

ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



CHASING  
HER *Tail*  
KATIE ALLEN

## Chasing Her Tail

Katie Allen

As a first-grade teacher, Bridget thinks she's prepared for anything a classroom of six-year-olds can throw at her. So it's a bit of a shock when she's bitten by a were-puppy and transformed into a dog.

As if peeing outside, excessive furriness and squirrel-chasing urges aren't enough, it seems as if everyone is after Bridget—including a billionaire with an unhealthy interest in the paranormal, and Micah, the smoking-hot uncle of her were-puppy student.

When she takes refuge with Hammer, a kind stranger who has the body of a god and feeds her hamburgers, Bridget thinks she's safe. Micah's hot on her trail, however, and the crazy billionaire isn't about to let a were-dog slip through his fingers. Meanwhile, Hammer is determined to discover the truth about the mysterious woman who visits his bedroom at night—wearing nothing but a black leather collar.

*Chasing Her Tail features a cameo by Hammer's friends Harry, Beth and Ky. Get to know the trio more...intimately...in Katie Allen's One-Two Punch.*

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Chasing Her Tail

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# *CHASING HER TAIL*

**Katie Allen**

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## Chapter One

Jodi popped her head into Bridget's classroom. "What are you still doing here?" she asked.

Bridget glanced up, startled, and then smiled at the sight of Jodi's freckled face. "Parent conference," she explained.

"Let me guess—Sam Foster?" When Bridget nodded, Jodi rolled her eyes. "What a wild child. Nadine was so happy when the school year was up last spring so she could pass the hellion on to you...and she only had him half-days."

"He's not so bad," Bridget protested.

Jodi snorted. "Sure, he's an angel. That's why you're having his parents come in for a conference two weeks into the new school year."

Bridget just shrugged and smiled.

"Well, come join us over at the Blue Donkey for a drink when you're done," Jodi told her.

"I'll try," Bridget said but Jodi shook her head sternly.

"Don't just try—come. You need to get out more, have some wild nights before you're old like me."

"Please," Bridget scoffed. "You're not old. You have another good ten, twelve years ahead of you." Laughing, she ducked when Jodi lifted her bag as if she were going to chuck it at Bridget's head.

"You'd better show up," Jodi threatened one last time before disappearing from the doorway with a final wave.

Bridget gave an answering wave before dropping her eyes back to the papers on her desk and picking up her pen. Jodi's visit had distracted her, however, and the pen sat idle in her fingers. Bridget doubted she would go to the bar—she very rarely did. Her looks were fine, she supposed, although nothing flashy—just brown hair and brown eyes and a mildly pretty face. Her plain-Jane exterior, combined with her tendency to say idiotic things when she was nervous, made going to bars uneventful at best and downright embarrassing at worst. It was so much more pleasant to curl up at home in her pajamas with a hot cup of tea and a book.

"Ms. Grace?"

Bridget jumped and dropped her pen, her startled gaze flying to the doorway. When she saw the owner of the gravelly voice, she swallowed. This man had to be Sam's dad—the two were an exact match, from the tousled, dirty blond hair to the full, sulky bottom lip. Well, an exact match except that Sam's dad was huge and quite definitely grown up.

"Mr...ah, Foster?" She flinched inwardly at the hesitation in her voice. Bridget was small enough and young enough to give parents doubts about her ability to control twenty-five rowdy first-graders. She tried to project confidence during parent conferences, to speak clearly, shake hands firmly and offer plenty of eye contact. Sam's father, though—he threw her off her game.

When he nodded, she gestured to a chair next to her desk. For conferences, she always borrowed an adult-sized seat from the teachers' lounge. There was nothing more uncomfortable than spending an hour crouched on a chair meant for a six-year-old.

Mr. Foster crossed the room and Bridget swallowed again at his approach. As he lowered himself onto the chair, she had to keep herself from pushing back from her desk. For some reason, this man made her feel as if she were being stalked.

Shaking her head to clear it, she forced a polite smile and opened her mouth to speak but Mr. Foster beat her to it.

"What did Sam do this time?"

Bridget blinked at him. "What?"

"Was it the hedgehog thing again?"

"Hedgehog thing?" she repeated faintly.

"Is he messing around with that Jack kid? In Sam's defense, that Jack's a little shit."

Bridget covered her snort of laughter with a cough. She had to agree with him on that one. "Mr. Foster—"

"Whatever Mrs. Schiller's told you, Sam's really a good kid," Mr. Foster interrupted again. "Just...sensitive."

"I know. I—"

"I don't want him to be blacklisted in every class just because he had a few problems adjusting in kindergarten."

"Mr. Foster." Bridget used her biggest voice, the one she used to cut through the babble of a classroom full of kids hopped up on Valentine's Day candy. It was his turn to blink at her.

"Mr. Foster," she started again more quietly. "Sam did nothing wrong. He's a nice little boy. I *like* him."

"Oh." He chewed on that for a few seconds. "So why am I here?"

"Your son—"

"Nephew," he corrected.

"You're not his father?" she asked in surprise. He was truly a grown-up version of Sam, down to the same blue-green eyes. Sam's changed color with his mood—intense, vivid green when he was excited or happy and moody blue when he was upset. Bridget found herself wondering whether his uncle's eyes changed as well and forced herself to concentrate on his answer.

"No. My brother—his father—is on tour. He's in a band," he explained. "Sam stays with me when he's on the road."

"His mother?" she asked.

"Gone." His tone was clipped and his eyes did go stormy blue, to Bridget's reluctant fascination.

*Focus*, she ordered her brain. "The reason I asked you to come in is because Sam has drawn a...disturbing image." She pulled the marker drawing out of a manila file and offered it to Mr. Foster. "It's unusually violent for a six-year-old."

He looked at the picture, his face expressionless.

"Did you have a small pet die recently?" she probed when he didn't say anything. "A rabbit, perhaps?"

"No," Sam's uncle said slowly, his eyes still on the paper. "He saw a dead rabbit the other day, though. The neighbor's dog had killed it."

Relief washed through Bridget. The day before, when Sam had drawn the picture, she had been walking up and down the aisles during the students' art time, admiring the pictures of rainbows and cars, houses and stick people, when she had first glimpsed the drawing that Sam was bent over, coloring with fierce concentration.

The picture showed a large, hairy creature, fangs bared, standing over the blobby brown shape of a small animal with bright red marker blood pooling around it. Sam had watched her hopefully, waiting for praise, and Bridget had tried to keep her expression impassive. She had finally murmured something about the picture being "very colorful" but she knew he could tell something was wrong. His eyes had darkened and dropped to his marker-flecked hands.

"Is this from a movie?" Bridget had asked gently. After a quick, guarded glance, Sam had returned his gaze to his hands and shook his head. Bridget had asked if she could have the drawing and Sam had nodded without looking up. She had brought the picture back to her desk, her stomach clenched in dread, terrified that something was very wrong with sweet little Sam.

*Not Sam*, she had wailed silently, glancing at the top of his bent, dark blond head. Although she tried to be fair, Bridget had to admit to herself that, just two weeks into the new school year, Sam was already her favorite.

"Good," she sighed and then shook her head at Mr. Foster's bemused expression. "Not good about the dead rabbit. I mean...it just...I was afraid that it indicated something much worse."

Sam's uncle nodded. "I'll bring him to his doctor; see what he recommends, just in case."

"That's a good idea," Bridget said. "I'm sure the drawing was just a reaction to seeing the rabbit, but it wouldn't hurt for him to talk to someone—especially with his father's absences."



"Sure," he agreed, his eyes lightened to green now. "So everything else is good? No hedgehog issues? No problems with the little sh— I mean, Jack?"

"None." Bridget beamed. "Sam's an absolute joy to have in class."

Mr. Foster raised an eyebrow. "Really. Well, good. He's crazy about you, by the way. Everything is Ms. Grace this and Ms. Grace that."

"I'm glad." She tucked the picture back into the folder, feeling as if fifty pounds had been lifted off her back. "He's lucky to have you. With his dad's travels, I'm sure you're his rock."

He shrugged as if embarrassed by the compliment. "Could I have that picture?" he asked. "To show to the doctor."

Bridget hesitated for a moment and then handed it back. "Sure. All his artwork will come home with him by the end of the year anyway. This will be one less thing to cram into his backpack." She smiled at him and one side of his mouth curled up in response.

Bridget's stomach squeezed again but, this time, it wasn't from worry.

What the holy howling *fuck* was he doing?

Micah Foster shifted in the driver's seat of his car, wondering for the five thousandth time that hour why he didn't just drive away. The light was fading and his friend Laz was probably wondering where Micah was. He pulled his cell phone from the holder on his belt and hit a button.

"Yeah?" Laz answered after a few rings.

"Everything okay?" Micah asked.

"Fine and dandy," Laz told him cheerfully. "The kid helped me work on the truck 'til we lost our light. We're just making a manly supper now."

"Manly?"

"Hot dogs in the microwave with some processed cheese on top."

Micah winced. "Could you at least give him some kind of vegetable?"

"Vegetable?" Laz repeated doubtfully. "Um, of course I'm giving him a vegetable." After a pause, he asked, "Does root beer count?"

"No. What the hell kind of vegetable would be in root beer?"

"I don't know. Aren't roots vegetables? Like a carrot or something?"

Micah groaned. "Never mind. I'll just double up the healthy stuff tomorrow."

"Ketchup!" Laz said triumphantly. "Ketchup is a vegetable! We're definitely having ketchup."

Micah heard Sam faintly in the background, announcing that he *loved* ketchup.

"Hey, Laz..." Micah trailed off, knowing that he shouldn't even ask. He should just go to Laz's house, pick up Sam and avoid a whole shitload of trouble.

"Yeah?"

"Forget it. I'm leaving the school now. Should be there in twenty minutes."

"Don't hurry home on our account," Laz told him. "We were going to watch a movie with cartoon bears or dogs or some shit in it—"

"Laz!"

"Oops, sorry." Laz didn't sound too contrite. "We're going to watch a lovely film filled with upstanding moral values then. Why don't you take the next couple hours and try to have a life? Go have a drink, find a hot babe and have some fun for once."

"You're expecting a lot out of two hours," Micah told him dryly, although his heart accelerated at the thought of going out. What would it hurt?

"Whatever. Just so you know that I'm fine, the kid's fine and we're not even letting you in the front door until the last beaver or penguin or whatever has danced across my TV screen. Got it?"

"Got it."

"Good, 'cause my hot dog's getting cold and that makes the cheese rubbery. Later."

"Thanks, Laz."

Micah hung up the phone and saw Bridget Grace hurrying through the parking lot, her slight figure lit by the halogen lights that had just flickered to life a few moments ago. Micah's entire body tightened at the sight of her.

His fascination baffled him—she wasn't his usual type. He liked his dates taller, more muscular and...well, more male. He'd slept with plenty of women but he normally preferred men. There was a rough edge to the sex that drove him wild.

There was something about this teacher though, something that made him pay attention to things he never noticed—the way the classroom lights caught the highlights in the chestnut fall of her hair, or how she looked at him, her dark brown eyes intrigued and wary at the same time.

She made him hungry and eager to hunt.

She tossed her bag into the passenger seat of her car and climbed in. After she drove off, Micah counted to five and then started his own engine, pulling out of the dark corner space and following her taillights down the street, cursing himself the entire way.

"Happy now?" Bridget grumbled, thumping the empty shot glass onto the bar.

"Ecstatic!" Jodi laughed as she dragged Bridget toward the small square of a dance floor. "I can't believe you actually came, much less had two drinks *and* a shot."

Bridget's swirling head was reminding her how unused to drinking she was. The dance floor tilted a bit and she closed her fingers around Jodi's arm. Why had she decided to go to the Blue Donkey? She fuzzily thought it had something to do with Sam's pretty, pretty uncle and the tingling heat his half-smile had inspired. After the conference, her stomach had been fizzy and her thoughts wouldn't slow down. Since

Bridget had known she would never relax if she went home, she'd figured she might as well head to the bar.

Now, however, with three drinks blurring her thoughts and the threat of having to dance looming in front of her, she reconsidered the wisdom of the idea.

"Come on," Jodi urged, laughing as she started to dance. "Don't freeze up on me now!"

*Oh what the hell?* Bridget shrugged and joined in, amazed at how much better her dancing was after a few drinks.

*Or maybe, she thought in a panic, I just think I can dance and there's someone from Girls Gone Wild here with a video camera and I'll be on YouTube and forever known as "that girl who can't dance" and –*

"Hey, Bridget," Jodi hissed, interrupting Bridget's terrified train of thought. "There's a guy over there checking you out. A *hot* guy."

"Does he have a camera?" Bridget blurted, spinning around as her eyes searched the crowd.

"What?" Jodi asked before shaking her head. "And real smooth there. You're supposed to be stealthy and sneak glances over your shoulder. Haven't you had a guy check you out before?"

"Um..." Bridget cocked her head and tried to think back, but the alcohol was holding her memory hostage.

Jodi laughed. "Never mind. I'll do my appropriate wing-woman duty. Okay, very casually—and I stress *casually*—look over at the bar." As Bridget's head whipped around, Jodi sighed. "Yeah, you're hopeless. Why don't you just walk over and demand to know why he's staring at you?"

Bridget saw him and blinked, not sure if he was real or just a figment of her alcohol-fuzzed imagination. When he didn't disappear, Bridget concluded that he must be real. As she started toward the bar, Jodi grabbed her arm.

"Kidding!" Jodi told her with a choke of exasperated laughter. "I was kidding!"

"What?" Bridget stared at her for a few seconds until Jodi's previous words clicked in her brain. "No, it's okay. I know this guy."

"Really? You know the hottie already?" Jodi's eyebrows shot up. "Aren't *you* the cagey one."

With a roll of her eyes, Bridget tugged free of her friend's hold. "There's nothing cage-like about it. He's Sam Foster's uncle. I just had a conference with him."

"Oh."

Bridget left a disappointed Jodi behind as she walked toward the bar. Mr. Foster was standing, one elbow propped on the bar in what appeared to be a casual stance. For some reason, Bridget didn't believe he was as relaxed as he tried to appear. She could almost feel the tension drawing his muscles tight and the energy radiating from him. He watched her as she approached, his gaze intent and serious, no friendly smile

softening his expression. Bridget almost faltered, only the liquid courage of her previous drinks keeping her feet moving toward the man, who appeared bigger and bigger as she drew closer.

"Mr. Foster," she greeted, feeling her cheeks flush as his name rose in a squeak. She cleared her throat. "Nice to see you again...um, so soon." Her face grew even hotter. Could she sound like any more of a dork?

"Micah."

"Uh, actually it's Bridget." The second the words were out, Bridget closed her eyes, wanting to disappear on the spot. How dumb could she be? He was going to wonder if she had enough of a brain to actually teach his nephew. Her eyes flew open when Bridget realized she was standing in front of this man with her eyes shut. Now he'd think she was clueless *and* insane.

A half-smile kicked up the corner of his mouth. "My name's Micah."

"Right." The abbreviated curve of his lips made her dizzy. "Micah. Hi."

Then neither of them said anything and Bridget was pretty sure the awkward, wordless pause was worse than any idiotic thing she could say.

"So do you come here a lot?" she blurted and had to force her hand not to smack her head. Maybe the silence hadn't been so bad.

Micah shook his head. Bridget watched, mesmerized. What a beautiful head. Shaking herself out of her hotness-induced stupor, she once again tried to yank a conversation topic out of her muzzy brain.

"Taking advantage of having a babysitter, then?" she asked with the start of a smile, which fell away as a thought occurred to her. Maybe there didn't *need* to be a babysitter. Maybe there was a wife or a girlfriend or a boyfriend or—

"Something like that." He shifted closer, just a tiny movement but enough to make it seem as if he were positively looming over Bridget. Looking up, her gaze was caught by his eyes, so incredibly green even in the dim bar lighting. She swallowed.

"Want to dance?" As soon as the words had fallen off her lips, Bridget wanted them back. Desperately. What was she thinking? With a sigh, she dropped her gaze to his chest and waited for the dismissal, the final blow-off.

*Great*, she thought gloomily. The school year stretched in front of her, almost nine months of school carnivals and holiday concerts and conferences spent dodging the hot Mr. Foster out of sheer embarrassment. Hitting on a student's parent—or guardian—was a really, really bad idea. Why hadn't she realized that five seconds earlier?

"Yes."

Bridget blinked at him, his answer not sinking in for a long moment. When it finally penetrated, panic strangled her, freezing her in place. He moved forward until he was so close she could feel the heat radiating from him, an incredible amount of heat, as if he had a fever. His fingers, hot as a brand, closed around her wrist.

The burn of his hand against the soft skin of her arm dissolved her bones and her will. She was willing to follow him anywhere with a single tug on her wrist.

"Actually," Bridget croaked, panic forcing out the words, "this is probably a bad idea. I should go."

Micah actually laughed at that, a harsh, short bark of sound. "Tell me about it."

"What?" She hadn't thought he could throw her any more off balance but he'd managed.

"I *know* this is a bad idea. One of the shittiest ideas ever, actually."

Some of Bridget's panic was shoved aside by indignation. "Well, it's not *that* bad," she protested.

"Yeah it is," he told her. Bridget realized he'd been nudging her toward the dance floor during their conversation and they were now standing in the dancers' midst, the two of them an island in a churning sea of people.

"Fine," Bridget huffed, stepping back and attempting to yank her arm free of his grasp. "I'll take this half of the bad idea home."

"No." He tugged her wrist, pulling her toward him. Bridget was annoyed with how easily she complied, stumbling a few steps forward until she was pressed against his unyielding bulk. His arm wrapped around her back, pulling her tightly into him. She was so close she could feel his thigh muscles shift as he moved to the music, the rise and fall of his chest as his breathing quickened, the bulge of his growing erection against her stomach...

Bridget's breath caught, threatening to choke her. "I can't..." She trailed off, not even sure what she couldn't do. The panic was back, fighting with the urge to give in and melt against him.

"Just dance with me," Micah growled, his lips so close she could feel his breath against her ear.

"I thought you said," Bridget managed to gasp, despite everything in her body wanting to shut up and obey, "that this is a bad idea?"

He'd grown even harder against her belly. Bridget shivered as her stomach dissolved.

"It is," he murmured, his lips moving against the skin of her neck. Bridget shook with pleasure. Now that just wasn't *fair*! How was she supposed to make rational decisions when he was doing that? "But that doesn't seem to be stopping me."

With that, he tightened his arm and ground his hips against her. Her brain went blank and Bridget gave in, her body, soft and compliant, molding to his. She gripped a fistful of his shirt in each hand, holding herself against him.

Micah smelled wonderful. As she rested her forehead against the unyielding strength of his chest, Bridget breathed in, trying to lodge his smell deep into her brain, lock it in so she'd never forget it. She marveled at the situation—held close to this beautiful man, smelling his beautiful smell, feeling the press of what felt like the most

beautiful cock in the world. The most perfect moment she had ever experienced had snuck up on her, knocked her over the head with a club and dragged her away.

They moved to the music, more of a sway than actual dancing. Micah's hands ran over her back, and the heat of his palms made her moan deep in her throat and tighten her grip on his shirt. He must have heard the low sound because a growl vibrated in his chest.

Bridget tilted her head back to meet his gaze. Desire tightened his jaw muscles and glossed his skin with sweat. His hair was tousled over his forehead and his eyes, so green they appeared to glow, peered through the fringe. He looked almost...wild.

Spooked, Bridget pushed back against his unyielding grip. She didn't know this man. What was she doing, grinding against this almost-stranger in front of everybody?

"Let me go!" Panic edged her voice as he held on to her for an interminable few seconds.

"Bridget." His voice was gritty, a coarse, guttural sound, but the underlying hint of a plea lured her in. She hesitated, meeting those hot and needy eyes, wanting so badly to give in, to be drawn back against his hardness and heat.

"Bridget," he rasped again and she was lost.

He drew her back against him with a rough noise, a sound that could have been relief or triumph or need or a combination of all three. Pressed to his chest, Bridget couldn't remember what had made her hesitate. She felt a mixture of safety and lust, and the odd combination made her laugh.

"Come on," he commanded, pulling her by the hand through the crowd. To her own surprise, Bridget went willingly. A part of her marveled at this; that she, Bridget, rule-following, safety-first, always-looking-before-she-leapt Bridget, was allowing herself to be towed along behind this feral-eyed man. She wanted this though, wanted *him* more than she'd ever wanted anything.

Micah yanked a side door open and tugged her outside. The night was quiet, the air sharp with the coming fall, and it cleared Bridget's desire-fogged brain. She hesitated, her feet slowing as her usual caution returned. Micah turned when he felt her lag behind.

"You okay?" he asked, the gravel in his voice tightening her belly and drawing moisture from her pussy.

"Is this stupid?" she asked, immediately regretting the words. Of *course* this was stupid but she wanted it anyway. Why was she wrecking things?

He smiled; the small, upturned twist of his lips that had started this whole mess. Bridget had to restrain herself from reaching up to touch that full bottom lip.

"Yes," he told her, taking her other wrist and running both of his hands up her arms. Leaning in close, so close she could feel his breath on her face, he asked, "Feel like doing something stupid?"

“God yes,” she gasped—and Micah’s lips were on hers. It was savage and primal and it was wonderful. He licked and bit at her mouth, demanding she let him inside, forcing her to back up until she was pressed against the closed door to the bar. His hands bracketed her face, his fingers buried in her hair.

After the first startled moments when all that existed were his lips on hers, Bridget seized two handfuls of his shirt, yanking him toward her, even though it was a physical impossibility for them to be any closer than they already were. She could feel the racing beat of his heart, his quick breaths that pressed his chest into hers.

It wasn’t enough to hold on to his shirt—Bridget needed more. As he kissed her, she pulled at the fabric, untucking it from his pants, trying to burrow beneath so she could feel his skin. His breathing roughened and he grabbed her ass, hoisting her easily until they were face-to-face.

She gasped and grabbed at his shoulders as he took her mouth again. As soon as his lips found hers, Bridget forgot about being suspended off the ground, only the door behind her and Micah’s hands holding her up. She was drowning in the kiss, in the feel of his hands massaging the cheeks of her ass.

Wrapping her legs around his waist, Bridget tipped her head back, breaking the kiss so she could gasp for breath. Undeterred, Micah nipped and licked his way down her neck. She shuddered and tightened her legs, grinding against his stomach in an attempt to assuage the empty ache of her pussy. It only made her need worse. Bridget knew she wouldn’t be satisfied until his cock was buried deep within her.

The thought tore a needy sob from her throat just as Micah closed his teeth on her shoulder. Even through the fabric of her blouse, the pinch of the bite made her frantic. Closing her fingers around a handful of his hair, she yanked his head up and kissed him hard. He snarled beneath her mouth and took over the kiss, giving her lower lip a sharp, retaliatory nip.

Bridget made a small sound as her legs and arms tightened around him, loving the roughness. A small part of her brain was amazed at how she was acting, that she was actually dying to be fucked against the wall outside a bar.

One of Micah’s hands released her ass and she whimpered in protest. Sliding his fingers up her leg, he burrowed beneath her skirt. She cursed the pantyhose that separated his touch from her skin. As if reading her mind, Micah closed his fist and ripped the delicate nylon fabric at her crotch.

Pressing into the kiss, Bridget sucked on his tongue as Micah’s hand dipped beneath the cotton of her panties, between her legs, back between her ass cheeks. She desperately wished she’d worn a thong—not that she’d ever worn a thong in her entire life—and then any thoughts dissolved in a rush of pleasure as his fingertips found the crevice between her cheeks.

She gasped against his mouth as he brushed her puckered rear entrance, her cheeks clenching, but whether that was an effort to keep him out or hold his hand right where it was, Bridget didn’t know.

His fingers were moving, slipping across wetness to her pussy. Bridget yanked her mouth away from his, unable to stand the double assault of pleasure. She pressed her face into his neck, breathing the hot, damp scent of him, all her senses focused on the marauding fingers between her legs.

