimaced. "Just the same, I should have been there. Not out here cavorting around like a teenager. This is a job and I should have remembered that. So let's get out of here."

She dipped her head and turned toward the gap in the cliff they'd climbed down, the plastic bag of Glory flowers clutched in her hand. She didn't want Logan to see her face because she knew darn well the devastation she felt would show on her features.

This *was* her fault. Her fault she'd fallen for someone who only wanted her because of a stupid smell. Her fault that she would miss him when this was over. *God, you are such an idiot, girl.*

"Hey, Kyla!"

She stopped so abruptly Logan almost ran into her. When she turned to face him, he slid one finger under her chin and raised her face to his. She tried to keep her feelings shuttered, but wasn't certain she'd achieved it.

"I didn't mean that the way it sounded, okay?" He lowered his head and gave her a hard kiss. "I guess I'm just feeling a little guilty that I shirked my duty, but you know

something? I wouldn't have passed up this time with you for anything. And I'm hoping like hell that there's going to be more of the same."

Then he sidestepped her and took the lead. Kyla shook her head and followed him, a cheesy grin on her face.

## **Chapter Seven**

Kyla leaned against the French door and stared out into the night, the drape bunched in one hand to pull it back from the glass. The glow from the single lamp burning on her desk cut a swath through the darkness, illuminating a strip of the verandah. A shadow fell into the light and signaled one of the Marines doing his duty trek around the house.

She felt a little shell-shocked, as if her whole world had tipped upside down. By the time they'd hit the homestead this morning, Logan had switched into full military mode. From that point on he'd taken control, issuing orders like a general. In fact, he'd turned back into the same darn arrogant bozo he'd been when he first arrived.

"Damn it, I feel like I've been subjected to a Jekyll and Hyde switcheroo."

"Talking to yourself, girlfriend? You want to be careful or they'll be sending the men with white coats out to collect you." Lisa slipped into the converted lab, closing the door behind her. "So who's switching what on you?"

"Hey, a girl could be forgiven for thinking she's going a little bit crazy with all this going on." Ignoring Lisa's last question, Kyla waved a hand at the French doors before allowing the drape to drop. She took the only chair in the room while Lisa perched on the end of the desk.

"That doesn't answer my question, kiddo." Lisa grinned and pointed a finger at Kyla. "Now give! Tell ol' Lisa what's worrying you. I'm here to help you solve your problems."

Kyla snorted. "You are so full of shit. You just want to know what went on out at the gorge."

"Yes, I do, so dish with the details, friend."

"It was..." Her words trailed off as she focused on what had happened out at the gorge. The memory of Logan making her come in the water filled her mind, quickly followed by raunchy pictures of the numerous times during the night when they'd brought each other satisfaction. A shivery feeling immediately invaded her stomach and spread throughout her body. Her heart started to speed up and heat rolled over her.

"Hey, Earth to Kyla!" Lisa bent close and rapped her knuckles on Kyla's forehead. "You still in there?"

"Oh yeah, just reminiscing." She grinned, but said nothing else. Lisa growled, reaching for Kyla's head again. Kyla held up a hand to ward her off. "Okay, okay, it was...bloody fantastic if you really want to know."

"I knew it," Lisa crowed. "You've had a glow about you since you got back. I take it you followed my advice and decided to indulge in a bit of horizontal wrestling. So what's he like in the sack?"

"None of your business, girl. I don't kiss and tell. All I'll say is, I wish this were founded on something other than this bloody cologne. I don't know how I'll handle it when it's all over."

Lisa frowned. "You've just met the guy. This sounds like you're getting serious. I told you to fuck him, have a little fun to build your ego back up again, not give your heart away. Was it that good?"

Avoiding Lisa's gaze, Kyla started pulling the petals off the Glory flowers spread out on her desk. When she'd denuded them all, she placed some of the petals in a mortar bowl and started to grind them into paste with the accompanying pestle.

"Kyla?"

"It *was* that good! Not just the sex, although I have to say that was—" She broke off, not about to go into details. "It was so much more than great sex. Logan was a different person altogether. Funny as all get out, sweet, caring. And definitely sexy as hell. I

haven't enjoyed myself so much with a man for a long time. He even laughed at my jokes."

"So what's the problem?"

"We get back here and he's suddenly in full military mode. The same arrogant, ordering prick he was when he first arrived. Hence my Jeckle and Hyde crack. Two different men."

Lisa opened her mouth to say something, but Kyla got in before her. "Don't tell me. I know I'm being selfish. I'm not so stupid I can't see that all the precautions Logan put into place today are necessary. I can fully understand why all the French doors were screwed shut. I can understand why we were restricted to staying inside. And I certainly don't want anyone else hurt. I know that Logan has a job to do."

Lisa was still frowning at her. "I think you might have lost me somewhere in there."

Kyla transferred the flower paste into an empty beaker before dumping the mortar and pestle back on the desktop. Then she dropped her head into her hands. "Don't mind me, I'm being an idiot. It's just... One kind word today from Logan instead of ignoring me would have gone a long way to making everything okay. I guess what I'm trying to say is—"

"You want to be more than just a job," Lisa finished for her, leaning over and giving her a hug.

She swallowed the big lump that seemed to have lodged in her throat and jumped to her feet, almost dislodging Lisa from her perch on the edge of the desk. "Enough of feeling sorry for myself." She flicked a glance at her watch. "Hell, it's nearly one in the morning. It's time we were in bed. That's probably where everyone else is right now."

Lisa slung an arm about Kyla's shoulders as they walked out of the lab. "Don and Leon are outside with Logan. And I suspect Albert is also hiding in the darkness with some of his mates. He's very protective of you. The other two guys are asleep on the floor in my room."

“Well, I don’t know about you, but I’ve had enough for today. I’ll see you in the morning.”

She slipped through the living room, stopping to pat the dogs on the way. Suddenly she felt bone-weary, the events of the last couple of days catching up with her. Stripping off her clothes, she had a quick shower and donned a fresh pair of panties and an old t-shirt. Not much point wearing a sexy nightie. Logan didn’t appear to be interested in coming to bed tonight, with *or* without her.

“Oh, for crying out loud, woman, stop with the self-pity. Logan has a job to do. That’s what he’s here for.” *Yeah, right!* Didn’t stop her wishing things were different.

After thumping the pillows into a more accommodating shape, Kyla climbed into bed and pulled the sheet over her. Then she kicked it to the bottom of the bed. With the French doors nailed shut, the room was stifling. All the overhead fan did was stir up the hot air. Lord, at this rate she’d be lucky if she got any sleep at all.

Making a determined effort to put thoughts of Logan out of her mind, she rolled onto her side and scrunched her eyes closed, praying for sleep to come. An hour later she was in the same position, her mind buzzing and her body aching for some rest.

Damn, this wasn’t working. Maybe she should get up and go work on the formula. The sooner it was finished, the sooner Logan would leave. Then she could set about putting her life back in order. She did it after her divorce. She could do it again. Right?

Not about to answer the silent question right now, she jumped from the bed and headed back toward her makeshift lab. She was halfway across the living room when the sound of a vehicle entering the property and heading up to the homestead filtered through. Now who the hell could that be at this time of night?

As Kyla made it to the back door, she heard a male voice from the verandah outside. She cautiously opened the door and peered out. Logan stood at the bottom of the steps and trained a flashlight on the face of the man alighting from the black SUV standing in the driveway. Two of the Marines hovered at the corner of the house and a slight movement off to one side gave away Albert’s position.

Kyla couldn't help herself, she gasped when she saw who got out of the vehicle. Bald head. Squat, rotund body. Pinched mouth. The only new thing was the deer-in-the-headlights look in his eyes as Logan kept the beam of light on his face. Christ, she'd have recognized that pompous bastard even in the dark.

"What are you doing out here, Grace?" Logan bit out.

"I've been in contact with your boss Agent Purdy. He told me about the attempted break-in last night and the attack on the Marine. I wanted to know your security was in place."

"At two thirty in the morning? Are you crazy?"

"What's going on out there?" Lisa crept up behind Kyla and whispered in her ear. "Is that who I think it is?"

Kyla just nodded and turned her attention back to Logan and Mr. Grace. Marty and Leon, the two Marines not on duty, appeared behind Lisa and pushed through, out onto the verandah.