With her legs tangled around his waist, Bridget was completely open to his explorations. Micah traced around her pussy, flicking her clit with a fingertip and making her jerk against him. When she heard his breathless chuckle, Bridget nipped his neck in retaliation, desperate for the teasing to end.

It was his turn to jolt and his laughter turned to a growl as he buried two fingers inside her. His fingers were thick and she was tight, but Bridget's moan was not from pain. The intruding digits stretched her, filled her, made her hungry for his cock.

"Kiss me," he ordered, his voice almost unrecognizable. She obeyed eagerly, turning blindly to find his mouth. His tongue imitated his fingers as they retreated and thrust, deeper and deeper each time. Her cries were muffled by his mouth, for which she was grateful—Bridget didn't think she could be quiet if her life depended on it.

When the door fell away, Micah pulled his hand free of her body and caught her to him before Bridget even realized she was falling backward.

"Sorry!" the man who'd pulled the door open told them, even as he smirked. Bridget realized how it must look with Micah holding her to his chest, one hand up her skirt and her legs wrapped around his waist. She unwrapped her legs and wiggled against him. He let her down, his hands slipping reluctantly away, although he kept her close enough that she could feel the heat of him.

"Sorry," the door-opening man said again. "Carry on." He let the door swing shut.

It was silent except for their hard breaths.

"Think he's guarding the door?" Bridget finally asked as awkwardness began to creep in. The man's intrusion had woken her up to the fact that a virtual stranger had been finger-fucking her in a public place. Who knew who had seen? Sweat prickled at her nape.

Micah grunted a laugh. "Maybe I should've slipped him a twenty to do just that."

Taking a tiny step back, as far away from Micah as he would allow, Bridget dropped her eyes. "Um, maybe it was a good thing. I mean, I don't normally do things like this."

He didn't respond.

"Especially since you're Sam's uncle," she babbled on, still not looking at Micah. "I really shouldn't do...um, anything with one of my students' parents. I mean, guardian. Right?" She wanted to kick herself as the last word came out sounding pleading and desperate to her own ears. Her body was begging her to climb right back up on this gorgeous man and have him finish what he started.

"Right," he agreed, although his tone was bitter. "It's a bad idea. I knew that."



"Right," she repeated, wanting to cry and furious with herself over that. He'd agreed with her, given her what she wanted, and here she was, upset that he wasn't pleading to give her the mind-blowing orgasm she'd just missed out on. "I'd, um, better get back inside then."

When he didn't answer, Bridget darted toward the door without looking at him. Once inside, she leaned against the closed door and blew out a hard breath. The guy who'd interrupted them was standing a few feet away. He winked at her when he saw her. Flushing, she turned away and blindly pushed her way through the crowd.

"Bridget!" Jodi's voice jerked her head around.

"Jodi, hi." Stumbling a little over the words, Bridget felt her face heat, as if Jodi had been watching the show outside. Turning her head, Bridget glanced toward the door she'd just entered. Micah wasn't there. Regret weighted her stomach. Why did she always have to play it safe? Why couldn't she have been wild this one time and jumped in without checking the depth, temperature and currents of the water, as well as the likelihood of sharks? If their brief, mostly clothed contact had been enough to light her panties on fire, full-on sex would have been incredible.

With a sigh, Bridget focused on Jodi and forced a smile. "What's up?"

"Did you lose the uncle?" At Bridget's nod, she grinned. "Good. I have found you the perfect man." Jodi grabbed her arm and towed Bridget across the bar. "You're going to love him."

*Too late*, Bridget thought. Any other guy she met tonight was going to be compared to Micah Foster and found pathetically lacking. With a halfhearted sound of excitement, Bridget allowed Jodi to pull her toward an anemic-looking blond, all the while trying to pretend there wasn't an enormous hole in the crotch of her pantyhose and her mind wasn't filled with Micah.

## Chapter Two

The following Monday, Bridget approached Sam's desk with apprehension, wondering what she would see on his paper. As she got close enough to get a glimpse, she was surprised to see...nothing. The white sheet didn't even have a dot of color.

"What's wrong, Sam?" Bridget asked, crouching down next to his desk. "Don't you have any drawing ideas today?"

He just shrugged, giving her a quick glance. His eyes were a murky blue and Bridget's forehead creased with concern.

"What's the matter, Sam?" she asked again.

He muttered something.

"What?"

Meeting her eyes, Sam said more loudly, "I don't want to draw the wrong thing again."

"Ah." Obviously, she hadn't hidden her dismay at his grisly rabbit picture well enough. "You know, nothing in art is wrong. You can draw whatever you like."

Sam didn't look like he believed her. "You were mad."

"I wasn't mad." She picked her words carefully. "I was worried. I thought maybe you were sad about something and that's why you drew the picture."

He still didn't look convinced. "I got in trouble."

"Tell you what." Bridget met his eyes steadily. "You draw whatever you want and we'll keep it in a special file. No one else needs to see it."

"You won't show it to Uncle Micah?"

"Not unless you want me to."

"Promise?"

"Promise."

He watched her for several seconds. Bridget held his gaze and he finally nodded and picked up a crayon.

"Ms. Grace! Ms. Grace!" Sophia, the self-appointed class monitor, was shrieking from her desk across the room. "Jordan's eating his own boogers!"

With a sigh, Bridget pushed herself to her feet. Sam was coloring intently now and she placed a gentle hand on his hunched-over back. He stilled beneath her touch—she didn't even think he was breathing. With a final pat, she left him to his drawing.

Pea pods or broccoli? Bridget examined the frozen bags in her hands and then, with a shrug, tossed both vegetables into her grocery cart. They would keep, so she might as well get both. She pushed her cart down the aisle, trying to remember what she needed. Once again, she'd forgotten her list.

Her eye was caught by a man farther down the aisle. His shoulder was propping the freezer door open as he pulled a stack of frozen pizzas from a lower shelf. The cold air swirled around him in a visible fog, curling around his thighs and drawing Bridget's eyes to the tight, squeezable ass in front of her.

She slowed as she got closer, unable to look away as heat melted her belly.

*What's wrong with me?* she wondered in exasperation. First making out with Micah Foster outside a bar and now ogling some strange man in the grocery store. What had turned her into such a ball of horniness?

Straightening, the man turned and Bridget whipped her head around to pretend she hadn't been staring at his ass in a drooling stupor of lust. When she saw his face, though, she stopped in mid-turn and stared again.

"Micah," she croaked, flushing at her froggy voice. She briefly considered pretending she had a cold to hide the fact that she was just really freaked out at seeing him, but just as quickly dismissed the idea. She'd never been good at acting. In her high school drama club, after a few disastrous attempts at trying out, she'd resigned herself to the fact that she'd be better off just painting the sets.

Micah nodded. "Bridget." He didn't appear embarrassed or uncomfortable or anything. He just seemed bored. Bridget bit the inside of her cheek. She'd been worried that her first meeting with him would be awkward but this was worse than uncomfortable. It was heartbreaking.

*Dummy*, she scoffed at herself. *So we groped each other at a bar. What'd you expect – true love?* Bridget didn't really know what she'd expected but it wasn't this cool dismissal she was getting.

"Ms. Grace!" an excited voice piped up. Bridget crouched down to peer under the fully loaded grocery cart, grateful for the chance to look away from Micah, from the remote eyes that had burned so hotly into hers just a few days earlier.

"Hi, Sam," she said as she glimpsed the little boy peeking out at her. Sam was on his stomach on the bottom rack of the cart. "I'm sorry. I didn't see you down there at first."

"It's okay," he told her, with a serious nod. "There's lots of stuff hiding me."

Bridget glanced at the Fosters' cart. There definitely was. "Having a party?" she asked, looking back at Sam's uncle.

"No." Micah scowled and shifted his weight. Bridget felt her face heat with a flush. Obviously, the man wasn't interested in chatting with her in the grocery store aisle. There wasn't even a hint of the sexual attraction that had positively radiated from him Friday night at the bar. It was a good thing she hadn't ended up going home with him, since he evidently didn't want anything to do with her now. If they hadn't been

interrupted the other night and they'd had incredible, mind-blowing sex, it would have crushed her to be ignored like this. It hurt badly enough as it was.

Wanting desperately to get away but unable to think of a way to back out of the conversation gracefully, she gestured toward the loaded cart. "Um, are you having a barbeque? I just mean, that's a lot of meat."

Micah's expression darkened even more. "No party. We're just... It was on sale."

"Oh." Bridget dropped her eyes and shifted from foot to foot, her hands gripping her shopping cart handle. "Okay then." Her fingers tightened around the plastic handle, slipping in sweaty circles. "Have a good...um, shopping." Barely resisting the urge to slap her own forehead, she pushed her cart away. *Nice one*, she berated herself. *Good way to show the uncle of one of your students that you have a firm grasp of grammar.*

"Ms. Grace?" Sam had scrambled out from under the cart and was hurrying after her. "Ms. Grace? D'you want to come over and eat ribs with us tonight?"

"Ribs?" It took a moment for the question to register. Glancing toward Micah, she inwardly winced at his expression, cool and uncaring, as if the night at the bar had never happened. Her stomach twisted. "Thank you, sweetie," she told Sam, crouching down so they were eye to eye, "but I can't. You have an extra one for me, okay?"

His face dimmed, clouds swirling in and darkening the bright green of his eyes. With a shrug, Sam turned away and climbed back under the cart to resume his perch, leaving Bridget to push her cart away, her stomach churning and guilt pressing down on her at the memory of Sam's defeated slouch.

She couldn't resist a quick glance behind her, although she wished she *had* when she saw Micah frowning at her back. Swallowing hard, she faced straight ahead and almost ran down the aisle away from the too-sweet boy and his gorgeous, sexy, incredibly confusing uncle.

It was one of those days. Days when she wondered why she became a teacher. Days when she thought longingly of being a doctor or an accountant or a mortician. At least then she could work with someone who stayed still for longer than five seconds.

There was a puppy in the classroom. She'd been reading aloud to the kids when she had heard scratching on the door. Curious, she'd opened it and a dog had darted in, to the kids' shrill delight.

The puppy was now dodging around the desks and the children had fallen in behind it, shrieking and laughing as they tried to catch it.

"Take your seats," Bridget commanded, clapping her hands, but the excitement of having an unexpected canine visitor completely removed any possibility of the kids having their listening ears on. The wild train, led by the puppy, careened its way around the room until Bridget hurdled a desk and trapped the animal in a corner.

Sweeping the puppy up in her arms, she ordered the children back to their seats once again. This time they obeyed, although reluctantly. The dog squirmed in her hold

and she shifted it beneath one arm. Needle points of pain darted into her wrist and she almost dropped the puppy.

"Little f—riend," she improvised through clenched teeth, cutting off the curse she really wanted to say. The dog looked up at her innocently, his little tail thumping against her back. It looked like a cross between a Husky and a German Shephard, and was way too friendly for a puppy that had just sunk its sharp teeth into her wrist. Beads of blood were already dotting her skin. *Great*, she thought. *Nothing like a rabies shot to complete my day.*

"Does anyone know who this puppy belongs to?" she asked her class. Every hand rose to a chorus of "Me, me, me! He's mine!" Rolling her eyes at her stupidity, she held up her free hand in a request for quiet and walked over to the classroom phone.

No one in the main office knew anything about a loose dog. The receptionist promised to call animal control and Bridget hung up, looking down at the puppy.

"So what am I supposed to do with you in the meantime?" she muttered. One of the kids sneezed and Bridget bit off a groan. Of course someone was allergic. The day just kept getting better and better.

She glanced around the classroom and her gaze caught on the supply closet at the back of the room right next to the hallway door. Hesitating, she bit her lip. It seemed mean to put the puppy into the closet but another scan of the room didn't give her any other ideas.

As she carried the dog to the supply closet, the kids protested.

"Please don't put him in there, Ms. Grace!" Jack pleaded. Even teacher's pet Sophia offered to hold the puppy on her lap.

"He'll be fine," Bridget insisted. "I'll leave the light on." With one hand, she shifted the reams of construction paper from the bottom shelf up out of puppy reach. A jolt of guilt flashed through her as she glanced down into the dog's liquid eyes but another sneeze from behind her strengthened her resolve.

To ease her conscience, Bridget slipped off her sweater and laid it on the floor before tucking the puppy into the closet and closing the door. She gave a sigh of regret for her second favorite sweater, knowing it would probably end up serving as a chew toy.

Turning around, Bridget faced twenty-four pairs of accusing eyes. "Callie," she told the sneezer, seeing the little girl's swollen eyelids. "Go to the nurse's office please." Callie nodded and slipped out of her desk as Bridget headed back to the phone to let the nurse know the little girl was headed her way.

When she hung up and turned back to the class, she saw the door closing at the back of the room and frowned. Bridget thought Callie had already left. She shrugged off the thought as another occurred to her.

"Where's Sam?" she asked.

"He went to the bathroom," Sophia informed her.

"That was ten minutes ago." Bridget sighed. What else could go wrong today? "Jordan, could you run down to the boys' room and check on him?"

Happy to have an excuse to get out of work, Jordan grinned and ran toward the door.

"Walk please!" Bridget's tone was sharper than normal as a rush of nausea rolled over her. Great—now she was getting sick. Well, that answered her question about what else could go wrong. After a quick glance at his teacher, Jordan slowed to a more controlled bounce, although Bridget heard his feet slapping the hall floor.

Picking up the book she had dropped, Bridget found her place and started to read, ignoring the occasional wave of dizziness that flowed over her. Jordan returned with a sheepish-looking Sam in tow and Bridget paused to eye the little boy. He looked okay but she made a mental note to check with him after story time, to see what had kept him in the bathroom for so long. He could have just been wandering around or he might not be feeling well.

Bridget grimaced as her stomach clenched threateningly. The kids were always getting sick—the little germ magnets. She usually could fight off the viruses they handed around but something was definitely hitting her today.

The final hour of school dragged for Bridget. It was with intense, nausea-tinged relief that she supervised the backpack loading and jacket collection before the children thundered off to catch school buses or meet rides or find older siblings to walk them home.

After the last straggler had left, Bridget hurried to the supply closet, dreading the mess that a small puppy could make in an hour. At least the dog had been surprisingly quiet. She reached for the knob before realizing that the door wasn't latched. Yanking the closet door open, Bridget saw the tiny room was empty. No puppy, no dreaded puddles, no sweater even.

"Those little monsters," Bridget muttered. How had they let the puppy out without her seeing? And what did they do with it? She remembered the classroom door closing as she turned around after calling the nurse. Had Callie snuck the puppy out with her? Or Sam—had he returned then left again with the dog? Bridget shook her head. He'd been in the bathroom during all the puppy excitement. He wouldn't have even known there was a dog in the closet.

With a bewildered sigh, Bridget walked over to the phone to cancel the call to animal control.

She was really sick. Almost scarily sick. Bridget had been feverish all night and her body retched and ached until she started crying in the early morning hours. She knew it would just make her head throb and her eyes swell—as if she didn't have enough misery—but Bridget couldn't stop the tears from trickling across the bridge of her nose to plop onto the pillow.

This wasn't the flu. Bridget had the flu before and this wasn't it. This wasn't anything she'd ever experienced. Her muscles and bones felt as if they were fighting under her fever-hot skin, as if her entire body was rejecting itself. Fuck, it hurt.

Groaning, she shoved herself onto her other side. The shift of position didn't help. A dull, tearing pain shot down her arm and Bridget knew she had to go to the emergency room. The thought of sitting at the hospital, waiting for hours, made her cry harder but she forced her aching body out of bed anyway.

As she dressed, slowly and painfully, Bridget wished she didn't live alone. Most of the time she liked her solitary home but being sick made her lonely. There was no one to pet her, bring her soup and let her be snarly to him or, most practically, no one to drive her to the emergency room when she was really, really sick. Micah's face came to mind and Bridget almost started to cry again.

Forcing herself to concentrate on putting on her shoes, Bridget shoved away the self-pity and shuffled out of her bedroom. The thought of calling a cab to take her to the hospital was too depressing to bear. Calling Jodi crossed her mind but Bridget hesitated. Jodi lived in a suburb forty minutes away and the hospital was barely a mile from Bridget's house. She could drive herself.

Although the streetlights looked strange—too bright and haloed—Bridget made it to the emergency room entrance without crashing the car into a tree. She only had to wait a half-hour before an efficient woman had her reclining in a chair next to the nurses' station.

"I'm so sorry you're out here," the nurse apologized as she took Bridget's blood pressure. "We're out of rooms. It's been a crazy night."

"It's okay," Bridget reassured her, her voice a little croaky. "As long as I'm not getting a pelvic exam, I'm fine being out here."

"Of course we wouldn't do that," the nurse exclaimed, looking horrified. Bridget just closed her eyes, too tired and sick to try to explain that it was a joke.

Her left hand was really hurting now. She held it up to look at it, expecting it to be swollen to twice the normal size. The nurse gasped.

Bridget blinked at her hand, wondering if she was having a fever-induced hallucination.

Although it wasn't swollen, her entire hand was...shifting, as if something was moving under the skin. Her fingers appeared shorter and stubbier, like they were withdrawing into her palm. As she stared at it, Bridget could feel the muscles stretching, pulling at the bones.

The pain drew drops of sweat from her forehead and she instantly felt clammy.

"Am I having a seizure or something?" Bridget doubtfully asked the nurse, not taking her eyes from the freakish thing that had been her hand a few minutes ago. "A hand seizure?" Bridget shook her head. It sounded ridiculous when she said it out loud but something really crazy was going on with her hand—with her whole body.

"It's...I..." the nurse stammered, tottering back a few steps and drawing Bridget's gaze. The woman's eyes were wide and fixed on Bridget's hand. "I need to get..." Trailing off into an incomprehensible mumble, the nurse turned and dashed down the hall.

Bridget stared after the woman. Whatever was happening to her hand had freaked out a *nurse*. Weren't nurses usually unflappable? Hadn't they already seen everything there was to see and were too busy getting things done to be shocked by a mutating hand?

When that very hand grew gray and blurry, Bridget realized she had stopped breathing. As she sucked in some much-needed air, she focused on her hand, trying to force it back to normalcy with mere strength of will. Her head pounded with the effort but she pressed on, desperate to *make* her skin and muscles and bones obey her and go back to being the hand-shape they'd always been up until now.

Under her ferocious stare, the shifting changed, her fingers lengthened, her palm narrowed and everything looked almost like it should again. Her breath huffed out in a gasp of relief. She wasn't better though. Bridget could still feel the fever raging through her, the unsettled twitching of her muscles.

The nurse rushed up, red-faced and panting, followed closely by a white-coated man—a doctor, Bridget presumed. He had thinning red-blond hair and a round moon face. What was obviously supposed to be a comforting smile that pushed his cheeks up, hiding his eyes, didn't reassure Bridget. It made her skin prickle.

"I'm Dr. Aspling," he said, his eyes flicking down her body. "Let us see that hand then."

*Us?* Bridget thought, irreverent in her fever and shock. *The doctor and who else? The mouse in his lab-coat pocket?* She couldn't help but giggle and Dr. Aspling exchanged a look with the nurse.

"It's fine now," Bridget told him, holding up her back-to-normal hand.

The doctor's eyebrows drew together as he examined her, turning her hand this way and that with gloved fingers. Bridget watched his face. He seemed almost...disappointed.

"It looks perfectly normal," Dr. Aspling finally announced, shooting an irritated look toward the nurse, who huffed and stepped closer.

"It wasn't a minute ago," the nurse told him, frowning at Bridget's hand. "The fingers were much shorter and the palm was thicker. It was...*changing* right in front of us."

Dr. Aspling released her hand and studied Bridget's face. "Is that why you came in tonight?"

"No," Bridget told him. "It looked fine to me." As she heard the nurse give a disbelieving snort, Bridget felt her cheeks heat. "It did." Crossing her arms mulishly across her chest, Bridget wasn't sure why she'd lied. There was something in the



doctor's cool, clinical gaze that set off her creep-o-meter and sent her self-protective instincts into overdrive.

"We should run some tests," Dr. Aspling finally said. He ran his eyes, flat as a lizard's, over her again and Bridget's skin chilled with panic. "See if we can get to the bottom of this." With another false smile he moved away, the nurse following. They conferred as they walked, their heads tilted close together.

"This is wrong," Bridget muttered. It might just be fever paranoia—if there was such a thing—but she couldn't ignore the way all her instincts were clamoring for her to get out, to get away.

Shooting a glance at the doctor and nurse, Bridget saw that they still had their backs to her. Closing her fingers around her purse, Bridget slid out of her chair. As she walked swiftly to the exit, she had to force herself not to look over her shoulder or, even worse, run. Drawing attention to herself was probably a bad idea while creeping away from an emergency room.

Bridget had no idea why she was sneaking out. It was crazy to leave. The doctor was there to help her. Everything else—all his creepiness, her panic, even her mutating hand—must have been creations of her fevered brain. It was all just too *weird*.

Even as she told herself she was stupid not to stay, Bridget shoved open the door and escaped into the parking lot. Relief coursed through her when the chill of the autumn air hit her exposed skin. As she made her way between the rows of cars, heading toward her sedan, a commotion at the exit door brought her head around. Instinctively, Bridget dropped down, crouching between a pickup truck and a station wagon.

"You're being stupid," she told herself under her breath. It was probably just another patient leaving or a couple of doctors taking a smoke break.

"Find her!" a voice ordered. Although the command was low, the sound carried easily through the early morning quiet to Bridget's hiding spot. "She just left—she has to be close."

Bridget's heart accelerated, sending blood to pound in her ears. She was pretty sure it was creepy Dr. Aspling's voice. Again the thought occurred to her that everything might just be a fever-induced hallucination. What if this wasn't real and she was home in bed or still sitting in the emergency room chair or even in a hospital bed somewhere?

Maybe it *was* just a crazy dream but Bridget figured she'd better assume the worst and move her ass before the possibly imaginary but definitely shifty doctor discovered her huddled between the vehicles.

Staying low, she moved to the front of the car, peering around it to check if anyone was there, waiting to pounce when she emerged into the open. She couldn't see another soul. Hunched over and breathing short, hard breaths, Bridget ran across to the next row of cars, feeling exposed and vulnerable.

Her skin burned hot with fever and her entire body ached, but she shoved that to the back of her mind. There was time enough to deal with her illness when she wasn't

being hunted in a parking lot. Something else was bubbling up inside her, feeding on the adrenaline pumped through her by her racing heart.

It was exhilaration. A part of her was loving this—the danger, the excitement. A wild creature inside her was howling with pleasure at this hide-and-seek game. Bridget tried to block that part of her out, pretending it was just the fever creating more illusions—but she knew deep down this feral beast was a part of her.

She reached the shadowed safety of the next row of cars, tucking herself between a minivan and a car. As she gasped for breath, trying to regain the air she had lost more through nervousness than the short sprint between rows, Bridget felt her muscles twist and her stomach cramp, tight and painful. Falling onto her side, she snapped into a ball, her pursuers forgotten in a burning roar of pain. She breathed in hard through her nose, barely preventing a scream from escaping. The agony spread, shooting through her chest and down into her legs, muscles contracting into cramps, shivering with such tightly drawn tension that Bridget was afraid, in the tiny part of her brain not totally overwhelmed with pain, that something would snap.

She wanted to fight it, to resist the twisting and contorting happening beneath her skin, but it hurt too much and Bridget was too exhausted to struggle against her body anymore. Exhaling a hiss of air through her clenched teeth, she stopped fighting.

Once she let go, it happened fast—a rush of intense pain and then release. Everything fell back into place, the muscles and bones and tendons all realigning to their proper places. With a shuddering sigh of relief, Bridget stood on wobbly legs...

All four of them.

Her breath started coming fast and shallow, hollow pants as she stared down at her feet—round, furred *dog* feet, half buried in a pile of fabric, which she realized were the clothes she'd been wearing just moments ago. Her shirt was still draped over her head and for some reason that freaked her out even more. She scrabbled at the piece of clothing with what had once been her hands but were now paws, knocking the shirt over her head into the pile of abandoned clothing.

"What the *fuck*?" she tried to say, but all that came out was a rusty whine.

"Did you hear something?" a voice asked, much too close for comfort. The person searching for her sounded as if he was just a few cars down the row.