"I'll remind you that the DSTO has a vested interest in this formula." Grace shoved past Logan and stomped up the stairs, hand reaching out for the back door. "Now let me see this lab. I want to personally check out your security."

Logan followed him, flanked by the Marines. "You hold it right there, Grace. You don't have any right to come barging in here in the middle of the night. You could have called tomorrow to check on security if you were that worried."

Grace scowled at Logan. "How else can I catch you out except to arrive when you least expect me? This job should have been given to the Australian guys, not a bunch of whack Americans."

*I can't believe this guy!* She'd had enough. Kyla flicked on the verandah light and stepped outside, forgetting for the moment that she was dressed in nothing but a pair of bright red panties and ragged t-shirt that came to the top of her thighs.



"You're a class act, aren't you, Mr. Grace? You'd better watch out, your prejudices are showing."

Grace got right in her face, almost making Kyla gag on stale cigarette smoke.

"Enough of your insubordination. You just remember who you're talking to," he blustered.

She chuckled. "A pompous little twit who doesn't know when to keep his mouth shut. And here's something else you've forgotten. I quit. When this project is handed over to the Americans, I don't have to deal with you again."

Grace's mouth dropped open and Kyla felt a surge of satisfaction. She'd wanted to do that for ages. She flicked a glance at Logan and saw the amused smirk on his face before he stepped closer to Grace and laid a securing hand on the man's shoulder.

"Think it's time you went home. And I do mean home. If I find you still in Alice Springs tomorrow, I'll have you detained."

"You don't have any authority over me." Grace shrugged out of Logan's hold.

Before Logan could retaliate, Kyla heard a shout from the front of the house.

"Hold him!" Logan shoved Grace at Marty before taking off around the house, the other men following him.

Kyla wanted to trail after them to find out what was happening when Marty lifted his hand, the other clamped around Grace's upper arm.

"Best to wait here, miss."

She grimaced but knew he was right. Whatever was going on, she didn't want to get in the way.

Within minutes, she heard the men returning. Her mouth dropped open when they rounded the corner of the verandah. Albert and one of the other aboriginal men held a scruffy individual between them, dragging him toward the back door. She stepped aside as they flowed on into the house, Marty pulling Grace inside as well.

Kyla was the last to join them and when she did, she stomped up to the captive and snatched off the black beanie covering his brown hair. "I knew it! I knew it was you." She elbowed Lisa in the ribs. "Didn't I tell you it was Brian?"

Hands fisted on her hips, she confronted him. "Just what the bloody hell are you doing here, Brian?"

Logan interrupted. "Ah, who is *Brian*?"

"My ex." She poked a finger in his chest. "Ex-lover. Ex-husband. Ex-work associate. I thought I'd gotten rid of you when our divorce went through. What the freakin' heck are you doing here now?"

"Damn guy's a thief," Albert chimed in. "Caught him trying to break into your lab. You want the boys and me to thrash him for you?"

She shook her head, her gaze fixed on her ex-husband. "No, I believe Logan can do what's necessary. Just tell me why you did it, Brian. Jesus, you took enough from me last time."

Brian struggled to get free of the men holding him and then gave it up to stare at Kyla. "Money. I needed the bonus to cover my..."

His voice trailed off, but Kyla didn't need to hear the rest of the sentence. "You stupid ass, you've been gambling again, haven't you? And what the hell is this about a bonus? Don't tell me you think you can sell the formula to the highest bidder. Jesus, are you mad? You'll be had up for treason for selling government secrets."

"I'm not going down on my own," Brian whined. "He put me up to it. You have to help me, Kyla."

She cast a glance around the room, stopping to frown at Logan before turning back to Brian. "He who?"

"Grace. Grace told me to do. Said he'd have me fired because of my gambling problem if I didn't. It was his idea to turn up here and create a diversion while I broke

in. And he's the one who belted that Marine over the head." Brian sagged as if all the stuffing had gone out of him, allowing the aboriginal men to hold his weight.

Shock held Kyla immobile for the moment. Grace? Pompous, pain-in-the-butt Grace? She turned to face her old boss, her mouth still hanging open in disbelief. Logan motioned to Don as Grace tried to break Marty's hold and escape.

"Why?" It was the only think Kyla could think of to say.

"We haven't had any new inventions since the last one Brian brought me."

"You mean the one he stole from me," she retorted.

Grace continued as if he hadn't even heard Kyla. "The powers that be are talking of cutting my department. I couldn't let that happen. We needed a startling new discovery."

"So you sent Brian here to steal my formula? A formula we're not even certain is going to work? God, you're both crazy. You didn't give a damn about me. You knew Brian had stolen my work, but as long as it benefited you, you were happy. And you sent him after me again?" She threw her hands up and turned toward her lab. "Get them out of here. I hope to hell I never see either of them again."

She slipped into the room and slammed the door shut behind her. Then she kicked the chair away from the desk. It rolled across the floor and slammed into the bookcase on the other side of the room.

Anger rode her, swelling in her gut and making her feel nauseous. What the hell was she so angry about? She wasn't the least bit hurt about Brian being part of all this. Angry as hell, yes, but she'd learned her lesson while they were still married and expected nothing from him. Mr. Grace was a surprise, but that simply pissed her off. No, the anger was deeper than that and she belatedly realized what was behind it. She'd finally found a man she could laugh with, could love and respect, and it was all about to fall apart.

*Life sucks, Kyla, get over it.*

With a deep sigh, she grabbed the screwdriver off the desk and started to remove the screws Logan had used to secure the French doors. They were in tight and by the time she tossed the last one onto the desk, sweat beaded her face and trickled down under her t-shirt. She opened the doors wide and lowered herself to sit on the floor at the entrance.

A soft breeze blew in, drying the sweat on her body and cooling her down. The house had fallen silent, the sound of vehicles fading into the distance. No doubt Logan and the Marines leaving with their prisoners. A shaft of pain surfaced in her heart but she ignored it. It was time to put her life back on track. Make plans and look for ways to carry them out. She needed to work out just where she was going and what she wanted to do with herself once she finished the formula. Mentally pulling on her big girl panties, she thrust away the image of Logan and the last few days, and tried to concentrate on what she most desired out of life.

A slight shuffle alerted her that she wasn't alone. She quickly turned her head to find Albert standing beside her, his white smile flashing.

"It's all over now, Miss Kyla," he whispered.

She smiled. "Thanks for your help, Albert. And make certain you thank the guys too, okay?"

Albert slunk away into the darkness and Kyla was on her own, staring out into the night. He was right. It was over and that's what made this all so hard. Because now Logan would leave, go back to the base, and she'd probably never see him again.

A good thing too. *After all, who wants a guy who's only attracted to you because of some stupid cologne?*

She winced.

*I do!*

\* \* \* \* \*

"Why aren't you in bed?"

Kyla yelped and spun the office chair about to face the door. "Freakin' hell, Logan, you scared the crap out of me."

She stood and leaned her butt against the edge of the desk. For some reason, she felt at a disadvantage with Logan towering over her. He'd obviously showered while he was out at the base. A pair of black jeans hugged his hips and skimmed the muscled thighs. He'd replaced the t-shirt of earlier for a cotton shirt. His chin was smooth, no hint of any dark stubble, so he'd shaved before returning to the homestead.

Sexy as hell. Enough that her hormones ignored the broken state of her heart and decided to go on a little trek from one end of her body to the other. Kyla blew out a shaky breath and clenched her hands against the need to rip the clothes off him and run her tongue down the length of that honed body.

"What are you doing here? I thought you'd — Oh, of course, you came back to get your gear." She made a move to leave the lab to retrieve his bag from the bedroom, but he backed her up until she leaned against the desk again.

"I came back for you," he said, and bent down to run the tip of his tongue along the edge of her upper lip.

"Huh?" She pulled her head back, trying to establish some distance between them. "You mean you came back to make certain the formula was safe?" She reached around behind her and grabbed the loose-leaf folder she'd set there earlier. "Here you go. I couldn't sleep so I spent the time recreating the cologne. All the details are in here. Now you can get your bag and head back to the base."

She'd known it would come to this, but damn, she hadn't realized how hard it would be.

"No."

"I'm sorry?" Okay, confusion was setting in now.