"Like what?" This was Dr. Aspling's impatient voice, coming from her other side.

Bridget realized that she could actually *smell* the two men, their colognes and clothes detergent, the cigarette smoke on the one to her right and the antiseptic soap from the doctor on her left. Underneath everything, she could smell *them*, an underlying scent that she somehow knew was different for every person.

*Never mind smells*, she ordered her brain frantically. *Get out of here!*

She slipped back toward the rear of the car, refusing to think about how she was walking on four paws because if she really let herself think about it, she would lose it completely. *Freak out later*, she ordered her barely repressed hysterics. *First get away from the scary men.*

She slunk behind the cars, checking behind each one with her eyes, nose and ears before moving silently to the next car's shadow. Bridget mentally cursed the well-lit lot as she headed, car by car, toward the edge where pavement met grass. The edges were mown, but if she could get across fifty feet of lawn without being spotted, she could escape to the dark refuge of the brush and trees beyond.

Eight cars to go, seven, six... Bridget was moving through the shadow of a pastel Volkswagen when she heard a shout. Without even checking to see if she had been spotted, Bridget bolted toward the trees, hearing the sounds of pursuit close behind. She increased her speed, feeling the bunch and stretch of muscles as she ran faster than she'd ever run in her life. The trees were closer—she could smell decaying leaves carpeting the grass and hints of small, furry things scurrying in the underbrush.

Just a few more strides and she'd be there. As she shot between two trees, triumphant, a sharp sting radiated from the top of her right hind leg. With a yelp, she lost her footing, her hindquarters twisting to the side as she scrambled forward, the need to escape from whatever danger was behind her overwhelming her brain and forcing her on.

Bridget regained her stride but a wave of dizziness flooded her and she slowed. The ground appeared to tilt under her paws and the outline of the trees blurred and shifted. The urgent need to move, to get away from the men, pushed her to keep running, but whatever drug had been darted into her was making her waver and stumble. Her shoulder slammed into a tree and she staggered, almost going down. Bridget shook her head, trying to throw off the threatening darkness, to keep moving, to escape.

The men were getting closer—she could smell them, hear their low-voiced, back-and-forth muttering. Their nearing scents and sounds sent a flash of panic through Bridget, clearing her head enough to take another few off-kilter strides. The ground ended in front of her, falling off into a ravine, and she stumbled to a swaying halt at the edge.

Just before unconsciousness caught her, she felt herself tipping over into nothingness and then all was dark.

## Chapter Three

The inside of her eyelids glowed red. Bridget could hear birds twittering and cheeping, could smell the mouthwatering scent of small furry things, going about their business in the underbrush...

Mouthwatering?

Her eyes snapped open and she scrambled to her feet. Glancing down, she shuddered as she corrected herself—to her *paws*. Either she was still in the middle of her fever-induced delusion or she had somehow turned into a dog.

The memory of the chasing men and the tranquilizer dart came rushing back, and she twisted around to see her right back leg. The dart was gone, having fallen out at some point. From this angle, Bridget could see the majority of her body and noticed that she was a mottled brown and gold, with a medium-length coat. She definitely didn't look like a wolf.

*Not a werewolf then, she decided. So what – a were-mutt?*

She sighed, which came out as a whine. How inelegant—instead of a majestic wolf, she'd turned into the lead character in *The Shaggy Dog*. Questions began to cram into her head. What *was* she? Could she turn back into a person? What had happened the night before? Why was the doctor chasing her? Where did they go? Was she safe? Were they watching her right now?

As her brain raced, her pulse accelerated until her heart thundered in her chest and she was quivering with the need to run. But where should she go?

Bridget looked around. She was at the bottom of a ravine and had been sleeping wedged against a decaying log, forest debris piled around her. Glancing up the incline, she guessed that she'd fallen, pulling after her a mini-avalanche of dirt, fallen leaves and whatever else made up the ravine she'd tumbled down. This natural blanket was probably what had hidden her from the two men.

Giving herself a shake, she heard the shower of dirt hit the ground as it flew from her coat. Bridget did an inventory, testing each group of muscles with care. Nothing seemed to have been damaged in the fall. In fact, she felt good—really good. After being so sick, she was almost giddy with the lack of pain and illness.

Bridget spun in a circle, unable to hold back an excited bark. The noise echoed in the trees, quieting the birds and making all the small creatures go still, bringing Bridget back to reality. She had to figure this out. First of all, she needed to get home.

Her car was probably still in the lot outside the emergency room, but what if someone was watching it, waiting for her to return? If she did manage to get to her car without anyone seeing her, she wouldn't be able to drive home in her current state. She

wasn't sure if she could change back into her normal, five-foot-two, less-hairy form and she was a little scared to try – what if this was it? No more opposable thumbs or speech-enabled vocal cords. Instead, she'd fight urges to drink from toilets and chase squirrels.

At the thought, her stomach rumbled.

*No, she told her hungry dog part firmly. There will be no eating anything in the rodent family – including uncooked squirrel.*

Her hunger and the thought of the sandwich meat in her refrigerator nudged her into action. Bridget trotted along the base of the ravine, heading toward a section that rose less steeply than the slope she had tumbled down the night before. A part of her was amazed at her calm acceptance of her new canine shape but Bridget figured so much had happened, so much shock and fear and overwhelming panic had flooded through her, that her brain had just short-circuited. Besides, she was still half-convinced this was all a dream.

She scrambled up the slope, her paws slipping a few times on leaves and loose dirt that pattered down to the forest floor below. Bridget was actually grateful for her four legs, since maneuvering seemed much easier than if she'd been human-shaped. As she climbed for what seemed like a long time, she marveled that she hadn't been injured in her lengthy fall the night before. She wasn't sure whether the two men had been put off their search because of the steep slope or whether they hadn't been able to find her.

When she finally reached level ground, she slunk toward the edge of the woods, peering out at the emergency room parking lot while keeping her body in the shadows. The hospital was busier than it had been the night before, with people walking in and out of the main doors and others standing around the entrance, possibly waiting for their rides or just enjoying the fragile warmth of the autumn sun.

Bridget eyed everyone with suspicion, not trusting even the elderly man using the walker, making his shuffling way toward a taxi. Any of the people could be watching for her, waiting for her to emerge from the woods and head to her car.

Retreating back into the trees, she turned and headed west, parallel to the parking lot. Although the route through the woods wasn't the most direct way to Bridget's house, it was probably the safest. Any chance of driving home was quashed when she remembered that her clothes were in a heap somewhere in the parking lot. She was pretty sure that even if she *was* able to change back into her normal shape, it would definitely be a naked shape, and that would attract way too much unwanted attention, as well as being extremely embarrassing. She might give the elderly taxi patron a heart attack.

The trees were thin enough for her to trot along at a good pace and Bridget enjoyed the easy stretch and flex of her muscles. When she'd tried to jog in the past, she'd been wheezing and gasping before she'd gone half a block. As a dog, she felt as if she could maintain this pace for hours. She wondered if any muscle she gained would stay with her when she shifted back to her human form – *if* she could shift back.

The thought sobered her, made her wonder what she was doing, thinking about such trivial things. She needed to make a plan.

*A plan for what?* she wondered. She decided figuring out how to turn back into a person would be a good start. After that, maybe she could find a way to get rid of this turning-into-a-dog disease for good.

*"You what?"*

At the sight of his nephew's bloodless lips and wide, stricken eyes, Micah squeezed his eyes shut, clamped his molars together until they squeaked, took a breath and counted to ten. Then he counted to twenty.

He was on fifty-eight when Sam spoke.

*"I'm sorry."* The little boy spoke on the inhale in a sort of whispered gasp, a sound that mixed a good chunk of guilt in with the utter horror that had swamped Micah.

*"We talked about this,"* Micah finally gritted out, totally at a loss with where to start, how to impress upon Sam the magnitude of what he'd done, the complete *wrongness* of it. The shock of finding out was still reverberating through Micah—how was he supposed to explain to a six-year-old? *"Over and over. You know better!"* Micah shut his mouth with a snap, cutting off the torrent of words about a ruined life and the painful reality of consequences when he saw the huge, unblinking eyes glistening with pooled moisture, those white lips shaking with potential tears. Sammy hardly ever cried.

*"Shit,"* Micah muttered, which just added to his guilt.

*"I'm sorry."* The first word was whispered and the second inaudible as the first tears overflowed and trickled down his face.

Micah sat down on the kitchen floor, feeling as if the weight of his own body was too much to support, and slumped against the island counter. Tipping his head back, he stared at nothing and tried to figure out what to do.

Staring at his uncle, Sam's silent tears turned to sobs and Micah focused on him. Reaching out an arm, Micah tugged the little boy onto his lap. Sam burrowed into his chest, crying harder.

*"It'll be okay, Sammy,"* Micah sighed, rubbing a hand over the boy's thin, shaking back. *"I'll fix this."* Even as he said it, Micah realized that he had no idea how the fuck to even start.

*Huh.*

Bridget sat between two of her lilac bushes, totally stumped. What now?

She'd slipped through the woods, darting through the occasional clearing or across a street if she'd been forced. When she'd reached her neighborhood, she'd twisted between houses, moving from hiding place to the next sheltered spot a few feet closer to her own home.

It had even started being fun, a game of hide-and-seek, and Bridget had tested out her new body. How high could she jump? Over the chain-link fence? No problem. The eight-foot wooden wall, however, had led to an inelegant scramble at the top and a breath-stealing thump of a landing on the other side. Of all her new skills, her favorite part was how she felt like she could run forever.

When she'd reached her own backyard, she'd stared at the house, nonplussed. How was she supposed to get inside? If she changed—if she *could* change—back to human form, she'd be naked. It would be just her luck if one of the neighbors spotted her as she retrieved her spare key from the top of the backdoor ledge, stark naked. She'd retreated to the shelter of the lilac bushes to puzzle out what to do. She wasn't having much luck with that.

Too bad she hadn't installed a doggy door. Since Bridget had never had a dog, though, that would have been slightly insane. With a heavy sigh, she lay down with her chin on her paws.

Maybe she should just go for it. It was mid-morning on a weekday, so all the neighbors should be at work or school or yoga-lates class or whatever they did during the day. She'd have to change under the cover of bushes—since who knew how crazy that would look?—dash to the back porch, grope for the key, open the screen door, jam the key in the lock... She sighed again. She'd be seen for sure.

Her gaze move across the yard and stopped on the garden shed in the far corner. Bridget didn't keep much in it—her lawnmower, an old bike with two flat tires, a few rakes, shovels, buckets, a tarp—

Her head shot up. A tarp would double as a toga in a pinch, which she was pretty sure she was in right now.

Belly low to the grass, she slunk diagonally across the lawn. An unlatched combination lock held the door closed. Bridget never actually locked the shed. If someone bothered to steal her ancient lawnmower, she'd send up a prayer of thanks for the excuse to buy a new one that could actually cut the grass with one pass and wasn't held together with wire, duct tape and baling twine.

Even hanging open, the lock was tricky. She tried to nudge it off with her muzzle but the U-shaped metal bar just knocked against the door. With a low growl of frustration and a growing fear that a neighbor would glance out and spot a large, mottled dog breaking into her garden shed, she grabbed the body of the lock in her mouth, turned her head and twisted it until it slid free.

Dropping the lock, she nosed the latch open and scrabbled at the door until it swung out just enough for her to wedge her muzzle in. With a twist of her head, she opened the door wide enough to slip into the dim shed. The tarp was there, folded and placed neatly on a shelf, and a surge of relief tore through her, so strong it made her legs go wobbly.

*Now the hard part.* Bridget closed her eyes and concentrated, trying to repeat what she'd done at the hospital when she'd changed the paw back into her hand. Her bones

began to slide and shift, yanking her muscles with the movement. She'd expected pain but it was surprisingly smooth, only a slightly panicky pull on her muscles, similar to what she felt when she pushed a stretch just an inch too far for comfort.

As the change finished, the final joints clicking as they fell into their proper human places, she gasped, a sound of half relief, half exhilaration. If this had really just occurred, if she hadn't had the longest, most realistic dream ever, then an amazing thing had just happened—and it had happened to her. Bridget. An ordinary, brown mouse of a schoolteacher whose idea of a wild night was watching a PBS special on African lions.

She, Bridget Grace, had just turned into a dog. In fact, she'd turned into a dog, escaped from an evil doctor, turned back into a human and was now standing naked in her garden shed. At the whole "naked" reminder, she grabbed for the tarp and wrapped it around herself toga style. Only then did she peer out the half-opened door to see if any of the neighbors were watching.

The coast was clear, as far as Bridget could see. Pulling the rough fabric of the tarp more tightly around her body, she glanced down to see if she was completely covered and then dashed for her back porch. Stretching up on her tiptoes, she slid her fingers along the ledge until she felt the spare key. She grabbed for it but her hands were slick with sweat and the key fell, landing soundlessly on the welcome mat.

Grasping a handful of tarp toga, she held the material closed as she bent to retrieve the key. She was almost home free—now was *not* the time to start mooning her neighbors. Straightening, she almost dropped it again as she tried to jam it into the keyhole. Her hands were shaking so badly that the key just bumped against the lock. Bridget finally took a hard breath in and forced herself to focus.

"Get the key in the lock," she commanded her hand. "Key in the lock." The metal tip caught the edge of the keyhole and slid in. As she heard the deadbolt click open, Bridget bit her lip to stop a shout of relief and triumph from escaping. She yanked the key out as she turned the doorknob. The door swung in and Bridget followed, almost falling into the house.

Once inside, she slammed the door and slid down its surface to sit on the floor. She listened to her heart thumping in her ears and concentrated on breathing. When her seat started to go numb from the hard tiles, she shifted a little, taking some of the weight onto her hands for a few seconds. She relaxed her arms and her elbow bumped the smooth lower panel of the door behind her.

"I have to install a doggy door," she muttered absently. When Bridget realized what she'd said, she started to laugh and couldn't stop. In mid-gasp, her laughter turned to tears and she sat on the floor and bawled.

Why did it fucking have to be *her*?

Micah was fuming as he drove. Why did it have to be Sam's teacher, the one who smelled like baking cookies and crayons, who should have just faded, brown and



mousy, into the background—an anonymous figure in Sam’s life, eventually merging into the memory of a dozen other teachers?

Instead, Micah had been driven to follow her, to stalk her and hold her and grind against her, to smell her scent—less innocent once they started dancing. Thank God she’d had the good sense to pull away, because he hadn’t. He’d been stupid, mindless with lust. After he left the bar, he’d been half-crazy from frustration but later, much later, he’d realized that it was better this way. He couldn’t have just stopped at one time, one night with her, and once was all he could offer.

If he was so desperate that just the thought of this woman accelerated his heart and pumped excitement through his body, then he was better off sticking to one-night stands with people who didn’t want a second time, who were hardened and jaded, who didn’t even want to tell Micah their names, much less have any emotional connection. Bridget Grace was a world away from people like that—people like *him*.

“Fuck!” He cracked the steering wheel with his palm and then swore again, shaking his stinging hand. Of all the people Sammy could have bitten, it had to be her.

As he turned onto Spring Street, just a few blocks from Bridget’s house, Micah forced himself to take a breath and calm down. It wasn’t her fault. She couldn’t have known that being kind to one of her students would make him want to keep her, or that ten minutes with her would make that little boy’s uncle feel exactly the same way. Bridget Grace had not asked for any of this but that didn’t change what had happened. It was impossible to go back now.

After the tears finally stopped, Bridget sat on the floor for a long time, too exhausted and overwhelmed to think about anything. When she finally refocused on the present, her lower half was numb. Pushing to her feet and letting the tarp fall around her, Bridget groaned, feeling her joints pop and complain about the long stint on the tile floor.

When she was standing, Bridget paused, not sure what she should do next. What did this whole thing mean? Could she continue being a teacher, continue with her normal, average life except for the occasional switch into dog-dom? What if she changed in front of her students? She shuddered at the thought. That would lead to a few parent-teacher conferences, not to mention some major therapy for the kids.

Maybe this had been a one-time-only event, some crazy, rare flu bug that would never cause problems again. Even as the thought occurred to her, Bridget dismissed it. She could feel the difference in her body, as if the animal lived inside her, curled and sleepy for now but definitely still there, waiting.

As if on cue, her stomach growled. Bridget realized she was hungry, starving actually. Kicking the fallen tarp out of her way, she headed for the kitchen and dug through the refrigerator, pulling out makings for a turkey sandwich. What she really wanted was a hamburger—a double. Bridget’s mouth watered at the thought and surprise stilled her hand for a second before she recovered and pulled out a couple

slices of bread. A hamburger? When had she ever craved red meat, much less a fast-food burger?

Shrugging, she focused on putting her sandwich together. It must be some kind of dog thing. Bridget supposed she'd be buying up the meat department pretty soon. Visions of steaks and ribs and roasts danced in her head and she took a huge bite of her sandwich.

At the thought of all that wonderful, wonderful meat, she paused. Micah and Sam's cart had been stacked with meat.

Bridget swallowed, the lump of sandwich that still needed more chewing going down hard. The puppy – she'd started feeling sick right after it had bitten her. Sam had been out of the room the entire time.

Her sandwich dropped from cold hands as pieces began to click together in her brain. Had Sam caused this? He was such a sweet boy though – why would he have done that? His uncle, on the other hand, could not be called sweet. That whole thing at the bar had been so strange, for him to have singled her out in such a way, for him to have been so obviously attracted to her... Plus the cold way he'd acted at the grocery store – what had caused such a change?

"Maybe he'd been in heat," she muttered and then choked on a laugh. She relaxed enough to take another bite of her sandwich. This was all supposition based on the items in a grocery cart. She'd have to talk to them, find out if they knew anything about this whole canine addition to her body.

She'd also do some research. As soon as she finished her sandwich, she'd fire up her laptop and do some Google searches. At the thought of how many hits she would get at the term "werewolf", Bridget groaned around her latest bite of sandwich.

As she shoved the last bit of food in her mouth, she realized with some amazement that she'd really like to make another. This dog thing was making her hungry. Reaching for the bread, she froze at the sound of the doorbell.

Bridget was suddenly very aware that she was still naked. In order to get to her bedroom, she had to cross the hallway, which could be clearly seen through the small, decorative window set in the front door.

"Oh for Pete's sake!" How many times could she be trapped naked somewhere? She assumed that it was one of her neighbors at the door – most likely retired Mr. Lee. He'd probably seen a dog breaking into her garden shed. At the thought, she muffled a snort of laughter.

Crouching low, even though there was in no danger of being seen as long as she stayed on this side of the hallway, she scurried into the dining room, which had windows that faced the street. Peering in the crack between the plantation blinds and the window frame, she saw a maroon sedan she didn't recognize parked by the curb. There was no way for her to see who was at the front door from this angle, but the car made her think that it wasn't Mr. Lee who was ringing the doorbell for the second time.

Jehovah's Witnesses, perhaps? Her stomach twisted even as the hopeful idea popped into her head. It was bad when she was hoping for someone trying to convert her; when Jehovah's Witnesses would be the better option. But she knew, just *knew*, that the person at the door was connected with her transformation into a dog.

There was a noise at the door. Bridget tried to quiet her breathing in order to hear the small sounds coming from her front entrance. She slipped closer to the opening into the hall, keeping her body pressed against the wall and out of sight. There were faint clicking noises and then a dull thump as her deadbolt released.

A tiny squeak escaped from Bridget before she clapped her hands over her mouth to muffle any other sounds. Someone had just picked her lock. The realization slapped her across the face. This was no neighbor, no door-to-door salesperson, no one harmless. This was someone who had just picked her *fucking* lock!

There was still the problem of her nakedness. She really, really did not want to face down a burglar with everything on display. When she heard the small groan of hinges as the door swung open, Bridget made a decision. Closing her eyes, she concentrated on changing—smooth skin to hairy, two legs to four, tail where there was none—and her body began to shift.

Bones slid out of place, pulled by muscles moving independently of Bridget's conscious command. As freaked out as this made her, it was also exhilarating. There was no sickness or fever or pain that accompanied the change anymore. It just felt natural, as if her body already knew exactly what to do, easing into the shape of a dog with an efficiency like the whirring gears in a clock.

Now she could smell that there were two of them, both strangers. Bridget slipped along the wall until she could circle behind the dining room table and chairs, moving fast and using the table's wide pedestal base to block her from the men's view if they happened to glance through the doorway.

She made it into the kitchen without being seen. Bridget figured it would only give her an extra minute or so, since the men would be checking each room as they went through the house. Keeping an ear on the burglars, she tried to think of a plan.

All of her escape routes—front and back doors—were through the hallway. Even if the men went upstairs before checking the kitchen, she couldn't open a closed door, due to her current no-opposable-thumbs state. Her windows were all shut and latched.

Bridget concentrated on listening to the men. They were moving down the hall, pausing at each doorway—dining room, living room on the opposite side, closet under the stairs. Rolling back on her paws so that her nails didn't click against the kitchen tile, she slipped back into the dining room. Hugging the wall, she moved around the perimeter of the room until she was next to the opening into the hall.

Neither man had said a word, not even in a whisper, since they'd stepped into the house. Bridget could only hear their even, hushed footfalls as they made their way to the back door at the end of the hall where the crumpled tarp lay. She heard the rustle of

the tarp being moved but she didn't dare poke her head around the corner, in case one or both of the men happened to glance in her direction.

After a pause, their footsteps headed back toward the front door and her hiding spot. The men's scents grew stronger, thickening the air in her nostrils and coating the back of her throat. Bridget fought to hold back a gagging cough, wishing this super-powered nose could be turned off and on at will.

To her relief, she heard the second stair give its habitual squeak under one of the men's feet. A few seconds later, the step protested again under the second man's weight. Their smell lightened slightly, although the stink of the two men still hung in the air.

Bridget didn't move until she heard the tread of feet on the floor above. Poking her head into the hallway, she saw that there was a clear path to the front door. Lowering her body until her belly almost brushed the floor, she slunk toward the door, half her attention on the empty staircase so she'd be ready to run if one of the men appeared.

A murmur from upstairs caught her attention and slowed her dash for the door. Bridget hesitated, torn between the animal need to escape and human curiosity. Telling herself that she would be safe enough if she stayed between the men and the front door, she crept halfway up the stairs, just far enough to make out the quiet conversation between the two intruders.

"...isn't here," one of the men was saying.

"No movement around the car either or the doc would've called," the other responded, his voice higher and more nasally than the first man's.

"You going to call him?" The way the lower-voiced intruder said "him" made Bridget's ears prick up. Literally.

"Fuck no! That's your job." The second man's voice went even higher. "He's going to be pissed."

There was a huff of humorless laughter from the first man. "No shit, Sherlock." After an extended pause, his voice came again. "Yeah, she's not here."

When the nasally man stayed quiet, Bridget guessed the other man was on his cell phone.

"Don't blame us," he told the person on the other end of the call. "We're not the ones who fucked up with the tranq gun. She was back here earlier though—there's a tarp at the back door like she used it for cover after changing outside somewhere. That, and there's food out. Looks like she was eating and had to leave in a hurry."

There was another pause, a shorter one this time.

"Nope, no word from the doc," the gruff man told whatever "he" they'd been referring to earlier. "Want us to grab anything before we leave?" Another pause ticked by. "Got it. See you in twenty."

After a rustle of fabric—probably the phone going into his pocket—the first man spoke again. “He wants us to bring her laptop and see if she left any sort of purse here. They didn’t find anything at the E.R.”

*Purse?* Bridget racked her brain. Where did she last have it? She knew that she’d snatched it up before she took off out of the hospital but couldn’t remember what had happened to it in the meantime. She’d lost it somewhere during her first change into a dog, she was sure. Her thoughts were interrupted when the nasally man spoke.

“Why does he want these freaks anyway?”

“Dunno,” the other man responded. “Cause they’re rare, I guess. Having things that no one else does gets him all excited.”

The higher-voiced man snorted. “Waste of money, if you ask me. Know how many hookers you could get for what he’s paying all of us to find this teacher chick? Hot hookers too.”

“You and your hooker dreams,” his companion scoffed.

The tread of feet approached the stairs, jerking Bridget into action. Twisting around, she ran down the steps. She’d been worried that she was going to have to change back into a naked woman to open the front door and risk exposing herself to anyone passing by, but the men had left the front door almost closed but not latched. Slipping her nose into the gap between door and frame, she swung the door wide with a twist of her head. The screen door was easy, since the latch opened by pushing in. Lunging up onto her hind legs, Bridget landed with one of her paws depressing the latch and the door swung open so suddenly that she lost her balance and tumbled awkwardly onto the front doormat.

Twisting around, she regained her feet and took off down her front walk. A car had pulled up behind the sedan, and Bridget headed for the gap between the vehicles. As she reached the sidewalk, the scent and sight caught her at the same time and she skidded to a halt.

*Micah?*

He rounded the front of his car and Bridget turned and ran, tearing down the sidewalk. She heard Micah’s feet pounding behind her and she sped up, turning sharply to the right and shooting beneath the lower board of a fence. Her back burned where it had rubbed the edge of the wood but Bridget ignored it and ran through the yard, snaking beneath a hedge and into the next yard.

She let instinct take over, allowing her body to do what it knew it could do in this form—over, under, around—running so fast that everything blurred into horizontal stripes. While she ran, the image of Micah taunted her. Bridget struggled to think, to come up with a way to explain his presence—a way that didn’t include Micah being involved with the men who had broken into her house. Was Micah Foster the “he” the two men had been discussing, the mysterious boss on the other end of the phone call?

Her heart hurt. Bridget told herself that it was from fear and exertion, but she knew the truth. As silly as it was, she’d been hoping Micah wasn’t behind her newly acquired

skill of turning into a dog or the men who where chasing her. As much as she tried to deny it, as much as she wished it wasn't true, she knew that Micah Foster, hot uncle of the sweetest boy ever, was involved in this up to his eyeballs. For some stupid reason, this broke her heart.

## Chapter Four

Micah chased the dog for half a block before the animal disappeared underneath a fence. It was Bridget—he was sure of it. Although his sense of smell wasn't as acute while in human form, he'd seen the awareness in her eyes, the comprehension when she'd spotted him.

Turning back, Micah tried to formulate a plan. He couldn't talk to her and explain what was happening if he couldn't even catch her. He'd have to find a safe place to change and then track her by scent. Micah scowled. Nothing could ever be easy.

Glancing toward her house, Micah frowned. She'd left the front door open. Even before she'd spotted him, Bridget had obviously been running away from something. Foreboding prickled the skin over his shoulder blades as he moved up her front walk, his steps slow and measured, his eyes sweeping the lawn, the windows, even her neighbors' homes.

He climbed the steps of the porch and reached toward the screen-door handle when he heard them—male voices, two of them at least. Micah swung around, flattening his body against the siding next to the front door.

"No purse in there either," one of the men was saying. Goose bumps rose on the back of Micah's neck and he pressed back a growl. He knew that voice. That was Ricky True, one of Bart Carlson's thugs. Bart was a billionaire, famous for his money and also for his interest in the paranormal. It was rumored that he was a collector of objects and even people, although Micah had just dismissed that last part as an urban legend. Now though, listening to Ricky True rummaging around Bridget's house made suspicion flare in Micah's gut.

"At least we found the laptop. That should make him happy—as happy as he ever gets, at least." This voice belonged to another one of Carlson's employees, a man named Nevin Greenleigh. Micah jerked involuntarily against the siding. Ricky was a not-too-bright petty criminal but Nevin was a whole other can of worms. Murderous, soulless, sadistic worms.

Micah debated pulling open the screen door, going inside and knocking the men's heads together to get some information but decided against it. Those two low-level thugs wouldn't be able to tell him much and it would tip off Bart Carlson that Micah knew what was going on. He grimaced. Not that he really *did* know what was going on.

Despite the fact that he wouldn't get any information from the men, Micah was still tempted to pound their faces in just for scaring Bridget and going through her things. He forced himself to step off the side of the porch. Micah circled the house and ducked into the backyard, trying to avoid any exposure to the windows at the rear of the house. Using the trees and shrubs for cover, he slipped through Bridget's backyard and into

the neighbor's. Cutting between the two houses, he emerged in the front yard and walked down the neighbor's driveway as if he owned it.

Micah made it to the street, pretty sure he hadn't been spotted. Circling around his car as he yanked out his keys, he unlocked the vehicle and climbed in, quickly locking the doors behind him. Micah started the car, putting it into gear almost before the engine turned over. With a great effort of will, he managed to avoid looking at Bridget's house one last time as he pulled away.

Circling the block, he found a good place to park in front of a neighbor's house. Evergreens crowded the yard and branches protruded over the curb, hiding him from the house as well as creating some disguising shadows. Yanking his cell phone off his belt, he unlocked the screen and hit a button. Tapping his fingers against the steering wheel, Micah waited what seemed like forever for an answer.

"What's up?"

Micah blew out a relieved breath. "Joey. You need to pick up Sam. Now."

"What?" Joey's voice rose a little in surprise. "The tour's not over until December."

"I don't care. Get your ass back here, pick up the kid and disappear." Micah tried to keep his tone even, although the explanations were wasting time he could be using to track Bridget.

"I'm on the other side of the country, for fuck's sake. We talked about this. The road isn't a good place for a—"

Micah's palm hit the steering wheel. "And this is not the fucking time to argue! Bart Carlson's sniffing around a new dog—a woman that your *son* changed, by the way—and I want Sam out of reach."

There was a shocked silence and Micah was flooded with equal parts impatience and guilt. That was no way to tell Joey about his son's inexplicable breaking of the rule, the one law that was sacrosanct in their family—never, *ever* bite a human.

"Sam *bit* someone?" Joey finally choked out.

"Yeah." Blowing out a hard breath, Micah rubbed a hand over his head. "I'll give you the full story later. Right now, you need to come home, pick up Sam and get him out of Carlson's reach. How soon can you get here?"

"Tonight. Where's Sam now?" To Micah's relief, Joey sounded as if he'd recovered from his initial shock. Micah hadn't intended on telling his brother anything over the phone but his frustration had sent the words flying out of his mouth before he'd thought them through.

"School," Micah told him. "I don't think he's in any immediate danger. Carlson's guys seem to be focused on the woman. She's Sam's teacher though, so I don't want them tracing him through her."

After a pause, Joey asked, "D'you think it's true then? That Carlson collects people like us for his own personal zoo?"



"I don't know," Micah sighed. "His men were in her house. He wants her for something."

"Where's this new dog then? She at school too?"

"No," Micah told him. "The principal told me she called in sick last night. Sam's class has a sub. He just told me this morning about...biting her, so I was on my way over to see her. I'd just arrived when she came running out of the house and took off down the street. Once I hang up with you, I'll track her down. She's probably curled up in a hole somewhere, freaked out of her mind."

"Shit." It was Joey's turn to sigh. "I can't believe Sammy bit someone."

"Yeah, me either." Micah turned the key in the ignition. "Call when you get in and we'll pick you up at the airport."

"Will do," Joey agreed. "Oh, and Micah?"

"Yeah?"

"Good luck tracking down your woman."

"She's not my..." Micah trailed off when he realized that Joey had already hung up.

The sedan that had been parked in front of Bridget's house was gone. Micah rolled past the now-open space and parked farther down the street. He noticed as he passed that the front door was closed and presumably locked, so Micah walked around to the backyard.

He saw the open door on the garden shed and headed toward the small building. Ducking inside, he pulled the door almost closed behind him and yanked off his shirt. Toeing off his shoes, Micah reached down to pull his socks free. He stripped off his pants and boxer briefs too, having learned the hard way that some items of clothing were harder to get rid of once he had paws. He tucked the car keys and his watch into one of his pants pockets and then, completely naked, changed into a dog.

Now Micah could smell that she'd been here, in this very spot, for quite a while. Her scent made his heart accelerate. Ignoring that reaction as a complication he couldn't think about at the moment, he nudged the door open and slipped out of the shed. Moving quickly, he cut across backyards until he reached the house where she'd wiggled beneath the fence earlier.

It was a simple matter to pick up the path she'd taken. He caught the heady scent of Bridget, as well as the odor of disturbed earth and slightly crushed vegetation caused by the tread of her paws. Settling into a steady trot, Micah followed her route automatically while he tried to work out a plan for when he found her.

*Shit*, he thought. This was getting more and more messy. How could a six-year-old be the cause of so much trouble? Giving an impatient huff, he sped up, his nose filled with Bridget's scent.

Bridget's panicked dash had slowed into a regular trot. She'd reached the outskirts of the city and the houses were getting farther apart. Neighborhoods were replaced by sprawling farms with battered outbuildings and fields that disappeared over the rolls of faraway hills.

She needed a plan, a destination. Although she didn't feel comfortable going back to her house, she needed to find internet access somewhere, to find someone like her or at least some information that could help her. The two burglars' conversation repeated itself over and over in her head as she tried to make sense of it. Was Micah Foster the boss? He'd shown up so quickly after they had called. Why else would he have been at her house? He'd chased her too, which meant he had to have known who she was—or at least *what* she was.

A faint barking brought her out of her daydream. She whipped around, immediately on guard, not sure what—or *who*—to expect. A black and white dog was heading toward her at a full gallop. She could smell him now—his morning kibble and the pigs he guarded and, most reassuringly, the scent of ordinary, non-human dog.

Bridget was so relieved that he wasn't a human in dog's clothing that the dog was almost on her before she turned to run. His barks changed to a snarl and his teeth snapped together with an audible crack. Part of Bridget wanted to stay, to fight, to roll the smaller dog beneath her and press her teeth into his throat, but the human part of her was appalled at this urge and that part told her to run.

Bunching her hindquarters beneath her, Bridget shot forward, her tail tucked safely away from the threatening teeth close behind her. She gained ground quickly, her longer legs carrying her across the weed-strewn pasture. At the edge of the field, she flattened her body and wriggled beneath the bottom of a wire fence. As soon as her hind end was clear, she was off and running again, the barks of the pursuing dog growing fainter.

She didn't slow down until she'd passed through the next property, staying far away from the ranch house and barn, just in case. It had been stupid of her not to expect dogs. In fact, she'd been lucky not to have seen any people, or she could have been picked up as a stray or shot at by one of the farm owners.

Her stomach rumbled and she ignored it. The only food to be had around here was the small creatures hiding in the tall grass. Occasionally she'd hear the rustle of movement or catch a warm rodent scent. As acceptable as the canine part of her found eating a mouse, the human part was adamantly against it and totally grossed out by the idea.

What she needed was a town. Although that would mean more people, it also meant internet access and the possibility of real, from-a-store, cooked food. She'd be naked when she changed back to human form, which meant she'd also need clothes.

Bridget stopped for a few seconds to get her bearings. She'd gone south out of town and, according to the sun, she was still headed roughly south. Therefore, unless she'd gotten completely turned around, she should stumble into the town of Myra sooner or

later. She'd driven through the town a few times on her way to the outlet mall, and Bridget didn't think it was more than fifteen miles outside the southern edge of the city.

What she wanted to do was follow the main highway south to make sure she didn't get lost but a dog running by the side of the road was sure to attract interest. With a sigh, Bridget set off at an even jog, ignoring her rumbling stomach and the anxious thoughts swirling in her brain.

She had a plan now, as basic as it was – get to Myra.

*Where the hell is she going?* Micah fumed, coming to a halt at the edge of the city. He'd expected her to go a few blocks and then hole up somewhere, whimpering and confused. Instead, she'd bolted – running off into the country, who knew where.

With a growl, he turned around and retraced his steps, heading back to Bridget's house. He had to get back, change and pick Sam up from school. His brother would arrive tonight, so Micah could pick up the trail tomorrow morning, after Joey and Sam were safely headed far away from Bart Carlson.

Her trail would still be there for him. Tomorrow, he'd find her, talk to her, explain why Sam had done what he'd done... He sighed. How could he explain when Micah didn't understand himself?

Being a dog was getting old. Bridget whined softly as she forced herself to keep up a steady speed. She was getting too hungry to ignore the rumblings of her stomach and the rodents were starting to smell better and better. Trotting down into a shallow depression, she fought her way through the tall weeds that were almost as tall as she was.

She lunged forward to jump up and out of the small ditch. Something bit into her leg and yanked her backward. With a yelp, she tried to regain her balance while struggling against whatever held her hostage. The harder she fought, the tighter the hold, shooting tearing pains up her leg.

Panting, she forced herself to calm down, to stop struggling against the invisible restraint. Twisting her body around in order to investigate, Bridget saw that a strand of barbed wire, probably left over from a long-ago fence, had circled her leg, digging into her flesh and snagging holes in her skin.

Her first instinct was to turn to her human shape and use her hands to pull the wire free, but her dog legs were much smaller and a change would bury the wire so deeply into her leg she didn't think even her hands would be able to help. Besides, it would really, really hurt. Instead, Bridget used her teeth to tug at the encircling wire, trying to widen the loop that held her captive.

The wire, ancient and rusty, was stubborn. It resisted her efforts and panic began to rise as she imagined pursuing men – the doctor and the two burglars and even Micah Foster. At the thought of Micah, Bridget fought the wire even harder, whipping her

head from side to side, ignoring the barbs that caught on her tongue and the sides of her mouth.

Pulling down on the wire, she pulled her leg up hard, feeling the skin tearing. It worked though, and her foot pulled free. Twisting around, she licked the red lines that striped her leg a few times before realizing what she was doing. Bridget gagged at the metallic taste of blood that coated her mouth, whimpering as pain sent a shiver across her body, raising her fur away from her skin.

After scrambling out of the small ditch, she gingerly walked the first few steps, testing to see if anything was truly injured. Although it hurt, the leg was able to support its share of her weight, so she moved forward, determined to get to town before it got dark. She could feel the slow trickle of blood dampening her fur and running down the side of her paw. Squashing another rush of panic, Bridget tried to reassure herself by reasoning that the flow of blood was good since it would wash out the bacteria from the rusty wire.

As she tried to remember when her last tetanus booster had been, Bridget decided the danger of the road couldn't be worse than dogs and barbed wire. She could hear the occasional rumble and whoosh of traffic in the distance and she changed course to intersect the road.

Everything looked grainy and gray as dusk began to fall. Bridget increased her speed to a trot, hopping quickly off the injured hind leg with each stride. She could see the road, an asphalt interruption of ditch weeds, and saw that drivers had turned on their headlights. Falling in next to the road but far enough away to be out of direct sight, Bridget ran toward the town of Myra.

Her leg throbbed each time it moved and her stomach clenched in hunger. She began to doubt her decision—why hadn't she stayed at her house and called the cops on those men? She didn't know where she was headed, only that Myra had looked decent enough. Once she did arrive, Bridget wasn't sure what she planned on doing there.

She'd like to go back to her house but she was afraid that someone was watching it. One of the burglars had said her car was being monitored. She realized that, as she'd been thinking, her limping jog had slowed to a walk. Speeding up again, Bridget pressed on.

When the first raindrops hit, she wanted to cry. Only the thought that it might draw the attention of other dogs, wolves or people stopped her from throwing back her head and howling. Instead, she lowered her head, shook herself and trudged on. The drizzle was heavy enough to send rivulets through her thick fur that tickled as they ran down her body. Her injury stung as the water touched it, although the cool liquid did feel good against the inflamed skin around the cuts.

With her tail and head tucked, she almost walked right into the wall of a house. Peering through the falling rain, Bridget saw there were several houses bordering the street. With a shuddering sigh of relief, she realized she'd made it to Myra.

Micah made Sam's favorite after-school snack—celery with peanut butter, washed down by milk with a couple strawberries as a chaser. The little boy just poked at his food though, turning one piece of celery upside-down and squishing it onto the other one. Micah watched Sam, suddenly struck by how much the boy looked like Joey. "Did you see her?" Sam asked his mashed-together food.

"Yeah," Micah said, thinking of the dog that had dashed away after glimpsing him.

"She mad at me?"

"I haven't talked to her yet."

"Oh." One small finger poked at the peanut butter.

"Your dad's coming tonight."

That brought Sam's head up. "Yeah?"

Micah smiled. "Yeah. He's going to pick you up and take you on a trip."

The light behind Sam's eyes dimmed as quickly as it had brightened. Dropping his head, he resumed poking at his food.

"What?" Micah asked the top of the boy's head.

"Is it...because of what I did?" Sam finally asked.

"Of course not," Micah told him. "It's not a punishment. You get to go somewhere warm with a beach. We'll have to remember to pack your swim trunks."

Sam looked at him but even the promise of swimming hadn't lightened his expression. "Are you coming too?"

"I can't." Micah shook his head. "I have to find Brid— I mean, Ms. Grace."

"Oh." Sam traced peanut butter loops on his plate with his finger.

Looking at the brown swirls around the uneaten snack, Micah asked, "You done with that?"

When Sam nodded, Micah wiped the boy's face and hands and sent him out to play in the fenced yard. As he cleaned up the food, he glanced out the kitchen window to see his nephew sitting in the sandbox, not playing, gazing across the lawn. Micah sighed. He didn't know how to reassure the kid—or even if he *should* reassure him. What Sam had done was so wrong, maybe he should have to feel some guilt.

Micah winced. The boy wasn't even seven years old. He shouldn't have to know what guilt was yet.

Letting out a huff of air, he put Sam's plate in the dishwasher. He was well aware he didn't know what he was doing with this whole child-rearing thing. He'd probably already made a shitload of mistakes that would fuck Sam up forever. In fact, this whole thing with Bridget Grace was probably Micah's fault too.

Despite his fascination with her, Micah thought he'd done everything he could to not get involved. He'd tried his best to stay clear of her. With a wince, he amended that—except for that first night, when he'd followed her to the bar, slavered all over her

on the dance floor, dragged her outside and almost fucked her silly before some guy interrupted. In the grocery store, he'd rebuffed her attempts at conversation and silently watched her walk away. He'd not called her back, even as he'd stared, entranced, at the swaying fall of her hair and the silky-smooth way she moved, even as every cell in his body screamed at him, demanding that he pursue her, catch her, drag her home and never let her go.

His head came up. Where had that last thought come from? To distract himself, he glanced out the window again and saw that Sam was drawing in the sand. Micah relaxed a little. The kid would be fine. Sam would go with Joey on tour, surrounded by dozens of security guards. He'd be spoiled and played with and given too many treats, and Sam would be fine.

Still, Micah stared out the window at his nephew, anxiety chewing a hole in his stomach.

It was almost worse now that Bridget had made it to Myra. Now that she was weaving between pine trees lining the back of a neighborhood, she had to actually make a plan. She was too tired, hungry, pained, cold and wet to make any kind of rational decision.

Giving herself an all-over shake—one of the parts of dog-dom Bridget had decided she liked—she tried to dump her self-pity. The rain had lightened to a mist, although threatening thunder rumbled in the distance, promising more storms to come.

*Okay, think*, she ordered her brain. She needed food, warmth, a dry place to sleep and probably a full course of antibiotics. Bridget gave a defeated whine.

What she needed was an owner.

Although the independent part of her rejected the idea, her logical side knew this was the easiest way. She should find a family who wouldn't try to get her to eat dog food, perform a few tricks to keep them happy then change back to human and use their internet at night while they slept. It would only need to be for a few days until she had this whole thing figured out a little more. Pressing down mental images of collars and leashes and doghouses and other possible degrading dog things, Bridget focused on the warmth, the safety, the *food*.

Swallowing as her salivary glands kicked into overdrive at just the thought of something edible, she trotted between two houses, ready to start her search for a temporary family. The only problem was the rain and darkness had driven everyone inside. The street was deserted, as were porches and front yards.

Having swallowed her pride and made the decision to pick someone to "own" her, Bridget was disappointed her plan was being foiled. Trotting down the sidewalk, she looked left and right, trying to find someone who had braved the weather and looked as if they might be a dog lover. There was no one around.

The rain picked up and Bridget stopped in the middle of the sidewalk. She wanted to howl out her misery to the sky but she was afraid of getting water up her nose.

*Quit whining*, she told herself. It didn't look as if anyone was about to give her food and shelter for the night. There was nothing she could do about the food but she could find a drier place to sleep. She started walking again, this time with a different focus. A block and a half down, she spotted the perfect spot—a cushioned wicker loveseat tucked back on a wraparound porch.

She trotted in that direction, noting that the windows to the front of the house were dark. Slipping up the porch steps, she hopped onto the loveseat, which creaked beneath her weight. Bridget held her breath, waiting for someone to come out and kick her off the furniture, but the house stayed quiet.

She lay down, trying to get comfortable. Despite her exhaustion, Bridget couldn't fall asleep. The loveseat, as cushy as it had looked from the street, wasn't very padded, and she could feel the ridges from the wicker pressing into her. Her whole body ached with hunger and the injured hind leg would give an extra throb now and then, just to add to Bridget's misery.

With a sigh, she settled her chin on the armrest and watched the rain. The mist caught the illumination from the streetlights, appearing almost gold as it fell. Even as miserable as Bridget felt, she had to admit it was beautiful.

Her ears caught a faint sound in the distance. Bridget listened to the noise, trying to puzzle out what it was. Her head jerked up—running feet! Panic caught her for a few seconds before she realized it was too steady, too slow for any of her pursuers. It had to be someone jogging, although why the idiot was running in the rain was beyond Bridget's comprehension.

Just to be on the safe side, she slipped off the loveseat and down the porch steps to the lawn. A large bush grew wild at the corner of the house and Bridget tucked herself behind it, hoping that the shadows would hide her from the passerby. She felt a little silly crouching in the greenery but Bridget figured she was entitled to be paranoid, given the number of people who'd been pursuing her during the past twenty-four or so hours.

When the runner came into view, Bridget held her breath. Water droplets clung to the man and the reflection of the streetlights off the moisture made his black skin appear to glow. Bridget shifted, trying to get a better look.

*Holy moly*, she thought, staring at the way the muscles stood out on his thighs and calves with each stride, the strong curves emphasized by the oblique lighting. He looked like a commercial for running shoes. *Or a commercial for gods*, Bridget thought, completely and utterly entranced. Safety forgotten, she moved out of her hiding place and trotted after him.

*This is a nice angle*, Bridget decided, watching the flex of his ass beneath the fabric of his shorts as he ran in front of her. The closer she got, the bigger the man looked. Tall, wide, strong... Bridget dreamily decided he was perfect, from the top of his shaved head to his feet hitting the wet pavement.

His smell was nice too, even with the sweat mixed in, especially the trace of...cooked meat. Bridget's eyes almost rolled back in her head. He'd had a hamburger for dinner – she could smell it on him. She couldn't hold back a whimper. She *loved* him.

The man whipped around in mid-stride, hand flying to his hip. Bridget froze less than ten feet away. She hadn't noticed how close she'd gotten. They stared at each other and Bridget realized just how stupid she'd been. He could call animal control on her or chase her off or, if he'd actually been carrying the gun he'd instinctively reached for, even shoot her. She crouched down a little, torn between running away and just curling up in a little ball and pretending none of this had ever happened.

"Shit!" the man swore quietly. "You scared me there, dog."

Bridget started breathing again. No shooting or chasing or calling of authorities yet. He was still watching her warily though. She figured that her dog body language was a little strange. Trying to think of how "I come in peace" would translate into dog language, Bridget remembered her tail and wagged it tentatively. She glanced back at it as she did so, just to make sure it was actually working. It was.

The man smiled in a flash of white teeth. "Better go home, dog."

*Kind of hard to do when random men are breaking into that home*, Bridget thought, but just wagged her tail again.

"Home," he commanded, pointing back down the street.

*Can't. Besides, that's the wrong way*. Obviously, the tail wasn't working as a pick-up gesture. She sat down and lifted a paw.

With another smile, the man walked toward her. "Are you lost, puppy?"

Bridget tried cocking her head and giving a little whine. She knew it was pathetic but at this point, she would do anything to go home with this man with the gorgeous body who smelled like heaven and hamburgers. In a stroke of genius, she stood up and walked a few steps toward him, exaggerating her limp.