"No, I'm not leaving." Logan took the folder and dropped it on the floor. Then he narrowed the distance between them so he could lick at her lips again. When the licking didn't seem to satisfy him, he started nibbling.

Kyla felt her knees weaken. Her legs trembled and she had to perch on the edge of the desk again so she wouldn't fall down into a melted heap at his feet. Her heart pounded out a staccato beat in her chest. Her palms grew sweaty and she had to wipe them on the back of her t-shirt.

"Y-you're not?" she stuttered. Lord, she sounded like an idiot, but her brain refused to function with any degree of normality.

"Nope, I'm staying right here until you accept the fact we just might have a good thing going and I for one would like to explore it."

"You would?"

He frowned at her. "Kyla, you answering me with a question is not working." He cupped her cheeks in his hands. "Hell, maybe actions will speak louder than words, to coin a quaint phrase."

He sealed her lips with a demanding kiss, so hot Kyla felt the heat right to her toes. She gave up trying to make sense of it all and snaked her arms around his neck. His tongue teased, lapping first and then thrusting in a parody of the ultimate surrender. She pulled him closer until their bodies aligned and Logan had made himself comfortable between her legs.

As she felt the ridge of a rock-hard cock at the apex of her thighs, fireworks exploded inside her. She tilted her hips, rubbing herself against him, moaning as sensation swept through her and lodged deep inside.

"I want you," he whispered as he slid his mouth down to nibble at her neck.

"What's stopping you?" She grabbed his shirt and yanked. Buttons flew across the room, making Kyla giggle. "I can't believe I did that."

He grinned as he shed the shirt and started on his jeans. "Lady, you can strip me naked any time you want."

Kyla felt as if she'd been apart from Logan for months, not just a few hours. Her body trembled with the need to feel him deep inside. Her movements were clumsy as she stripped off the t-shirt and tossed it on the floor. Her panties followed soon after.

Logan stood in front of her, stark naked, his fully engorged erection rising from the dark pubic hair. Kyla reached out and trailed the tip of one finger along his length, gratified when Logan let loose with a husky growl.

"Shit, woman, keep doing that and I'm not going to last."

"Bedroom?" she asked, her voice as husky as his.

"To hell with that. I can't wait." He lifted her up and placed her on the edge of the desk. Then his face dropped and he stared at her in consternation. "Shit, condoms! Where did we leave the leftovers from last night?"

With a grimace, Kyla pointed over her shoulder at the corner of the lab.

He stared and then chuckled. "You blew them up like balloons? I take it you didn't figure I was coming back?"

She shrugged. "I thought once the case was over, you'd be gone."

He wrapped his arms around her shoulders and lowered his head to rest his forehead on hers. "So what are we going to do now?"

She pulled out of his hold and reached for the desk organizer. "I didn't get finished before you returned." She grinned and snagged a silver foil packet between two fingers.

Logan immediately grabbed it and ripped the packet open. Before Kyla could draw breath, he'd rolled it down over his cock.

"Hey, I wanted to do that."

"Next time," he promised.

Her heart swelled at his words. The sexual hunger inside her suddenly rose to unbearable proportions. She felt she'd shatter if she didn't have him inside her soon. Hell, she'd shatter anyway, but what a way to go. "No waiting. Now! I need you hard and fast."

"Baby, you got me, any way you want." He slanted his mouth over hers, his tongue tasting her while his hands roamed her body. Then he pulled her closer to the edge of the desk, and with one hard thrust, seated himself to the hilt inside her.

Logan groaned, pausing for a moment to ride the intense feeling that surged through him at their union. God, he couldn't get enough of this woman. If someone had told him he'd fall this hard and this fast for a woman, in particular for an Aussie female, he would have told them to fuck off. He hadn't been looking for a relationship. He'd been too intent on focusing on his career. Yet here he was, unable to stay away, incapable of functioning properly because all he could think of was Kyla.

He slowly drew out until the head of his cock hovered at the entrance to her pussy. Her hips tilted in preparation for taking him deep again, but he held on. He needed an answer to his question. "So are you?"

She slid her hands around his hips and clutched at his ass, trying to pull him in again. "Am I what?"

"Are you going to give us a go?" He eased back in a fraction, grinning at her muffled growl. He started speaking again before she could raise any obstacles. "I know we're from different countries, but I'm stationed here for five years."