*Hah*, she thought triumphantly when the man's smile fell away, replaced by a look of concern. *Benji has nothing on my acting skills*.

"What's wrong, puppy?" With another whine, she limped over to him and sat, giving him the biggest, most entreating eyes she could manage. Bridget was tempted to lean against his legs but remembered in time that she was fairly damp. She really hoped she didn't smell like wet dog.

"Shit, you're big," was the man's response. If Bridget could have frowned, she would have. She supposed that a hundred-plus pounds of human body had to translate into a fairly large dog but it still wasn't very nice to hear. He owed her another hamburger for that one.

Besides, he was one to talk. The guy was *huge*. Sitting next to him, Bridget was dwarfed and she had to tilt her head back to see his face. This close, she could see a scattering of scars over his cheek and forehead, and his left eye turned down a little at



the corner. His smile was a little lopsided too—higher on the right than left side. Bridget guessed that whatever had caused those scars had done some nerve damage as well.

"Think you can make it to my house?" the man asked.

*For hamburgers? Definitely.* Bridget stood up and wagged her tail madly.

"I'd check at some of these houses to see if anyone knows who you belong to but I think everyone's asleep by now. Besides, they'd probably not open the door once they looked through the peephole and saw this face. Not without a shotgun, at least." He gestured toward his cheek and gave a rueful grin. "Just moved here so I haven't gotten to know too many people yet. Obviously I need to get out more, since I'm standing here talking to a dog on the street." He glanced up toward the sky. "In the rain. C'mon, muttly. Better get home before it really starts to pour." He turned and jogged down the street.

*Muttly?* With a sigh, Bridget trotted to catch up with him. This dog shape wasn't very good for her ego. Muttly was not a pet name she'd like to hear coming from the mouth of a man she was drooling over. If she hadn't been a dog, she would have laughed. She'd been *literally* drooling over him once she smelled the hamburger.

The man glanced down at her. "Where's the limp?"

*Oops.* Now that she wasn't thinking about it, her limp had almost disappeared. Although she was tempted to fall back into it, she reminded herself that, now that she was around people, she had to start acting like a dog and pretend as if she didn't understand what anyone was saying. Instead of limping, Bridget looked up at him with her blankest look and wagged her tail.

"Con artist, huh?" Even though he was running at a pretty fast pace, the man wasn't even breathing hard. "Can't really blame you. It's a miserable night. No one in their right mind would be out in this." He let out a harsh bark of laughter. "Guess 'right mind' are the operative words, huh? Okay, talking to the dog again. Gotta stop that." Glancing down at Bridget, he said, "Race you to the house, fuzzy!" and took off at a sprint.

Bridget decided that being called fuzzy was slightly better than muttly, although not by much. Realizing that she was staring at the flexing muscles in his back that were outlined by the wet fabric of his t-shirt, Bridget took off after him. He was fast. She had to work a little to draw even with him.

She fell into a steady pace next to the man, not wanting to get ahead, especially since she didn't know where they were going. The man slowed to a walk and turned into a driveway attached to a cute two-story house. He was breathing hard as he walked to the front porch. Unzipping a pocket on his shorts, he pulled out a key and unlocked the door.

"Well, come on in," the man told her, pushing the door open. "You'd better be housetrained."

Bridget didn't even bother to take offense at that, since she was so grateful for the offer of a warm house. She politely did a full body shake on the porch before stepping inside. The man swore.

"Watch it!" he sputtered, his arm across his face to block any droplets. Bridget felt somewhat bad, although hunger took over and wiped all guilty feelings away when she stepped into the house, her nose leading her straight to the kitchen.

"Go right ahead and make yourself at home then," he muttered behind her but Bridget ignored him. The smells were wonderful, filling her nose and making her drool.

"Hungry?" he asked, having followed her into the kitchen.

*Yes! Yes! Yes!* Bridget tried the sitting and offering a paw thing again. After all, it had gotten her a home for the night. Hopefully it worked for food too.

The man smiled his lopsided grin. "I'm starting to learn your bag of tricks. I suppose if I don't give you something to eat, you'll start limping again."

Bridget figured she'd have to work on her range of doggie manipulations. For now, though, since he was headed to the refrigerator, this appeared to be working.

"I don't have any dog food," he told her, his head buried in the fridge.

*Thank God.*

"How about leftover hamburgers?" He emerged with a plate covered in foil. The most marvelous smell emanated from the platter, making her drool once again.

*Hallelujah!* Her tail went crazy with wagging.

He grinned. "Guess that's a 'yes'."

Bridget could barely resist knocking him down in order to eat the burgers directly off the plate. He pulled another plate from a cupboard and forked a burger onto it. Although she knew it wasn't really polite, she'd eaten the hamburger before the plate even reached the ground.

The man eyed the empty plate and then her beseeching eyes. "Still hungry?"

She wagged her tail again. The first hamburger had barely made a dent in her hunger.

He sighed and forked two more hamburgers onto her plate before setting it on the floor. This time, Bridget was able to restrain herself and didn't gobble the burgers down until the plate made contact with the tile.

While she ate, Bridget heard him filling a big mixing bowl with water, which he set by her plate. It took a few tries to figure out how to drink but she caught on quickly and was amazed at how much water a curled tongue could bring into her mouth. After the food and water, she felt much better and also really, really sleepy.

The man left the room and returned shortly, carrying a towel.

"Come here, pup," he ordered and she went to him with a lazy wag of her tail. He began to towel her off and it felt so incredibly good that she groaned with pleasure, wriggling with the motion of the towel. No wonder dogs liked to be petted—this was

nice. She let out another low moan as he did her ears, moving down her neck to her back, the terry fabric massaging her all the way down to her tail. Kneeling, the man began on her legs and feet, and when he ran the towel over her injured back leg, she yelped and pulled away.

"Sorry, puppy," he told her, sounding contrite. "So you weren't faking completely, huh?"

Ignoring him, she twisted around to see her injury but it was hard to tell how bad the cuts were beneath her fur.

"Let me see," he ordered, leaning in to peer at her leg, his huge hands gentle as he held the fur away from the wound. "What'd you do, get caught up in barbed wire, poor baby?"

*Got it in one*, Bridget thought, feeling a warm rush of liking for this man. She was still twisted around enough that she could lick his ear, so she did.

"Hey!" He jolted back, dropping her leg and rubbing at his ear. After his initial startled reaction, the man started to smile. "What's with the wet Willy?" He scratched her ears. "Better bring you to the vet tomorrow," he told her. "It's too late for stitches but you'll need some antibiotics. You'll live though."

After a final pat, the man disappeared into the next room which, judging by the detergent and dryer sheet smells coming from it, was the laundry room. Bridget waited for him, not sure if she should be half in love with a guy just because he scratched her ears and fed her cold hamburgers. When he reemerged into the kitchen a few minutes later, he was completely naked.

Bridget froze and stared, knowing that she shouldn't look, that she was operating under false pretenses, that it wasn't right to stare at him when he thought she was a dog. She couldn't help herself though—he was just so incredibly gorgeous. She realized that her tail was wagging.

"I'm taking a shower. You behave yourself."

Bridget made a low sound in her throat, not quite a bark. *Woof indeed*, she thought, watching his tight backside leaving the room. She resisted following for a solid ten seconds before running up the stairs after him. She'd only be staying for a day or so; she had limited time to look her fill.

He'd left the bathroom door open and she padded into the steamy room, guilt niggling at her but not strongly enough to stop her from slipping her muzzle between the shower curtain and the wall.

*He is perfect*, Bridget decided, watching as soapsuds ran over the sculpted planes of his body, the bubbles stark white against his mocha skin. As big as the man was, there was no fat on his body. His eyes were closed as water ran over his shaved head and down his face and neck, cascading off his nose and lips. She must have made a noise because his eyes flew open and his whole body tightened in readiness.

Bridget pulled back, startled as well, but his relieved laugh brought her nose poking in once again.

"Dipshit dog," he insulted amiably, starting to lather his hands again. "Scared the hell out of me. I should call you Norman Bates."

*Please don't.* If a dog could wince, Bridget would have.

"Except you're a girl dog, aren't you? Norma then."

*Yeah, not that much better.*

"I shouldn't name you though."

*Especially if you're going to choose such lame names.*

"I'm sure you're someone's dog. I shouldn't get attached."

That jolted Bridget back to reality. *She* was the one who shouldn't get attached. After a couple of days at the most, she would be gone. This sweet, ripped guy was just a source of food, shelter and, when he slept, internet access. She knew she had to figure out what she was going to do, if she was going to try to keep her house and her job and her life or if she was going to create a new one somewhere safe, a place where creepy doctors and hired housebreakers couldn't find her.

As oddly tempting as it was, she couldn't just stay this man's pet, eating hamburgers and peeking at him in the shower. With a heavy sigh, she withdrew and padded down the hall. His bedroom smelled of him in the best kind of way. The sight of his bed reminded Bridget how very tired she was. Hopping up, she stretched out on the blissfully soft comforter and rested her head on a pillow. She was asleep in seconds.

"I don't think so."

The man's voice jolted her out of a deep sleep. She opened an eye and saw him standing by the bed, amusement making the corners of his mouth twitch. Thumping her tail against the bed a few times to show that she was happy to see him, Bridget let her eye drift close.

"Off."

*Seriously?* Bridget lifted her head. The bed was huge. Surely there was room for both of them? She shifted over closer to one side and let her head fall back onto the pillows.

"Off. The. Bed." He sounded serious this time.

With a groan, Bridget heaved herself up and off the bed. She stood on the floor and yawned so widely her jaw cracked.

"I don't care how many teeth you have," the man told her. "You don't get to sleep on the bed."

*We'll see about that.* Plotting ways of sneaking back in, Bridget curled up on the floor. The man had pulled on some boxer briefs after his shower. She pretended to sleep as she watched him climb into bed. All she had to do was wait until he nodded off.

Instead he stared at the ceiling. What seemed like a long time later, he flopped over onto his stomach, squashed the pillow into a new shape and jammed it under his face. Bridget could tell he wasn't sleeping. In fact, his body almost vibrated with tension. Finally, he turned to his side and propped himself on an elbow.

"Fine! I can't sleep with you staring at me. Get your hairy ass up here." The man flipped over onto his other side in a huff.

*Excellent!* Happy that she didn't have to wait until he fell asleep, especially since that seemed to be taking an extraordinarily long time, Bridget hopped back onto the bed and circled two and a half times before she caught herself and lay down. Just because she looked like a dog didn't mean she had to act like one.

She had a frightening thought – what if the longer she stayed a dog, the more she turned into one? What if, a year from now, she'd not have any humanness to her at all?

A little freaked out by the thought, Bridget moved closer to the man, pressing her back against his. She felt him tense at the contact and then relax. A few moments later, his breathing slowed and deepened in sleep. Although she was tempted to close her eyes and wallow in the shared warmth and the softness of the bed, Bridget was still unnerved by the idea of spending the rest of her life as a dog.

Easing her body away from the man, she tensed and froze when he muttered in his sleep. When he grew quiet again, she hopped onto the floor and padded out of the room. As soon as she'd left the bedroom and was out of viewing range of the bed, she changed. Such relief flowed through her when her muscles and bones slid into position that she burst into tears as soon as her body allowed. Pressing her fists against her face, she tried to muffle her sobs as she hurried away from his bedroom.

She slipped down the stairs, taking deep, raggedy breaths, trying to get her tears under control.

"Later," she said in a faint whisper and then almost started crying again at the sheer relief of being able to talk again. She needed to focus on finding a computer. There had to be *something* on the internet about other people who were like her, who could change into dogs. She wondered if there were even those who could change into other things – cats or horses or end tables or whatever. If the human body could transform as hers did, why not into other shapes and species?

As she thought, she crept from room to room, searching for the dark shape of a laptop or desktop computer, the green flicker of a modem light or the reflection from a screen. The streetlights outside provided just enough illumination for her to see only the basic shapes of furniture and doorways, so she used her hands to feel.

The living room yielded nothing. Neither did the kitchen or dining room. Holding her breath, Bridget tiptoed back up the stairs and past his partially open bedroom door. She didn't dare peek inside in case she woke him and had to explain why a naked stranger was tromping through his house.

The first room she checked looked like a guest bedroom. Disappointed once again, Bridget poked her head into the next room and had to suppress a squeak of happy discovery when she saw that it'd been set up as a study. Excitement tightened her throat as she hurried to the computer on the desk. Turning both speakers off, she sat in the chair in front of the computer and booted it up.

When the white rectangle with “Password” beneath it came up on the screen, Bridget stared at it for a full minute. Of course his computer was password-protected – why hadn’t she thought of that? Guessing was out of the question. She didn’t even know the guy’s name.

At that thought, she changed her focus. The surface of the desk was clear of clutter, so Bridget slid open the top drawer. Pens rolled with the movement of the drawer, sounding thunderous in the quiet night, and Bridget’s heart pounded in her throat.

When a solid minute of silence had gone by without a peep from the man sleeping in the other room, she shuffled through the contents of the drawer as quietly as possible. Her fingers slid across a smooth surface and she pulled out a half-sheet of address labels.

*Score*, she thought, bringing the labels over to the window to read what was printed. Unless the man who had taken her in was in the habit of stealing other people’s address labels, his name was John Dexter.

*John*. Bridget cocked her head and considered the name. It didn’t seem to fit her host, just too plain for such a...fascinating guy. She realized she was smiling and mentally pinched herself. First lusting after Micah and now she had a crush on her pseudo-owner? What was wrong with her? Hurrying back over to sit at the desk, she tucked the address labels back in the drawer and slid it closed.

The bright white of the password box on the computer screen taunted her. With a huff of annoyance, Bridget pushed the off button on the CPU.

“What the hell?” The sleepy voice from the doorway startled Bridget so much, she toppled sideways out of her chair. When she hit the floor with an “oof”, she was already changing. She crouched low, hiding as much of herself as she could behind the chair, even as she knew it was too late. He’d seen her.

“Get out here!” John ordered and Bridget obeyed, head lowered and tail tucked.

He blinked at her. “Where did...?” After rubbing at his eyes with the heels of his hands, he looked at her again and then shook his head. “I’m really losing it. You didn’t happen to see a naked chick sitting here, did you, muttly?”

*Nope. I was the naked chick. And if you call me muttly again, I might have to bite you in the ass. Literally.* Bridget wagged her tail, giving him her best dumb and innocent look.

“Never mind. It must have been a trick of the light or my brain or something. C’mon back to bed, fuzzy. Don’t mind me and my delusions.” He turned away and Bridget, relieved, followed him back to the bedroom.

## Chapter Five

Bridget woke up feeling cozy and contented. Snuggling closer to the warm body next to her, she let herself drift in and out of sleep. The mountain of man—*John*, she reminded herself—stirred and she opened one eye to glare at this disturber of sleep. He had turned onto his back and was stretching his arms above his head. Any irritation Bridget had felt about being jostled out of sleep was swept away by the beautiful sight of his taut chest, muscles lifting beneath his skin.

She lifted her head for a better view, so entranced that she jumped when his hand began massaging her ears. With a groan of pleasure, Bridget let her chin rest on his ridged stomach and closed her eyes blissfully. Too soon, he gave her a final pat and his hand fell away.

“Morning, muttly.” John slid away from her and sat up, rubbing his eyes. “I had some crazy-ass dreams last night.”

Even in dog form, Bridget couldn’t meet his eyes. She hopped off the bed.

“Suppose you need to go outside.” John stood up and stretched again.

If Bridget could have made a face, she would have. Peeing in the bushes was not her favorite part of being a dog.

John pulled on some sweatpants and led the way downstairs. His sliding glass door in the dining room led to a fenced yard. One corner had a few evergreens, so Bridget used them for cover. Although she knew a regular dog wouldn’t care who saw her pee, she still did—especially if John, on whom she was rapidly developing a serious crush, was the one watching.

He was smirking when she returned to the door. “Shy?” he mocked, sliding the door open for her. Bridget chose to ignore that and instead focused on breakfast.

“Still no dog food,” he said, digging in the fridge. “How does bacon and eggs sound?”

*Perfect.* Bridget wagged her tail, following him around the kitchen as he cooked. After he tripped over her for the second time, he pointed at the far side of the room.

“Go over there and sit,” he commanded.

She obeyed with a sigh, flopping down to wait the endless time it took for him to finish cooking breakfast. She was going to have to figure out how to keep him from buying dog food.

Bridget caught herself. It wouldn’t matter if he did buy dog food—she wouldn’t be staying. She had a were-dog mystery to figure out, as well as her *life* to figure out. With a sigh, she rested her chin on her paws and watched John putter around the kitchen. He really was built, she decided dreamily. In the morning light, she could see that his chest

was peppered with the same small scars that marked his face but they didn't detract from his hotness.

"Want to go to work with me today?" he asked, pulling two plates from the cupboard.

*Okay.* There wasn't anything she could do without his computer password anyway. Bridget figured she'd see him type it soon enough if she paid attention. Going to work with him would definitely beat out moping around the house all day, worrying about her situation. She wondered what kind of job he had that allowed him to bring his dog.

"I should get you to the vet too," John said, putting a plate on the floor in front of her. "Get those cuts of yours checked out." He'd given her a generous helping of bacon and eggs, plus he'd made her toast and even buttered it.

*He is an angel,* Bridget thought with a happy sigh, giving his hand a quick lick of thanks as he released the plate.

He watched her eat for the five seconds it took for Bridget to clear her plate. "No offense, muttly, but you're kind of a pig."

Bridget would have definitely taken offense, except she was too busy licking any stray crumbs off her plate. He'd refilled her mixing bowl of water earlier, so she went over for a drink, feeling full, warm and very happy. As John ate, she took a quick nap under the table, her head on his bare foot.

Micah was worried. More than worried—he was frantic.

What made it worse was that Joey had taken off with Sam this morning. Micah had been forced to peel the little boy's arms from around his neck before handing Sam over to Joey. Micah knew it was for the best, that he couldn't risk the little boy's safety, but he'd gotten used to having the kid around. The house was too quiet without him.

Micah had listened to the drum of rain on the roof for hours the night before, thinking about Bridget outside, wet and cold, most likely scared out of her mind. Could she turn back and forth at will? Did it hurt to change the first time? He couldn't remember the first time he'd turned into a dog. He'd been born into it and he hadn't known anyone personally who'd been bitten. It had always been drilled into him that it was the worst thing he could do, to bite and change a person. Micah still couldn't believe that tiny Sam had done it.

Micah shook his head. He'd gone over and over this in his mind and all it did was make him feel pissed off and guilty. It was time for something constructive. Picking up her trail from the day before, he followed her scent out of town. She'd cut through fields in full view of houses and he growled under his breath at her lack of caution.

Immediately, he felt a fresh wave of guilt. Of course Bridget didn't know how to act, how to survive as a dog. She'd only been one for a couple days and she didn't have anyone to teach her how to avoid attention and keep herself safe. The whole situation was Micah's fault—he should have been a better teacher to Sam, should have drummed it into his head how horribly wrong it was to bite someone.



With a sigh, Micah started across a field, only to spot the blur of an oncoming dog. He could have easily taken the dog on and won, but Micah didn't want to trigger a community hunt for a vicious stray dog. Besides, he'd hate to hurt another dog.

Micah turned and ran back the way he'd come, swearing mentally the whole time. Without crossing the field, he couldn't tell which way she'd gone. Glancing behind him, he saw that the other dog had stopped at the property line, barking furiously. Slowing to a trot, Micah retraced his steps back into the city.

He returned to Bridget's house and changed inside the garden shed, where he'd left his clothes once again, and then walked to his car. He'd parked a block away again today, just in case Carlson's men were watching the front of her house. Micah was grateful for her shed—it was a bitch to change in the car. When people saw him putting his pants on in the backseat, they always assumed the worst.

He sat on the driver's seat and pulled the door closed. Taking out his phone, Micah started making calls.

"Huh. That's strange."

John was examining her hind leg, running his fingers over it.

*What?* Bridget twisted around to see what he was looking at. When he brushed aside the hair covering the cuts, she could see that they were just pink lines, not at all painful and almost completely healed.

"I'd swear these were still bleeding last night," he muttered, moving his head even closer.

Bridget assumed that accelerated healing was part of the whole dog-transformation thing. She was happy there were a few upsides. So far, it'd been nothing but hassle, harassment by strangers, eating off the floor and peeing outside—not really the most stellar talent. This quick fix of her injuries was good since it meant no trip to a vet, who might recognize all was not quite normal with this dog.

She wagged her tail and whacked John in the back of the head with it.

"Watch it," he warned. "I could still drop you off at the pound, you know."

His grin belied his mock-annoyance. Tugging her leg free of John's hold, Bridget whirled around completely to face him. Tail wagging wildly, she ducked into a play bow. John reached for her and she danced away and spun in an excited circle. Bridget felt better than she had in a long time and energy was shooting through her. Some of it had to come out or she'd explode.

Giving a small yip, she bowed again and watched as John pushed himself to his feet.

"Sorry, muttly. I'd love to play but I've got a meeting with a new client at nine. One of us has to go to work and put food on the table—and the floor. I'd better change." He took the stairs three at a time and she bounded up behind him, not about to let a chance to see him mostly naked go to waste.

"No, I'm sorry," the woman on the other end of the phone was saying. "We haven't had anyone bring in a stray dog this week. Why don't you give me your number and we'll call if anything like that comes in."

Micah rattled off his cell number, thanked the woman and hung up, trying very hard not to throw his phone across the room in frustration. That was the last vet clinic in a fifty-mile radius. He'd already checked all the pounds, humane societies and pet supply shops. Sitting in his car after losing Bridget's trail, he'd called all the places he could think of and then headed home to call every place in the area he could find on the internet that had any connection to dogs. He even called the dog daycares in case a dog owner mentioned spotting a stray. Micah was desperate.

Unable to sit still, he prowled across the room, trying to think. It would've been easier if it had been a different woman—*any* other woman—but it had to be Bridget. The fact that it was her clouded his brain with worry. Images of her flashed through his mind—soft and smiling at the conference, her face flushed and her eyes heavy-lidded as he touched her outside the bar, her eyes uncertain at the grocery store, her full bottom lip caught in her teeth...

With a snarl, he grabbed the car keys and slammed his way out of the front door. He'd go look for her. That had to be better than hanging around the house, driving himself crazy with guilt and worry and lust. He knew she'd been heading south when he'd been blocked by the dog. He'd follow the southbound road and see if he could find any trace of her. He had to do something—it was either search or go nuts.

Bridget now understood why dogs traveled with their heads out car windows. There were just so many *smells*! Although she wasn't far enough gone to hang her own head out the open window, she couldn't stop her nose from twitching, especially when they passed the doughnut shop. She actually whined at that one.

Reaching over, John gave her a pat. "Almost there, sweet pea."

*Sweet pea is much better than muttly or fuzzy*, she thought. Her tail thumped against the seat.

John pulled the car into the lot of an office park and swung into a space in front of a glass door reading Hammer Investigations. He pushed open the door and got out of the car, unfolding his big frame.

"Coming?" he asked Bridget, holding his door open. Hopping over the console, she joined him on the pavement.

He looked at her a little uncertainly. "I probably should get a leash for you," he muttered and Bridget sighed. Of course, the collar and leash. She'd known that was coming. At least it wasn't dog food though.

"Nothing to do about that now," he said. "Come on then. Just don't be running off and getting me in trouble."

With an agreeable wag of her tail, Bridget followed, waiting for him to unlock the glass door and push it open before she trotted inside.

*I like it*, she decided, wandering around the compact, two-room office. It was comfortable without looking worn. In the smaller of the two rooms, she hopped onto the big chair behind the desk. *Nice*.

John laughed from the doorway. "You going to do the meeting?" he asked, pocketing his keys. Jumping off the chair, Bridget eyed his fit form in the business-casual attire. Although her favorite was seeing him in nothing at all, she had to admit the man cleaned up well.

"If this woman's allergic, you're going in the bathroom," he warned. Ignoring the threat, she brushed past him into the front part of the office—obviously the reception area—and hopped onto the leather couch. She watched him as he turned on lights and started coffee, enjoying being able to stare at him all she wanted without him getting self-conscious or uncomfortable.

His beautiful body aside, John was a really nice guy. It was too bad she had to be a dog when she met him. Bridget let out a mournful sigh. Wasn't that typical—she finally meets the perfect man and he thinks she's a dog.

The door opened, startling her out of her self-pitying wallow. A woman walked in, chic and thin and looking very familiar. Her blond hair was streaked with white and cut to frame her face. Although the wispy fringe softened her strong features somewhat, she still looked formidable. Her eyes were intent and her mouth was set in a straight, determined line. Bridget cocked her head, trying to remember where she'd seen this woman.

"Mrs. Carlson," John greeted, holding his hand out to her.

*Mrs. Carlson, of course!* If Bridget had a hand at the moment, she would have smacked herself in the head with it. Mrs. Lila Carlson was a fixture on the local newspaper's community page. She was big with the charities. Her husband, Bart Carlson, had inherited Blue Star, his family's multibillion-dollar cleaning products industry. As social as Mrs. Carlson seemed to be, gossip said her husband was just a few acquaintances short of being a hermit. They lived on a huge estate in an upscale neighborhood in the northwest part of the city.

"Mr. Dexter." She allowed her fingers to be captured in the barest of shakes and then retreated. "Thank you for meeting me."

"No problem," he told her, ushering her into the back office. Bridget left her perch on the couch, eager to hear why Lila Carlson was meeting with a private detective. John cut her off before she could slip into the office though.

"Watch the front desk," he told her with a twitch of his lips before he shut the door in her face.

*Ass*, Bridget grumbled mentally. *Good thing I have super-dog hearing*. She lay down next to the back office door, her ear as close to the crack at the bottom as possible.

"As I mentioned on the phone, Mr. Dexter," Mrs. Carlson was saying, "I would appreciate your discretion."

"Of course," John told her.

"Morton Wellesby had only the best things to say about you," Mrs. Carlson continued. "I've never found it necessary to hire a private investigator before. For any past issues, I was able to use my husband's security staff but, for obvious reasons, I need to be discreet about this."

*Not obvious to me*, Bridget thought, brimming with curiosity. *What reasons?* She wiggled closer and pressed her ear against the bottom of the door.

"Sure," John assured her. "Whatever you say to me will not leave this office."

"Thank you, Mr. Dexter. I just need to know what's going on. I'm not a woman who can be blissfully ignorant."

*I'm with you on that one. If Mr. Carlson is cheating, you better find out and dump his ass.* Bridget had to stop her tail from thumping against the floor in a supportive wag.

"What do you think is going on?" John asked.

There was a pause, long enough for Bridget to give an impatient wiggle.

"Honestly, I don't know," Mrs. Carlson admitted, speaking slowly, as if considering each word carefully. "It was small things at first. He'd be gone in the evenings and on weekends—at work, or so he said. One night, though, some pipes froze and burst in the guesthouse. He usually manages things like that, so when I couldn't reach him on his cell or office line, I drove over to the office and the night watchman told me Bart wasn't there. After that, I made some inquiries and discovered he was *rarely* there, only coming in for the most urgent meetings."

"Ah." There was no surprise in John's voice. Bridget wondered how many times he'd heard different variations on this same theme.

"I didn't say anything about my visit to Bart. Since then, there have been a variety of things—mysterious phone calls, 'work emergencies' at all hours, that sort of thing. The final straw, what drove me to ask Morton if he could recommend a discreet investigator, was when I discovered Bart had a second property. One that I knew nothing about until I went through his files."

"I'm sorry."

Mrs. Carlson gave a short laugh. "As am I, Mr. Dexter. Obviously, my first assumption is that there is another woman."

"That seems reasonable," John agreed.

"I need you to find out for me whether my assumption is correct." Her voice shook on the last word and Bridget whined a little in sympathy. *Men are bastards*, she thought. *Sorry, John—except for you. The rest though...*

Micah's face flashed across her mind but she quickly shoved the thought away. *Bastard.*

The car behind Micah honked and flew by in a flash of silver. He barely glanced at it, intent on studying the ditches and outlying fields for any sign of Bridget. He wanted to park the car and change to see if he could get a scent but it was too dangerous on a busy highway during the day. Even at night, he'd have to find a secluded place to park the car and change. With the way things had been going since his conference with Sam's teacher, he'd probably unknowingly pick private land as his parking spot and the property owner would be waiting with a shotgun when Micah returned.

Therefore, he was driving too slowly on the highway, scanning either side in what was most likely a futile effort. A flash of golden brown gleamed in the ditch grass and Micah hit the brakes and jerked the wheel to the right. He parked on the shoulder, jumping out almost before the car finished rolling to a stop.

Nausea rolled in his belly as he waded through the weeds toward the spot he'd glimpsed. Even in human form, he could smell the reek of death as he moved closer. Micah could hear his rough breaths but couldn't do anything about the sound. It was like his body belonged to someone else.

The patch of brown fur grew larger until he could see the whole animal—a deer. His legs lost their strength and he fell to his knees next to the carcass, the cold sweat of relief prickling his neck. The fur was the exact shade of Bridget's hair, the color of polished maple wood. This so easily could have been her—changed and confused in the wilderness, wandering out in front of a car, possibly pursued by a dog or Carlson's men.

Breathing deeply and then coughing when he managed to suck in a lungful of the smell of deer decomposition, Micah regained his feet and climbed out of the roadside ditch. Despite the danger of changing, he needed to do it. He needed to track her. This way was going to drive him crazy. Tonight, after it got dark, he'd drive out here again and change under cover of night.

"You okay, buddy?" A man had pulled over behind Micah's car and was calling out the window. Micah didn't blame him for not getting out—he must look pretty crazy stumbling around in the ditch.

"Yeah, thanks," Micah told him. "I'm looking for my dog. That dead deer's the same color, so I thought it was her from the road."

"Sure, that's understandable," the man said with a sympathetic smile. "Good luck—hope you find your dog."

"Thanks." Micah raised a hand as the other man's car swung back into the southbound lane and rolled passed. Getting into his own car, Micah let his head rest against the seatback for a moment. His heart was still pounding. What was it about this woman? Why did he feel so connected to this almost-stranger?

Taking a deep, shivering breath, he shifted the car into drive. He needed to find her before he went completely insane.

Bridget thanked her lucky stars she'd found someone who was not only nice and fed her human food, but who also had a really interesting job. She'd zoned out a little while John told Mrs. Carlson about his rates and policies, but she was quick to move away from her position by the door when she heard them moving in her direction.

She stopped in mid-dart when she realized that neither person would accuse a dog of eavesdropping. Sitting down, she put on her happy, blank dog stare and waited for them to come out.

"What a beautiful dog," Mrs. Carlson said as she emerged from the office. If Bridget hadn't already been on the woman's side, that would have clinched it. She wagged her tail in thanks. "What kind is he? Or she?"

"It's a she," John answered, following Mrs. Carlson out of the office. "And I'm not sure what she is. I just found her last night."

"Whatever she is, she's just gorgeous." Mrs. Carlson moved toward the exterior door. "Thank you, Mr. Dexter. Please keep me informed of your progress."

"I will." John held the door for her to pass through. When it swung shut behind her, he grinned at Bridget. Her tail wagged—she couldn't help it. "So, gorgeous, feel like helping me track down a cheating bastard of a husband?"

*Sure. Not much else on the schedule.*

"Want a snack first? I have cashews."

She really did love him.

Bridget found that if she positioned herself just right, she could see John's computer screen as he researched Mr. Bartholomew Carlson. On paper, the man was squeaky clean. He seemed to be more of a figurehead at Blue Star than anything. The company was run by a competent board of directors and had a CEO who was more concerned with stability than short-term profit.

Mr. Carlson had other interests. Growing up, he'd been a science geek. His father had left his mother when Bart was eight and his mother had raised him with the help of her father, the founder of Blue Star. When he was nineteen, his mother had died of uterine cancer. He'd gotten a year into his Ph.D in molecular biology before his grandfather had died and left the company in Bart's hands.

Even after he'd discovered the company ran just fine without much help from him, Bart didn't return to his studies. Instead, he married Lila, settled at their estate and didn't do much, as far as anyone could tell. None of the information John found mentioned any interests except for the occasional visit to Blue Star for a stockholders' meeting.

Bridget cocked her head to the side. *A guy that smart isn't playing video games all day. What's he up to?*

"So what does he do all day?" John mused, echoing her thoughts. His hand dropped to her neck and he absently massaged her muscles. Bridget leaned into the

pressure with a soft sigh of pleasure. "You can only fuck around for so long." He snorted. "Literally."

She would've rolled her eyes at the lame joke except she was too busy enjoying her neck rub.

"Know what I'm thinking?" he asked.

Her ears perked in anticipation. *That it's time to go spy on the cheating bastard?*

"Stakeout."

*Excellent!* Bridget hadn't expected her dog transformation would involve so much excitement. She'd always figured a dog's life would be more rabbit chasing and leg humping, so the situation she'd stumbled into was a pleasant surprise. Although she loved being a teacher, her life had gotten a little safe and dull. There'd definitely not been any stakeouts or billionaires cheating on their wives. Maybe she could delay making any long-term decisions about her life for a while. Maybe she could stay a dog and just be John's pet.

"Too late tonight," John said, glancing at his watch. "I wouldn't know where to find him. Mrs. Carlson put what she knows about her husband's schedule in the file she gave me. Hang on." He flipped through some papers and pulled out a sheet. "Let's see... He leaves the house at seven each morning, supposedly to visit the gym and then head to work. Sounds like an early morning for us then."

John stood up and stretched his arms over his head as Bridget watched, entranced. He really was a gorgeous man.

"Come on, sweet pea," he said, smiling at her. She sighed, her tail wagging. "Let's swing by the pet supply store before I get arrested for violating the leash law."

*Well shit.* Bridget's dreamy mood was slapped away. *This better not mean dog food.*

It wasn't even fully dark when Micah drove south of the city to change. He turned the car onto a dirt track that had not been used for some time, if the rounded, crumbling edges of the dirt ruts overgrown with weeds were any indication. Parking where the car was almost hidden in a stand of scrubby trees, he moved to the backseat to change.

It was awkward yanking off his clothes inside the car but the tree layer was thin enough to make him nervous about changing outside. Somehow he managed to strip to his skin and then the rest was easy. After cracking the rear door, he changed and hopped out of the backseat. Turning around, he jumped on the back door, using his front paws to swing it closed.

It was a relief to finally be in his dog shape and able to use his nose to search for a trace of Bridget. He trotted toward the road, planning on starting there and then working east, attempting to cross Bridget's southbound path—if she was still going south, that was. If she'd circled around, it could take him weeks or months to track her down.

Ignoring the pessimistic thought, Micah focused on what he could smell. He'd been right about the path—all the human smells were bare traces from long ago. Animal scents overran the human smells, crisscrossing over the path as if trying to lure Micah's dog half on detours into the fields.

Instead he continued straight toward the road, his nose down. Once he reached it, he stayed out of the headlights' paths, running parallel to the pavement. Now other smells complicated the search—roadkill and fast food wrappers littered the ditch, overlaid with the stench of exhaust.

The scents of people were more common now but Micah dismissed the smell of random strangers. All that mattered was that Bridget hadn't been here. Micah kept up a steady trot, angling slightly to the left and then heading back toward the road, although he never drew close enough for any of the passing drivers to catch the gleam of his eyes in their headlights. The repetition dulled his mind and he shifted into automatic mode—back and forth, staying on a parallel path with the road.

Since he didn't have to think about tracking, Micah thought about *her*. Small and sleek in varied shades of brown, from the chocolate of her eyes to the warm tan of her skin to the sleek shade of her hair, which fell somewhere in the middle, there was nothing about her that screamed sex. Still, when he'd walked into that classroom and she'd smiled at him, he'd felt as if he'd been punched in the throat.

He'd wanted to take her right there, over the wide desk that stood between them. While she'd talked, he'd struggled to pay attention to her words, distracted as he was by the fluttering pulse in her throat and the color that rose beneath her skin. When she'd shown him Sam's picture though... That had yanked him back to reality, reminding him just what he was.

A few days before the conference, he and Sam had changed. It was their usual schedule, turning into dogs every other day in the late afternoon, followed by a big, meaty meal afterward. Although it was probably overkill to change so often, Micah didn't want to give the urge a chance to grow in Sam, didn't want him driven to change somewhere away from the safety of their secluded home. Micah snorted. Obviously, that plan hadn't worked so well.

Micah and Sam had been running in the woods behind their house when a rabbit had dodged in front of them. The small creature had stared at them, eyes huge and startled. Before he realized what he was doing, Micah had lunged, the dog instincts taking over. He'd felt horrible afterward but by then it had been too late. The rabbit was dead and Sammy had seen it.

Sam had been quiet that night, intensifying Micah's guilt. He'd never killed anything before, in dog or human form, no matter how much the dog part of him howled for prey.

*What kind of monster am I?* Micah had wondered, watching his nephew pick at his dinner. He'd sighed, knowing that he'd managed to fuck up parenting once again.



Despite knowing that he wasn't normal, could never be normal, Micah had waited in the parking lot after the conference with Sam's teacher. There was no way he could ask her out on a normal date, where they could eat and laugh and share their favorite music and movies and the fact that he had to turn into a dog a few times a week.

There was something about Bridget Grace, something that Sam had recognized, turning him from the terror of his kindergarten class to the teacher's favorite. Micah didn't blame his nephew for adoring his teacher. There wasn't much Micah wouldn't have done for Bridget's loving touch, her kiss, the hot, wet pull of her body around his fingers...

Micah growled, giving himself a full-body shake. He needed to quit torturing himself. What he needed to do was concentrate, to find Bridget, who obviously hadn't been here. He veered to the left, planning to cut to the east and hopefully cross her trail, when he caught it—a slight whiff. He froze and, standing stock still, concentrated with everything he had. There it was—Bridget!

Moving to the left, in the way he'd been heading, the scent disappeared so he backtracked. Ahead and to the right, the smell returned, stronger and with an overlying scent that accelerated his heartbeat.

Blood.

## Chapter Six

The store clerk leant John a slip lead so he could bring Bridget inside to look at collars and leashes. Her ears flat against her head, her tail tucked, she stayed right next to John's leg so she wouldn't get pulled back with a dignity-destroying yank of the leash.

She heaved a sigh, glancing up at the big man. *The things I do for you*, she grumbled mentally. All those happy thoughts about being John's pet had dissolved, leaving her miserable with a skinny nylon loop around her neck and a strong likelihood she'd be eating kibble for dinner.

When they reached the collar aisle, the choices were staggering.

"How the hell do I know what to get?" John muttered, fingering a choke chain doubtfully.

*Not that!* Bridget moved away from the prong collars and other torturous-looking devices toward the other end of the aisle, where the less-scary nylon and leather buckle collars were displayed. She nudged John along with her, still conscious of the leash looped around her neck. Releasing the metal collar he'd been investigating, John followed willingly enough.

"Looks like a BDSM store." Pulling an extra-small harness from its peg, he added, "For tiny people."

Bridget snorted at that before quickly turning the sound into a fake sneeze.

John picked up a black leather collar that was studded with fake diamonds. "How about this one?"

*Not bad*, Bridget thought, surprised that she really didn't mind that one. *I like the bling.*

"Do you like the pink one better?"

*God no. I'd look like Paris Hilton's Chihuahua dressed me.*

After studying both collars for a few moments, he put the pink one back on the shelf. "The black one's a little classier, don't you think?"

*Nothing says classy like black leather and rhinestones.*

John squatted down so he was at her eye level. "What's with the sneezing, sweet pea—are you getting a cold or something?" He eyed her carefully. "Maybe I should take you to the vet. I'll call tomorrow for an appointment. I probably should check if anyone's missing a dog too." He sounded so sad that Bridget gave his hand a quick lick.

*Don't worry, John. No one's reported me missing. Or had they?* She was brought up short by the thought. The men who'd been chasing her in the hospital parking lot and

breaking into her house knew she could change into a dog. Would they be advertising their “lost” pet in an effort to track her down?

“There. You’re looking fine, sweet pea.” John’s voice brought her out of her panicked thoughts. He’d buckled the collar around her neck and was now moving her head from side to side, admiring how it looked. Picking up the matching leash, he pulled off the temporary slip lead, to Bridget’s relief. She hadn’t liked the idea that the leash could’ve tightened, cutting off her oxygen.

“It looks nice with your fur,” he told her, clipping the leash to her collar, and she wagged her tail halfheartedly.

*If someone had told me a week ago that I was going to be wearing a leather collar and matching leash, led around by the sweetest, most built guy I’ve ever met, I would have laughed and laughed.*

John’s hand stroked over her head as he led her to the checkout.

*Although, she mused, her eyes half-closing in pleasure as his fingers lingered on her ears, it’s not as bad as I expected.*

Especially since John didn’t remember the dog food until they were halfway home.

Once he’d found Bridget’s scent, it was easy. The rain had actually enhanced the trail, making it a simple matter to follow the route she’d taken the night before. Micah paced himself, resisting the urge to flat-out run, but the smell of Bridget overlaid with blood was thick in his nose, making it hard to think rationally. He should have risked changing earlier, while it was still light. He forced himself to concentrate on tracking.

He followed her trail into a town—Myra, the sign read—and behind and through a residential neighborhood and up to the front porch of a house. A thrill rushed through him—he was close. Micah closed down that bubbly excitement since the trail was still old—at least twenty-four hours—and he didn’t think she’d stayed long.

He circled out from the porch, hoping to pick up her trail again. After four passes, he found her scent once more. Micah wasn’t sure what had driven her off that porch, where he’d figured she’d intended to spend the night, but she had headed straight down the road, away from the direction she’d come from originally.

Another person’s scent underlay Bridget’s. It was a man and it was...intriguing, warm and spicy with undertones of sweat and pheromones. Following their combined trail, it wasn’t long before he trotted up a driveway. A quick check showed that Bridget had entered this door.

Micah huffed with relief and a bit of humor. She’d found herself an owner.

Although he was glad she’d been safe and dry last night, Micah still couldn’t feel settled. Had she taken off to who-knew-where early this morning? The nice-smelling man she’d picked up last night could’ve taken her to the animal pound. He circled the front yard, not able to pick up on any trails except the one she came in on. With her scent scattered around this area, however, Micah couldn’t be sure of anything.

Slinking along the side of the house, he circled the exterior of the fence. Bridget had been back here more recently and the scent of her made him dizzy. Although he wanted to stay, to watch until he saw her, Micah knew he could get a lot more information as a walking, talking human.

After a long backward glance, he headed back in the direction of the road.

She smelled him before she saw him.

John had taken her out on a run through the crisp darkness and they had jogged through the streets of Myra, the air smelling of wood smoke and dying leaves. Bridget loved this part of being a dog, this athletic ability, this capacity to run and run without getting tired.

As they slowed to a walk a block away from John's house, Bridget felt uneasy, oddly prickly. Three houses down from his, she caught a scent and stopped dead.

Micah.

"What's wrong, sweet pea?" John's voice was low as he looked around, his body tensing in response to her reaction. Bridget eyed him, unsure of what to do. The collar made her edgy. If she'd been free to run off, she would have.

On the other hand, she hesitated to leave John alone. He was a mountain of a man and could definitely take care of himself, but he didn't know the situation.

*I don't know the situation*, Bridget reminded herself. She gave in to John's tugs on the leash and began walking again, staying close by his side.

John was still tense. She could feel his muscles vibrating, could smell the change in his sweat as he walked toward the car parked in front of his house. As they drew closer, Bridget used all her senses, her head swiveling as she tried to smell and hear and see Micah before he could ambush them.

"Hi."

Bridget jumped and felt John start as Micah stepped out of the shadows of the porch.

"Can I help you?" John's voice was sharp with nervous energy that had converted to irritation.

"Sorry." Micah was smiling affably and Bridget eyed him uneasily. She was more familiar with his surly side. "I know it's late. It's just that your neighbor mentioned you'd found a dog and I was hoping it was my nephew's dog." His eyes fell to Bridget. "That's her! Hey, Bridget! We've been worried sick about you, you silly dog." She had the impression he was talking through gritted teeth.

"She's yours?" John's face was expressionless, although his eyes were wary.

Micah looked at him again. "My nephew's actually. I was supposed to watch the dog while he and his dad were on vacation. Bridget took off yesterday, the first day I had her at my house. Great dogsitter, huh?" He smiled too widely again. Bridget

wished he'd stop doing that—it was really freaking her out. She glanced at John, whose expression hadn't changed.

"Do you have any proof that she's yours?" John asked.

The fake smile fell away. "Proof?"

"Vet records, pictures, bill of sale—anything to prove ownership?"

*Hah! Take that, Mr. Can't-Make-Up-Your-Mind-If-You're-Interested-In-Me-Or-Not!* Bridget was starting to enjoy this. With an unyielding John at her side, it was much easier to feel safe than when she saw him as she was fleeing from home intruders. She cocked her head and eyed Micah with interest. He was starting to look annoyed.

"They have all that stuff at my brother's house," he said. Now he was definitely talking with his jaw clamped shut. "Look, buddy, I've been searching for her for the past day and a half. Why would I go to all this trouble if she wasn't mine—my nephew's, I mean?"

John let a beat or two of silence pass before answering. "I have no idea. What I *do* know is that you're here at my house at eleven at night, lying your ass off. You come back tomorrow with some proof that this dog is yours, then we'll talk. Right now, I think you'd better go."

Bridget watched Micah, waiting for him to explode. Instead he closed his eyes for a few seconds. When they opened, he looked incredibly tired.

"I need to talk to you, Bridget," he said directly to her. She stared at him, shocked that he'd dropped the dog-owner act. "I know my family's the cause of this whole mess but there's a guy after you, a really dangerous guy, and I just want to keep you safe."

"Talking to the dog isn't helping to prove your sanity here, buddy," John told him.

"I know." Micah grinned crookedly at John. "Sorry to drag you into this—both of you. I'll be back tomorrow. Promise to keep her safe for me?"

John nodded, still wary. "Of course. I'll be home by six, so swing by anytime after that. Maybe not this late though, huh?"

"Sure." Micah turned toward his car but then paused to look back at them. "Oh and Bridget, Sam wants you to know that he's really, really sorry."

*Sam.* That confirmed what Bridget had suspected—the puppy in her classroom, the one that had sunk its sharp little teeth into her wrist, was Sam. He'd turned her into this dog-human hybrid. As she watched Micah get into his car and pull away from the curb, Bridget couldn't decide how she felt about that.

"What the fuck was that about?" John muttered, drawing her attention. Bridget gave her best dog shrug, which entailed a cock of her head and a blank stare. "Yeah, I don't know either. If that *is* your owner, no wonder you left. He's messed up."

*Tell me about it.*

"Cute but messed up." With a shake of his head, he started toward the front door.

Bridget stared after him until the leash hit its full length and yanked her forward.

"Cute"? she thought in shock as she followed him into the house. John was gay? How had she missed that she was crushing on a gay guy?

"Is that your name? Bridget?" he asked, unhooking the leash from her collar.

Bridget hesitated, unsure of how to respond. If Micah knew her name, that went a long way toward proving ownership. On the other hand, it had been a relief to hear her real name, an acknowledgement of the person beneath all this fur. On still another hand, "sweet pea" wasn't half-bad as a name. She waved her tail uncertainly, not sure if that was telling John anything at all.

"Weird name for a dog," he said. "Better than what I've been calling you though, I suppose." Wandering into the living room, he plopped down on the couch and picked up the remote. Bridget followed, jumping onto the couch and curling up next to him, her head resting on his thigh.

His hand massaged her ears as he frowned down at her, ignoring the late-night talk show that lit up the TV screen.

"Knew I shouldn't have gotten attached," he muttered.

*You and me both, buddy.* Bridget's sigh emerged as a whine.

## Chapter Seven

When John finally fell asleep in bed later that night, Bridget slipped out into the hall and changed. She knew that it wasn't much use trying to get on his computer again. When she was at the office with him, he'd logged on while Bridget was in the other room, so she hadn't had a chance to watch him type his password. Besides, he was probably a careful enough guy to have a different password for each computer.