He dragged in a deep breath, his control starting to unravel. "And if this goes where I think it will, either I can move over here permanently or maybe you could think about coming to America. The government would snap you up in a heartbeat with your scientific skills. Or maybe you could come and work at the base with me. Then we'll get to see more of each other. Oh, and I don't have to live on base, I can stay here with you. And—"

"Yes! Yes, yes, yes. I want you, I need you, I can't live without you." She nipped at his neck then ran the tip of her tongue over it to soothe the love bite. "Logan, you talk too much. Now shut up and fuck me already!"

He grinned, totally turned-on by her use of the crude terminology. His cock twitched and she whimpered at the movement. His butt muscles quivered and his



control started to break up. He drove into her, bending her backward over the desk so he could take one nipple into his mouth and suckle hard.

She arched her back, hooked her legs around his hips and ground against him. A litany of breathy mewls slid from her throat and buried deep inside him, pushing his libido higher. The slap of sweaty bodies filled the silence of the room. The smell of musk rose, fueling his senses, tightening the tension inside him. He pounded into her, his body shuddering at the influx of emotions for this woman. The sight of his cock sliding inside Kyla made his mouth dry and his heart miss a beat.

She met his every movement and urged him higher still. When he thought his heart could no longer stand the pace, she squeezed her internal muscles and he yelled out. His balls pulled up tight against his body and he knew he was about to come. Fingers trembling, he slid one hand between them and rolled her clit between thumb and forefinger. She tightened around him again and then broke apart, her body convulsing. That was all it took. He thrust one last time, hard and fast, and emptied himself inside her.

As he tried to regain some semblance of control, he rested his head against her breasts. When his heart stopped thundering and he felt he could stand without falling down on the floor in a satiated heap, he wrapped his arms around her and pulled her into a sitting position. "And if that doesn't convince you we have something going here, nothing will."

"Baby, we're smokin'." She started to chuckle, but within seconds the laughter disappeared and a worried frown took over.

"What's the matter?"

"What happens when the effects of the Glory flower oil wears off? You know that's probably the only reason you're attracted to me, don't you? Once that dissipates, you won't want anything to do with me."

Logan stared at her for a moment before dissolving into laughter.

She smacked him on the shoulder. "It's not funny!"

"It is from my side of the fence. This has nothing to do with the cologne. I wanted you from the first moment I saw you. And there's one thing I forgot to mention. I have no sense of smell, or at least very little. I suffered head trauma the first year I was in the Marines and haven't had much sense of smell since then."

A smile broke out over her face. "You mean, all this time —"

"It's all you, Kyla. Nothing to do with the cologne." He sketched her a snappy salute. "Would I lie to you, ma'am? I'm a Marine."

Kyla hugged him to her. "That's the best news I've heard in a long time. I wanted you to like me for myself, not because I was some honey trap. There is one thing though."

He dropped a kiss on her smiling mouth. "What's that?"

"We'd better get me into a shower before anyone comes to visit. I'm sitting in Glory of the Center flower petals. I'm definitely going to be a man magnet if anyone smells it on me."

He leaned over and sniffed her butt. "Can't smell a thing."

She laughed and slapped him on the shoulder. "Eww, that's just plain bad."

With a quick twist, he rolled her over onto her stomach and proceeded to lick away the residue of the crushed petals. "I may not be able to smell, but I sure can taste. And, baby, I'm a sucker for honey."

*Ooh-rah!*

## About the Author

Multi-published author Alexis Fleming's first book was a bedtime story for her children, written and illustrated totally in crayon. She hooked her children in and created a new career for herself, a career that gives her immense satisfaction and a lot of fun. She now writes her own bedtime stories, but be warned – these are strictly adults only!

Alexis' first love has always been romance, whether on this world or the next. Hot, sizzling relationships with a dash of comedy and a few trials and tribulations thrown in to test her characters. Alexis writes sassy, fun, erotic contemporaries, as well as paranormals and fantasies where you'll find yourself coming face to face with anything from sexy shifters to beings from other planets.

When she isn't tied to her computer creating sizzling stories to tempt her readers, she helps run a busy motel set on the edge of a national marine park in Australia.

The author welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

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