She mainly changed to make sure she still could. There was a niggling fear at the back of Bridget's mind that she wouldn't be able to change back one of these days, that she'd be stuck in dog form for the rest of her considerably shortened life.

Now, standing naked and shivering in the hallway, she didn't know what to do. Almost without consciously deciding on anything, she padded silently back into the bedroom, her heart banging in her ears.

John was restless, his head moving against the pillow as he muttered incomprehensible words. Bridget moved closer, despite a voice in her head screaming at her to retreat to the hallway and change back into her dog shape. Instead, she walked closer, wanting to see this man with her human eyes, to see if he was as fascinating and huge and lust-inspiring as she thought from her dog perspective.

He was. Bridget stopped a few feet away and looked at him. He was still moving, obviously in the middle of a dream, and she had to resist trying to smooth away the worry lines twisting his eyebrows together.

*He's gay, dummy*, she mocked herself, but it didn't stop her from taking another step toward him.

His eyes opened and he bolted upright.

"It's you!" he said, blinking hard, as if that would make her disappear before his eyes.

Bridget was frozen in place, unable to move or think or speak.

"How'd you get in here?" he asked. "*Who are you?*"

"I'm the dog," she finally answered in a croak, saying the first thing that crossed her mind and then immediately cursing herself.

"You're the *what?*" He rubbed his eyes and then stared at her, his eyes flicking down over her body and reminding her that she was totally naked. Naked, that was, except for the leather and rhinestone dog collar snugly circling her neck.

"The dog." She didn't know why she was telling him the truth. He'd be calling the cops in a second and she'd be on her way to a psych evaluation.

To forestall any calling of the authorities, and because she'd been dying to ever since she changed back, Bridget took the two steps to the edge of the bed, leaned over

and kissed him. The man let the kiss cling for several seconds before tearing his head away.

"Fuck," he groaned. "I knew I wasn't dreaming last night."

There was something in the way he'd looked at her naked form, something in the way he'd allowed the kiss to continue, that gave Bridget hope. Besides, the one taste of him hadn't been enough. Bridget caught his face in her hands and kissed him again, harder this time, bruising her lips against her teeth. She'd wanted Micah but had gotten scared. Now she wanted this man and she wasn't running away this time.

Seizing her arms, he pulled her down and flipped them both over so she was pinned beneath him, arms captive above her head. A touch of nervousness was drowned out by adrenaline and lust and she surged up toward him, trying to reconnect her mouth with his. He stayed just out of reach, holding her down easily.

"What's your name?" he asked her, breathing hard. She was a little flattered that she could steal his breath when even a hard run didn't wind him.

"It is Bridget," she told him, her own chest heaving beneath his. "So quit calling me muttly. Or Norman. Sweet pea's okay though. Even better than Bridget, actually."

He jerked a little. "How'd you know that?"

"I'm the dog." After basically lying to him about who she was for the past twenty-four or so hours, it was a relief to tell the truth. Maybe, though, telling this kind of truth wasn't a good thing for John. Perhaps it would've been kinder to allow him to believe she was only a dog. She shook her head. It was too late for regrets now. The cat—or dog—was out of the bag.

"So I'm making out with the dog."

"No," Bridget told him, a little put out that her attempted seduction was going so poorly. "You're *not* making out with me. We're talking instead."

"Great. I've managed to fuck up an ill-advised hookup with a gorgeous, burglarizing dog girl. I think I've just hit a new low."

She laughed and then paused, glancing away. "You think I'm gorgeous?"

"Yeah," he admitted, brushing the sensitive skin of her inner wrists with his thumbs. "As dog girls go, you're pretty much perfect."

Bridget squirmed with pleasure and he growled, pressing her down into the mattress. "I thought maybe," she told him, her voice breathless, "you were more interested in guys."

He blinked at her in surprise. "Why'd you think that?"

"Because of what you said about Micah. His cuteness, I mean."

A touch of color darkened his cheeks. "I thought I was talking to the dog when I said that."

"You were." A flash of guilt ran through Bridget. He probably wouldn't have said most of the things he'd told her if he'd known she actually understood.



"Well, I'm not," he said.

Bridget looked at him, puzzled. "You're not what?"

"Gay."

"Okay." She lifted her head to kiss his jaw.

"Not totally, at least," he amended.

Bridget drew back to look at him. "Which means?"

"I've hooked up with a couple of guys but mostly I've dated girls." He glanced away and then back to her face. "I don't know why I'm telling you this."

"No reason to be embarrassed," Bridget told him. "I understand the attraction to hot guys and Micah is definitely hot." She felt him stiffen beneath her and not in a good way.

"So you did know him," he accused her.

"Barely," she said defensively, catching the emphasis on "know". "We made out once. His nephew was a student in my first-grade class. After that one time, Micah blew me off completely until the dog thing happened."

"Right." John traced the edge of the collar where leather met skin. "This is pretty hot on you, by the way."

Bridget smiled. "Thank you."

"When I've thought about what it'd be like to have a beautiful, naked home invader climb into bed with me," he said, the corner of his mouth twitching, "I didn't imagine there'd be quite so much talking."

She would have smacked his arm but he still held her wrists captive. "And whose fault is that?" she demanded, fighting her own smile.

"Probably mine," he admitted. "Although it's partially your fault for being so interesting. I'll make it up to you though." With that, he lowered his mouth to her ear. Bridget shivered as he traced the shape with his tongue and she tilted her head to give him better access.

A part of her was amazed. What she was doing was completely out of character. Climbing into bed naked with a guy she'd only known for a day was crazy, totally not something the Bridget of just a week ago would have considered doing.

Ever since that night with Micah, though, it was like a part of her that had been sleeping had finally woken up—and woken up with a vengeance. She wanted John, wanted him inside her, filling her. It might be unwise, even straight-up nuts, but Bridget didn't care. She was going to grab this opportunity with both hands.

John's teeth closed lightly on her earlobe, making her arch beneath him, her wrists twisting in his grip. Just a touch of his mouth on her ear and she was wetter than she'd ever been before.

"John," she moaned and he released her earlobe.

"Why are you calling me that?" he asked, his breath brushing her ear.

"What?" Bridget struggled to pull herself out of the quicksand of lust he'd so quickly thrown her into. "I thought that was your name."

"Yeah but only my mom calls me that." With her head turned, Bridget couldn't see his face but she was pretty sure he was grinning. "Whenever someone calls me that, I feel like I'm in trouble."

She gave a breathless laugh. "I'll remember that. Sounds like a good way to keep you in line." Turning her head to look at him, she was caught by the heat in his eyes and almost forgot her next question. Trying to focus, she finally remembered to ask, "So what should I call you? Hot Guy?"

His smile dropped away. "You don't need to say that. I know I wasn't pretty even before I picked up a few souvenirs in Afghanistan."

Bridget rolled her eyes, loving that she was in human form and could finally do that again. "Please. Like you don't know that you're built like Adonis on steroids. Pretty doesn't come into it. You're something beyond pretty."

John snorted. "What's beyond pretty? Beautiful? Gorgeous? Divine?"

"If you start throwing out words like 'divine', I'm going to start questioning that whole not-gay thing."

"How's this for not gay?" He ground his rigid erection against the juncture of her legs, dissolving her stomach in another wash of desire.

"That works," she gasped, happy she was able to talk at all. "Now how about a name?"

"Hammer." His voice was rough, as if the contact had affected him just as much as it had her. "Call me Hammer."

She couldn't help but laugh. "Hammer? Do you know how many bad puns just crowded into my head?"

His laugh was more of a groan as he rotated his hips again. "How about I make you forget all your jokes?"

Any hammer puns she would have made were already forgotten with just a single roll of his hips. "Sounds good," she rasped and then his mouth found hers.

*God, he's a good kisser.* He knew just when to be soft and when to increase the pressure, when to use his teeth and when to use his tongue. With a moan, Bridget wrapped one leg around his hips to hold him to her and forgot everything but the feel of him.

He released her wrists so he could run one of his hands up her arm, supporting his considerable weight with the other arm. His hand was huge but his touch gentle as he cupped her shoulder and then slid his palm down her side. Just his fingertips brushed her straining nipple, driving it to an even more rigid point. After that barely teasing touch, his hand dropped to her waist.

Bridget broke the kiss. "Hammer," she pleaded, wanting his hand to return to her nipple, to pull and massage and pinch until she was out of her mind with lust.

His mouth bore down on hers, nipping her bottom lip sharply before pulling back. "My bed, my rules," he growled, his hand sliding beneath her so his arm circled her waist.

He flipped them both over easily, reversing their positions. Bridget's breath caught at the swift motion and at the ease with which Hammer moved her. She thought she was used to how big the man was but that had brought it home once again. Compared to Hammer, she was tiny.

With his hands beneath her arms, he lifted Bridget to a sitting position until she was straddling his stomach. She was instantly distracted by the ripple of muscle beneath her pussy, which was pressed against his skin. The muscles in her inner thighs felt the stretch as her knees reached for purchase on the bed.

"Fuck you're wet," he groaned, pressing his abs up against her. With a small sound, she bore down against him, needing more contact, more stimulation, more of something that his stomach muscles just couldn't give her.

He reached past her and eased his boxer briefs over his erection. As soon as she realized what he was doing, Bridget twisted around to help. He bent his knees and she slid his underwear down his legs and off, tossing them to the side. She reached for his tempting erection but Hammer caught her hand before she could touch.

"Don't be in such a hurry," he admonished, giving her hand a warning squeeze before releasing her.

Wanting him to be just as desperate as she felt, Bridget smoothed her hands across his chest, raking her nails lightly over his skin. When he shivered beneath her touch, when goose bumps rose on his skin and his breathing quickened, she felt it all through the stomach muscles beneath her thighs and against her pussy. His eager reaction melted her, drawing out even more moisture that wet his skin.

When her fingers found his nipples, Hammer jolted, bringing a small smile to Bridget's mouth. She pinched both nubs sharply and he swore, his voice as rough as sandpaper.

"That's it," he told her, seizing both her hands. "Lace your fingers together behind your head."

She hesitated, not wanting to give up the power she'd just discovered, wanting to continue exploring how her touch could make him quake.

"Now!" he barked and she obeyed, pulling her hands from his and twining her fingers together at the back of her head before she even realized what she was doing. He gave a short nod. "That's better. Now keep them there or I'll have to tie you."

This new, commanding Hammer surprised her even as he turned her on. Bridget couldn't stop herself from twisting her hips in a slick, needy grind against his stomach. He smiled, his eyes hooded, and she knew he was aware just how much she liked his bossy side, the knowledge that, even on his back beneath her, Hammer was definitely the one in charge.

Her position gave her lower back an arch, thrusting her breasts forward and up, as if they were begging to be touched. When Hammer moved, though, his hands landed on her hips instead. Bridget whimpered.

Ignoring the needy sound, he kneaded her flesh, moving almost leisurely. She moaned—he was driving her crazy! She pressed her interlaced fingers against the back of her head, wanting more than anything to drop her hands to his, yank his fingers up to her breasts, to seize his head and force more of those addictive, drugging kisses from him. Resisting the urge, she kept her hands where they were and groaned again.

She wanted to rotate her hips, to slide her pussy against his skin, but he kept her still in his hold. Bridget bit her lip, fighting the need to jerk out of his hands and impale herself on the iron-hard erection that pulsed so close to her weeping pussy. Once again she restrained from acting on her urges, enjoying his control—the tight clamp of his fingers into the giving curve of her hips, the rake of his gaze over her exposed breasts, even the light touch of the leather collar that encircled her neck. Tightening the muscles in her lower back, she thrust her chest out farther and waited for Hammer's next move.

He liked that—she could tell by the flare of heat in his eyes and the tightening of his jaw muscles. His hands slid back to cup the cheeks of her ass and her muscles tensed beneath the caress of his fingers. Bridget's head fell back as his fingertips tucked into the crevice separating the globes, her hair brushing the small of her back. Just that silky tickle against her overly sensitive skin made her breath catch in her throat. Her entire body was lit up, as if her nerve endings were exposed to each touch.

Pushing her back to straddle his hips, Hammer sat up. Even in her aroused state, Bridget was impressed by the easy way his abs pulled his upper body into place. She was quickly distracted by the press of his erection hot against her ass.

This close, the temptation to touch was almost unbearable. His sculpted chest was so close that Bridget could feel the heat radiating from it.

"May I touch?" she asked in a breathless rush, her eyes hungrily taking in each detail—the way the moonlight cupped the muscle of his shoulder, rounding into his upper arm, the strength of his neck and the tight planes of his face.

"Not yet," Hammer growled, pulling her hips tightly against him.

She could only groan in response as her body shrieked for more—more contact, more caresses, more *him*. His hands slid to her waist and higher, up the sides of her rib cage, stopping just under her breasts. Her breath came quickly, pushing her chest against his palms, those tormenting hands that were close, so close, but not quite touching where she so desperately wanted to be touched.

When he slipped his hands back down her sides, Bridget couldn't hold back a whimper. He returned his grip to her ass, massaging the cheeks, tracing the dividing crack with his fingertips. Putting her weight on her knees, she lifted her body a few inches above his lap. Bridget arched her back, pushing her ass into his grip.

The muscles in her inner thighs burned from the effort of kneeling with her legs spread wide but, strangely enough, that just added to the pleasure, ratcheting up the

needy ache of her entire body. Her efforts were rewarded when Hammer's fingers brushed the entrance to her pussy. He growled deep in his throat as he traced a teasing line to her clit.

Bridget held her breath, releasing it in a shuddering sob when his fingertip finally landed on the nub of flesh, pressing it down on itself and releasing shock after shock of pleasure. She jerked beneath his touch, so close to coming that a flare of red covered her vision.

As he continued to play with her clit, his head lowered so he could kiss her shoulder. Running the tip of his tongue along her collarbone, he nudged a finger into her pussy. Her legs shook, from fatigue or desire, Bridget didn't know. Her knees slipped a little along the bed and she dropped just enough to take another inch of his finger.

It felt thick inside of her. Except for Micah, it had been a long time for her and her body gripped his finger tightly. She could feel Hammer's breath panting against her damp skin, air moving in and out faster than she'd seen at any point during his run.

"You feel so good," he rasped. His mouth dropped to her nipple and Bridget's brain stopped working altogether.

Hammer caught the stiff nub between his teeth, caressing the tip with his tongue. The combination of hard and soft, pinch and stroke, drove Bridget over the edge. She was panting, making small, wild noises that she couldn't believe were coming from her own throat. Unable to keep from touching him any longer, she dropped her hands to his head and clutched him to her.

He sucked at her nipple and she ground down on his finger, trying to force the digit deep into the hot depths of her body. When he wouldn't cooperate but instead teased her, not allowing his finger to enter any farther, she reached down and grabbed his hand.

"Think you're in charge here, do you?" Hammer raised his head and asked, his voice amused but with enough smoldering undertone that Bridget froze, her heart hammering with anticipation.

"No?" she said, annoyed with the way she let her voice go up at the end of the word.

"No," he repeated, much more firmly than she'd said it.

"Sure?" With a tiny smile, she released his hand and trailed her fingers up his chest, enjoying the way his eyes darkened at her touch.

In answer, his hand lifted and then landed on her ass cheek in a stinging spank. Bridget squeaked and jumped. Hammer's other hand remained between her legs and a second finger joined the first inside her. A fresh rush of excited moisture soaked her pussy, easing his invasion. She wriggled, part of her feeling as if she should make an indignant protest against the spank but knowing it would be a halfhearted objection at best. Already she was arching her lower back, offering her ass for another smack.

Hammer kneaded the cheek before complying. Her flesh heated under the sharp slap of his palm, multiplying the shocks of desire that rushed through her, burning beneath her skin as if her blood was on fire. She moaned, allowing her forehead to rest against his chest as her arms circled his waist. Her hands sought purchase on his slick, smoothly muscled back and she was tempted to dig in her nails, to close her teeth on his skin.

Shocked at her primitive thoughts, Bridget pulled back so she could look at him, to regain her humanity by connecting with Hammer. His face was a stone sculpture, drawn tight with need, bone and muscle standing starkly beneath the skin. She stared, amazed that she'd caused this reaction, forgetting her own desire for a moment when she saw his.

Then his hand connected with her ass cheek again and she closed her eyes, catching her breath as her lust for him returned in a rush. Her lips found the salty surface of his chest blindly and she kissed his skin, licking it when kisses weren't enough. He must have made a noise because she felt his chest vibrate against her lips. Bridget pushed herself higher on her knees and found the juncture of his neck and shoulder with her mouth. Unable to resist, she closed her teeth on the hard muscle there.

With a growl, Hammer pulled his fingers free and seized her hips, lifting her body with almost frightening ease and then lowering her until she felt the blunt tip of his cock demanding entrance into her pussy. She clutched his wrists, desperately grateful that she'd finally be filled, but something didn't seem right.

"Wait!" she gasped, her rational brain fighting through the fog of lust. "Condom!"

"Fuck," Hammer swore. Lifting her off his straining erection, he twisted, dropping her onto the bed next to him on her back.

Her stomach clenched, afraid that he was done with her, that this crazily wonderful sex was over and now the questions would start, the police would be called, the psych exam would be given, her secret would be out and she'd spend the rest of her life locked up in a government lab somewhere, the subject of experiment after experiment—

Bridget's train of thought was cut off before she could start hyperventilating as Hammer reached toward the bedside table and pulled open the drawer.

*Is he getting a gun?* she wondered irrationally, and then felt like a hysterical idiot when the silver foil of a condom wrapper caught the moonlight. Immediately her thoughts turned carnal again and she turned onto her side, reaching for the small packet.

"No." Hammer held it up where she couldn't grab it. "You touch me and I'm done. Keep those greedy little fingers to yourself."

Pouting, Bridget watched as he rolled the latex over his straining cock. She swallowed, her sulk forgotten, her eyes fixed hungrily on him. There was so much she wanted to do to that stiff, gorgeous cock—lick it, suck it, run her hands over the length to feel the heat of it, strip off the condom and taste the head, shiny with wetness.

"Later," he promised and her eyes flew to his. Judging from the burn of his gaze, Bridget figured her thoughts must be written on her face. Dropping her eyes, she flushed, reality and embarrassment nudging their way into her haze of desire. She'd never acted this way before. What was she thinking?

"Hey," his voice was gentle as he rolled toward her. "Don't get all shy on me now, wild thing."

That reminded Bridget of her savage behavior, the way she'd closed her teeth on his shoulder. With a gentle finger, she touched the faint marks she'd left in his skin. A fine shiver ran through him and she met his gaze, surprised to see he was smiling.

"Yeah, that really set me off," he admitted, tucking a strand of Bridget's hair behind her ear. "I'd apologize for spanking you but you seem to like it a little rough."

Her face heated again and she ducked her head, hiding a smile. "I'm not usually this way," she told him, staring at his chest again. "I never thought...I mean, I didn't expect..." She trailed off again, redder than ever.

Hammer put his mouth right by her ear. "You didn't expect you'd get so turned on by my hand smacking your ass."

She met his eyes again. "Yes."

Just like that, his face was transformed. His eyes glowed darkly and his jaw tightened, his smile disappearing as lust changed his face into a mask. Just looking at him, seeing what she'd caused, brought back all the mindless desire from before, dissolving everything inside her in a hot, wet rush of excitement.

"Hammer," she said, begging him with that one word.

"I've got you, baby," he said, leaning down to kiss her. Once his mouth met hers, Bridget was lost.

*Oh who am I kidding?* she admitted to herself. *I was lost the minute I saw his gorgeous ass running through the rain.*

Clutching his head with both hands, she pulled him into a harder kiss. Bridget felt like she couldn't get close enough, that any space between them was too much. Hammer rolled on top of her, allowing just enough of his weight to press down for Bridget to feel every hard curve and angle of his body.

She wrapped her legs around his waist as she nipped at his lower lip, loving the way he growled before punishing her with a deep, hard kiss. Unable to stay still beneath him, she wiggled and twisted until he trapped her under his body, catching her hands in his and holding them captive above her head.

Bridget liked that. Being restrained, forced into compliance, quickened her breaths to shallow pants. She struggled a little harder, testing the limits of his hold. The way he stilled her so easily made her whimper and grind against his stomach.

"We'll play like this," Hammer told her, sounding just as breathless as she felt, "but if you say stop, I stop. Got it?"

"Yes." She didn't ever want to stop. She wanted this—his weight on her, warm and heavy, his hard cock against her thigh, his lips and tongue dominating her mouth—and she didn't ever want it to end.

"If you ever decide to visit me again, mystery girl, we'll have to try tying you up." Still holding her arms against the mattress, Hammer bent his head to flick her earlobe with his tongue.

The image that flashed through her brain of her roped to the bed, coupled with the damp caress, almost brought her off the mattress. She cried out, a desperate, needy sound, and he soothed her with tiny bites and kisses along her jawline.

"Hammer?"

"Yes, baby?"

"If you don't fuck me right now, I'm going to kill you." At that moment, Bridget meant it.

With a choked laugh, Hammer released her arms and shifted his body so the tip of his cock nudged into her pussy.

"I'll fuck you now, since you probably *would* kill me if I didn't," he growled into her ear, sliding another hard inch inside her. "But I'll punish you for your bossiness later."

Bridget cried out, his threat sending a thrill of anticipation through her as he thrust inside, stretching her as he filled her. His arms were braced by her head and he lowered his own to kiss her. Her legs tightened around him as she arched into the kiss, his tongue imitating the small strokes of his cock.

Each time he drove his erection inside her, her body gripped it, clung until he withdrew and plunged again. He thrust once more, driving the final inch of his length into her welcoming pussy and she came, convulsing around the rigid cock buried in the wet heat of her body.

Her orgasm seemed to go on and on, Hammer tossing her back into pleasure with each thrust, the friction driving her higher until she was screaming his name, her fingernails digging into the ridges of muscle bordering his spine. With a snarl, he seized her hands and pinned them against the mattress next to her head, holding her down as he drove into her.

Bridget thrust her hips up to meet him, glorying in the wildness of their mating, the raw savagery. When he pulled out she reared up, fighting the loss of his thick cock. He released her but only to flip her over so fast the room spun around her.

Lying on her stomach, Bridget gripped handfuls of the top sheet as Hammer caught her hips, pulling them up so her ass was in the air like an offering. For a moment, she wondered whether he was going to follow through on the threatened spanking but then she felt the slide of his sheathed cock, slippery from her own body, brush her inner thigh.

She widened her stance and arched her back, her body begging for the reentry of his hot erection, but he teased her, using the blunt end of his cock to bump her clit. Even



so soon after her first orgasm she was hungry for more of him. With a disgruntled sound, she pushed back against him, trying to force him inside.

He held her still with one hand on her hip as his cock rubbed against her clit again, drawing moisture from her too-empty pussy.

"Please!" she begged, her voice raw with need.

Instead of answering, Hammer continued to play, tracing the edges of her labia with a finger while still tormenting her clit with his slick cock. His fingertip slid up toward her rear entrance and she stilled, holding her breath. Bridget had never allowed even a finger in her ass before but she knew she wanted this. Badly.

"Okay?" Hammer asked. He must have felt her stiffen.

She nodded, her cheek slipping against the cool sheet.

"Can't hear you," he said, his finger moving away from its target and drawing an invisible pattern on her ass cheek.

"It's okay," she whispered, now desperate for the penetration of her tight and virgin hole.

"Sure?" His finger returned, tracing circles around her anus.

"Yes!" she begged. "Please!"

When his finger plunged into the wet depths of her pussy, Bridget thought she'd have to beg again but he was trailing his now-slick digit toward her clenching back opening. He teased it, circling and running his finger back and forth over her entrance until it relaxed enough for him to slip his fingertip inside. She caught her breath at the alien sensation. Once he'd gained entry, Hammer pushed inside until his finger was buried to the hilt.

"Oh," she moaned, clenching around the intruder.

"'Oh' good or 'oh' bad?" he asked, twisting his finger and making her jump.

"Good," she answered tentatively and then pushed her hips toward his hand. A different kind of heat was spreading from her ass to her pussy, but it was absolutely a pleasurable sensation. "Definitely good."

"Good," he rumbled, sliding his finger in and out of her ass. With each pass it felt better and better and Bridget began thrusting her hips in rhythm with the movement of his finger.

Another digit joined the first, pushing in together and stretching her tight hole. She welcomed the slight burn of their entry, the way the tiny bit of pain spread into the pleasure, widening it until her whole body was flooded.

With all her focus on the entrance to her ass, Bridget had almost forgotten about the cock pressed, hard and urgent, against her clit. When he pushed the head of his erection into her pussy at the same time his fingers plunged deep into her ass, she cried out, the double penetration overwhelming.

Hammer paused but she recovered quickly from the initial surprise and shoved her hips toward him, wanting to be filled front and back, to get the full effect of these new

sensations. With a growl of satisfaction, he complied, plunging his cock deep inside her as his fingers pressed into her ass.

When she cried out this time, it was in ecstasy. He pulled out and drove in, filling her both front and back as she sobbed and bucked under his invasion. His fingers and cock filled her once more and she came hard, screaming his name.

Her body clamped around the intruders, gripping them, fighting to keep him inside her. Hammer's thrusts became erratic, coming faster and harder until he exploded.

She melted beneath him, feeling only a slight twinge as he withdrew his fingers. His weight was boneless now and the heavy warmth was as much a pleasure in its own right as what came before. Too soon, Hammer stirred, pulling out and turning on his side next to her. Regret slid over her at his withdrawal. She knew she couldn't stay in human form all night but that didn't mean she couldn't wish for it.

Self-consciousness set in as he watched her, his eyes too alert for a recently satiated male.

"What?" Bridget finally asked, looking away.

"You coming back, mystery girl?"

She shrugged. "I'm always here," she told him, still not meeting his eyes.

He made a sound that could have been a snort or a laugh. "Fine then. Be evasive." He rolled out of bed and headed to the bathroom. At the door, he turned to look at her. "Don't go anywhere."

Hammer stayed awake for so long, his body curled around hers, that Bridget thought she'd have to go into the bathroom to change back into a dog. He was quiet but she could tell by the tension in his body that he wasn't sleeping. Although she fought to stay awake, she dozed a few times, bringing herself back to consciousness with a jolt. It wasn't until the gray light of dawn began creeping into the room that his breathing deepened into almost snoring.

## Chapter Eight

When he woke, snuggled up to the dog, Hammer jolted to a sitting position. Bridget sat up too and looked at him curiously.

“Whoa.” He stared at her with suspicious eyes. She put on her best blank and happy expression.

“You lend someone your collar last night, sweet pea?” She thumped her tail against the bed.

Scrubbing his hands over his face, Hammer groaned. “Fuck. Either I’m completely nuts or I had a sexy burglar in my house last night. One who thinks she’s a dog and knows an unnerving amount about me.”

*Burglar?* Bridget thought indignantly. *I wasn’t burglarizing!* She did have to admit she was planning on stealing internet access but that was a far cry from taking the silverware. She was so distracted by mentally defending herself from burglary charges that she missed Hammer leaving the bed and heading for the bathroom. Giving herself a shake, she hopped off the bed and followed him.

After a quick trip to the bathroom, he grabbed a plastic box from his study and returned to the bedroom. Bridget trotted after him, full of curiosity. The box looked like a fishing tackle box but she had a feeling he wasn’t about to bait a hook and try to catch a fish in his bathtub.

He put the box on his nightstand and flipped open the top. Straining to see what he was pulling out, Bridget felt her stomach drop. Hammer was holding what looked like an old-fashioned shaving cream brush and a container of black powder. She’d seen these things before on a television police drama.

He was dusting for fingerprints. *Her* prints. She frantically tried to remember what she’d touched the night before. Could he get prints off bedding? That was all she remembered touching, except for Hammer. Could he get prints off his own skin? She whined.

“Sorry, sweet pea,” he apologized, dropping the brush next to the powder container. “You need your breakfast, don’t you? We’d better get to that first—this is going to take a while.”

Hammer wasn’t kidding. He dusted every hard surface in the entire house for prints, leaving black powder everywhere. Bridget couldn’t figure out why he wasn’t just sticking with his bedroom but then realized that he thought she’d broken in. She gave a soft snort. Anyone who tried to break into Hammer’s house was nuts. Not only

would a burglar have to face down an annoyed Hammer but deal with the most technologically advanced security system Bridget had ever seen outside of spy movies.

She sighed, resting her chin on her paws, bored with waiting for Hammer to finish dusting the bathroom.

*I could have told him not to bother. I used the yard this morning.* With another bored sigh, she closed her eyes for a short nap. She was tired today since she hadn't gotten much sleep the night before.

"C'mere, sweet pea."

Bridget opened an eye. Why was Hammer calling her over? Did he want to dust the dog for prints?

"Come on, puppy. Bring that collar over here."

*Ah.* He didn't need to dust the dog—he needed to dust the collar. Taking her time, she pushed to her feet and stretched, trying to remember if she'd touched the collar. When Hammer had said he'd liked it, he'd touched it but had she? Had she fingered it unconsciously?

"Get your ass over here," Hammer snapped. With a resigned sigh, she walked over to him, pretty sure she hadn't touched the collar.

Wait, what was she thinking? She'd wandered all over his house the night before last. Her prints were on his desk, his computer, everywhere. He'd find out who she was for sure.

"What's with you this morning?" he asked, unbuckling her collar carefully, touching only the edges. "You're acting like you haven't slept all night when it's me who should be—" He broke off, staring at her, and then shook his head. "Impossible," he muttered, glancing at her again. "And really, really wrong."

He dusted the collar, stealing glances at her. Bridget tried not to look guilty as he lifted a number of prints from the smooth leather surface between the rhinestones and on the inside of the collar. After he was done retrieving the prints, he wiped off the powder and buckled it around her neck again.

His cell phone rang and he answered it with a short, "Hammer."

After listening for a short while, he glanced at his watch. "Great. I'll be there waiting when he gets out."

He hung up and went back to dusting, twirling the small brush with the ease of someone who's had enough experience to be comfortable with it.

"Our cheating friend, Mr. Carlson, has a doctor's appointment this morning, so it's not too late to follow him after all. I'll even have time to clean up all this shit. Sometimes," he flicked the brush over the sink faucet, "things work out."

Bridget just absently wagged her tail a few times, still going over the night before in her brain, trying to remember what she'd touched.

Something caught Hammer's eye in the garbage. "I knew I wasn't crazy," he announced triumphantly, hurrying out of the room. He reappeared a few seconds later

with one hand in a latex glove and the other holding an empty evidence bag. Reaching into the garbage with his gloved hand, he pulled out the used condom and tucked it into the bag. "There has to be something on this that will tell me who she is."

Bridget stared in horror. She was trying to be safe! Was this what she got for being responsible? With a groan, she rolled over to her back and let her paws hang where they would. Could this day get any worse?

Pulling out his cell phone, Hammer dialed, waited a few seconds and then grinned.

"Hey, Mac."

During the pause, his smile grew. "What do you mean 'favor'? I never call when I need... Okay, so just a little one."

He laughed. "Nope, not in jail. My place was broken into last night, so I need you to run some prints, possibly DNA evidence, and tell me who I'm dealing with here."

After another pause, Hammer spoke again. "No, I'm fine. Nothing's missing, it was..." Glancing over at him, Bridget was amazed that he was actually blushing. "It was a strange thing. I'll give you all the details over a beer sometime."

Hammer listened for a moment and then said, "I appreciate it. I'll drop everything off this morning. You can meet my new dog."

He laughed again. "Yeah, a dog. I'm getting all domesticated and shit. Thanks, Mac."

Tired and anxious, Bridget moped for the whole car ride into the city. Even the smell of doughnuts didn't cheer her up—completely, at least. Hammer brought her into the police station to bring the evidence to his friend. Mac was a tall, skinny woman in her fifties who smelled like peppermint gum and coffee. She gave an amazing ear rub.

Their next stop was an office park that housed, Bridget guessed, Mr. Cheater Carlson's physician. Hammer backed into a parking space by the lot's exit, within view of the building's main entrance.

"Now here's the boring part, sweet pea," he told her, turning off the car. "Maybe I should have warned you when I invited you along that stakeouts aren't very exciting."

Bridget was too sleepy to care. Hopping over the console, she stretched out in the backseat. She must have whacked Hammer in the head with her tail on the way, since he was grumbling about inconsiderate, ungrateful, uncoordinated dogs. Thumping her tail against the seat in a halfhearted apology, Bridget let her eyes sink closed.

"Here he is."

Eyes snapping open, Bridget sat up and peered through the windshield at the slight man crossing the parking lot. She recognized Bart Carlson from pictures Hammer had pulled up while researching the man the day before. Carlson climbed into a black sedan and backed out of his parking space.

Bridget cocked her head curiously. Although the car was obviously a higher-end model, it was fairly subdued for someone who could afford anything. She stood, trying to get a better view of Carlson's car as it left the lot. Hammer turned the key and shifted into drive, rolling forward once Carlson turned onto the main road.

As she jumped back into the front seat, she bumped into Hammer's elbow and he jerked the steering wheel to the left before hitting the brakes.

He turned to glare at her. "Pick a seat, muttly," he gritted from between his teeth, "and stay there."

Giving him her best limpid gaze, she turned her attention back to Carlson as Hammer turned onto the road in the direction Carlson had gone.

*Hurry up! You're going to lose him!* Carlson's car quickly blended into traffic, camouflaged by the many other black sedans on the road.

Hammer seemed calm, keeping his speed even, gradually passing other vehicles until Bridget spotted Carlson's car in their lane, with just a station wagon separating them.

"Little close," Hammer muttered, allowing a hybrid to squeeze in between his car and the station wagon.

Bridget wagged her tail and whined, the excitement of the chase flowing through her, thrilling both her human and canine parts.

Hammer grinned at her. "Yeah, this is the fun part." He reached over to rumple her ears. "It's nice to have company, now that you've finally woken up."

Ignoring the last part, Bridget kept her eyes on the black car ahead of them.

*He switched lanes! Hurry, switch lanes!* Bridget yelled in her head but Hammer, looking completely relaxed, waited several minutes before moving over into Carlson's new lane. Now Hammer was three cars behind the one he was following but that didn't seem to bother him. It was making Bridget very anxious though.

"Well, he's definitely not going to the office," Hammer commented. They were headed to the industrial section of the city, passing abandoned warehouses that were a little too far away from the downtown area to be remodeled into upscale lofts.

*If the girlfriend lives here, he's not a very generous sugar daddy.* Bridget glanced out the window, puzzled.

Carlson turned right onto a side street and Hammer swore. "Of course he picks an empty street," he complained and drove right past the turn.

Bridget stared at him. *What are you doing? We're going to lose him!*

"Hang on, sweet pea," he warned as he took a sharp right at the next street. He drove slowly along it, checking each block for any sign of Carlson or his car. The neighborhood was deserted. When the street they were on ended, Hammer swung another right, heading toward the street Carlson had turned onto.

At the intersection, Hammer checked both ways but the street was empty.

"Shit!" He began to crisscross the blocks, carefully checking for any sign of Carlson's car, but it was as if he'd vanished.

"Motherfucker's getting a GPS tracker on his car next time," he muttered, scowling as he headed back to the main road. Yanking out his cell phone, he hit a button and held the phone to his ear, still grumbling to himself.

"Mrs. Carlson, it's John Dexter from Hammer Investigations," he said, interrupting his own stream of profanity.

"Well, somewhat successful," he told her after a pause. "I have a quick question for you. Do you or your husband own property anywhere near Marsh Street and Twenty-Eighth?"

He nodded, listening. "That's what I thought. Any idea what he might be doing in this area?"

Hammer gave a bark of laughter. "Yeah, that's probably right. Thank you, Mrs. Carlson. I'll call back once I have something to report."

He hung up. "His wife thinks he has a girlfriend holed up here but that doesn't seem right, does it, sweet pea?"

*Nope.*

"Well, there's nothing more to see here. Might as well go back to the office and get some work done." Making one right turn and then another, he headed back to the main road.

Once they got to the office, Bridget slept on the insanely comfortable couch while Hammer worked. It was late afternoon before she wandered into the back part of his office. Standing by his chair, she leaned into him, yawning hugely.

His hand stroked down her back. "Shit, we've got to run." He saved the last article to the already enormous file he'd put together on Bart Carlson and shut down the computer. "Company tonight. Plus our cute loony might be by again."

*Company?* A horrible thought occurred to Bridget. Was this a *date*?

Hammer was flicking off the lights. "You'll like them, Sweet Pea. I don't like many people but I do like them."

"*Them*" is good, Bridget thought with relief. Unless he was having an orgy, "them" meant some friends were coming over and there was no special lady—or guy—involved. She immediately felt guilty. She should be happy for Hammer to have a person in his life. She was a temporary dog and occasional sex burglar—that was all.

Glancing at his watch, Hammer swore. "I was going to swing by the pet supply store on the way home to pick up some dog food but we don't have time. Guess you'll just have to make do with steaks tonight." He slanted an amused glance her way. "Think you can handle that?"

*I'll try.* The thought of steaks did cheer her up a little, although the reminder that her situation was temporary made her ears and tail droop as she walked with him to the car.

*God that smells so good.* As she eyed the steaks cooking on the grill, Bridget drooled. She was finding that she was hungry all the time as a dog, especially for meat. Her feelings were different too. Although she still had human reasoning skills, she had to fight down a growing attachment to Hammer that bordered on slavish devotion. Surely that had to be a dog thing—she'd only known the guy for a couple days. She leaned against the object of her love, which conveniently also got her nose closer to the lovely, lovely steaks.

"Hammer!"

An adorable blonde woman came into the yard through the gate in the wooden privacy fence. She bounced over to Hammer and threw her arms around him. Bridget restrained the urge to bite the woman on the leg.

"Hey, Beth," Hammer greeted, giving her a one-armed hug in return, his other hand occupied with the long grilling tongs.

Beth glanced down at Bridget and her face lit up. "You have a dog? You've been holding out on us! When did you get a dog? What's his name—or is he a she?" She crouched down so she was face-to-muzzle with Bridget, only Hammer's legs separating them. "Hey, beautiful."

*Beautiful? Okay, so maybe I won't bite her leg.* She gave a tentative tail wag as she moved around Hammer toward Beth. Close up, the blonde was annoyingly cute, with wild curls and full lips. Jealousy began creeping back in but was forestalled by Beth scratching Bridget's ears. It was really hard to hate someone, no matter how pretty, when that person was rubbing her ears. Bridget half-closed her eyes in bliss.

"Bridget," Hammer said, and both Beth and Bridget looked up. "That's her name. Maybe. I've been calling her sweet pea."

Beth gave Bridget one last pat and stood up, grinning at Hammer. "Sweet pea?" she repeated, laughter in her voice. Hammer flushed.

*Knock it off, Bridget thought, or he'll start calling me muttly again.*

"Hey, Hammer." A new voice, male this time, brought Bridget's head around. Two men were walking toward them. One was tall and dark, with bright blue eyes and a cheerful grin, and the other was...whoa. Bridget realized her tail was wagging. Despite his scowl, the second man was gorgeous.

"Harry," Hammer nodded at the taller of the two men. "How's it going?"

Harry gave a heavy sigh, his eyes bright with amusement. "I'm just trying to keep these two in line. It's a full-time job, I tell you." Hammer laughed.



The man next to Harry rolled his eyes. "Whatever, asshole," he said, although his voice was fond. "You know – Hey!" he interrupted himself. "You have a dog!" He hurried over to Bridget and crouched down, offering a hand.

Just as she put her paw in his hand, she realized that he'd meant her to sniff it. He just grinned and Bridget almost fell over, he was so beautiful.

"Hey Ky, Hammer calls her sweet pea," Beth told him, her voice still full of laughter, and Hammer reached over to lightly whack the back of her head.

"I shouldn't have said anything," Hammer grumbled but Ky ignored the banter, busy massaging Bridget's neck and ears.

"Who's the prettiest widdle sweetie pie," Ky crooned.

Bridget couldn't help herself. With a groan of ecstasy, she rolled over onto her back and offered her belly for scratching. She didn't care how dog-like or undignified she was acting. If this pretty, pretty man wanted to rub her belly, who was she to argue? She sighed with contentment as Ky obliged, still sweetly baby-talking.

The other three were silent until a snort made Bridget open one eye. Hammer, Beth and Harry were all staring down at them, their mouths open.

"Who is this and what did you do with Ky?" Hammer asked.

Ky looked up and his scowl returned. "Better watch the steaks, big guy. They're burning."

The steaks hadn't burned, to Bridget's regret. She had a feeling she would have gotten all of the charred grill rejects. She did fine food-wise, though. Between the four people slipping her food, she'd eaten the equivalent of three dinners. With a satisfied groan, she shifted over, careful not to move her head from Ky's lap. He was sitting on the ground, his back propped against the trunk of a huge oak tree. Bridget was sprawled next to him and the other three were lounging on lawn chairs, talking casually.

Bridget eyed the visitors. She still hadn't figured out who was with whom. Harry had the same affectionate, protective manner with both Ky and Beth, and Ky treated everyone except Bridget with the same brusque, foul-mouthed disdain, although his eyes grew narrow and hot when he thought no one was looking. The problem was that Bridget had caught him giving the same look to both Beth and Harry. As for Beth, she was openly affectionate to everyone, dispensing hugs indiscriminately, hanging off Harry's arm one minute and leaning on Ky the next.

The strangest part was that there didn't seem to be any jealousy between the three. With a contented sigh, she nudged Ky with her nose and he began absently rubbing her ears again. She was halfway to sleep when Hammer's voice brought her to full alert.

"Can I ask you a question?" Hammer's tone was unusually tentative, catching everyone's attention, although the query had been addressed to Ky.

Ky shrugged, which Bridget assumed was a yes.

"You still having dreams? Nightmares, I mean?"

Another shrug from Ky. Glancing up, Bridget saw that all expression had cleared from Ky's face. She licked his hand and he looked down, his eyes softening as he gently tugged her ear.

"Why d'you ask? You having nightmares too, Hammer?" Harry asked, leaning forward, concern drawing his eyebrows together.

"No," Hammer shook his head. "It definitely wasn't a dream. This was real."

"They feel like that sometimes. Like you're fucking right there," Ky said quietly, his gaze far away.

"Someone was," Hammer muttered. Guilt shot through Bridget. Here was this great guy who'd helped her out, kept her safe, fed her food that wasn't kibble and she repaid him by making him think he was crazy, or at least a burglary victim. What kind of awful person was she? Standing up, she walked over to Hammer and rested her head on his thigh, wishing she could explain, could apologize. He smiled at her and rubbed her ears.

"Call us," Harry ordered. "When you wake up, if you need to talk, call us. I don't care what time it is."

"We'll probably be up anyway, between my nightmares and this screamer in our bed." Ky jerked a thumb at Beth, who sat up straight, spilling some of her beer in the process.

"Total T.M.I., Ky," she hissed at him, her face red.

He stared at her blankly for a second and then grinned. "No, dummy – not *that* screaming. Screaming after a nightmare."

"Ohh," Beth settled back, her face still red, brushing at the splatters of beer on her jeans. "Guess I'm the one sharing too much information then. Sorry, Hammer."

"No problem," he told her, his voice strained, as if holding back laughter.

Beth looked around at the three men, who were carefully not looking at each other. "Oh, go on. Get it out before you explode."

The men burst into laughter, the sound filling the yard and floating through the crisp evening air. Bridget moved back to her original position next to Ky. This peace had a fragile feel, as if they were in a temporary lull before a storm. Bridget figured she might as well enjoy the calm while it lasted. She'd figure out how to explain things to Hammer in a way that didn't bring his sanity – or hers – into question. Somehow.

As if on cue, the sound of the gate opening broke the short-lived peace. Bridget came to her feet as Micah entered the yard. When he saw the group, he hesitated.

Hammer stood up. "Sorry," he told his visitors. "I'll just be a few minutes." Bridget followed him over to where Micah stood.

"Sorry to interrupt," Micah said when Hammer drew near. "This won't take long."

Hammer's hand sought out Bridget's head. She stood mostly behind him, using his bulk as cover, with her head curled around his leg. Micah gave her a mocking look, which she ignored.

"That's okay," Hammer told him. "I asked you to come by tonight. Did you bring some pictures or her vet record?"

Instead of answering, Micah asked, "Were you hoping to keep her?"

"Well, sure." Hammer sounded as if he'd been thrown off guard by the question. "Unless Ky wears me down." At Micah's questioning look, he explained, "My friends would love to have her too. I'm just joking though—I'd keep her."

"You should." At the words, Bridget stared at Micah. He looked different today without the false joviality. Now he just seemed tired and sad.

"I should keep her?" Hammer asked incredulously. "After all this, you're just telling me to keep her?"

"Yeah. I've done some research. I know you're ex-Army, now a P.I. and, as far as I can tell, a straight-up guy. You could take care of her. With you, she'd be safe."

Hammer stared at him. "Never thought I'd need my whole résumé to get dog-care approval. What about your nephew?"

"He should never have done it in the first place," Micah said, frowning.

"Done what?"

"Gotten a dog," Micah amended.

Bridget had the urge to roll her eyes. *Or made me a dog.*

"The only thing is, there's another man who's looking for her," Micah explained urgently. "I need you to keep him away from her."

"Another owner?" Hammer asked skeptically. "Popular dog."

"No," Micah shook his head. "He's not her owner and he can *never* be. This is a bad guy. He's been trying to get Bridget from us for days now. You have to promise to protect her from him."

"Who is this 'bad guy'?" Hammer asked. Bridget could tell he still thought Micah was crazy.

"His name's Bart Carlson," Micah told him.

*What?*

"What?" Hammer's voice had gone from indulging the crazy person to focused interest.

Micah looked at him sharply. "Bart Carlson. Why? Do you know him?"

Hammer gave a short laugh. "Know of him, more like. Hard not to—he's a big name in the city and this town is right next door. What's his interest in the dog?"

"She's a...rare breed and he's a collector," Micah half-explained. "He's cruel and can never get his hands on Bridget. Can you promise to protect her?"

Hammer shook his head slowly. "I have to tell you that every time I talk to you, man, you sound a little nuttier."

With a short laugh and a shrug, Micah said, "Yeah, I figured. Don't really care, as long as you promise to keep Bridget safe."

After a short pause, Hammer nodded. "Fine. I'll do that."

"Thank you." The amount of relief in Micah's voice erased the last shreds of suspicion in Bridget's mind. She stepped forward to nudge Micah's hand. He crouched down, taking her head in his hands. "You need to be careful, you hear me?"

Yes. The memory of the men at the hospital and the two breaking into her house sobered her.

"You really need to stop talking to the dog," Hammer sighed. "At least while other people are around. Why don't you come sit down? Have a beer."

"No thanks." Micah stood up, glancing over to Hammer's guests. "I don't want to intrude."

"Don't be stupid," Hammer told him. "C'mon."

He walked over to the other three with Micah reluctantly trailing behind. Hammer introduced Ky, Beth and Harry and then raised an eyebrow at Micah. After a second of hesitation, Micah told them his name—his real name, to Bridget's surprise.

After a few more minutes of casual chitchat, Harry stood up and stretched. "Not to sound old but we have to get home to bed. It's almost a two-hour drive and I'm opening the gym tomorrow. Plus Ky has class at eight."

Beth hugged Hammer. "Bye, Hammer. Next time, we'll cook for you."

"Translation," Ky corrected. "I'll cook. These two are hopeless around food. Unless they're eating it."

"I wouldn't say—" Beth started, looking offended, but Ky interrupted her.

"Hopeless," he repeated.

When she opened her mouth to say something else, Ky cut her off again, this time by kissing her, short but hard. When he raised his head, Beth looked dazed.

"What?" she said and Ky grinned smugly.

"C'mon you two," Harry said. Although he was smiling, his eyes were hot from watching the kiss. He shook Hammer's hand, using his grip to pull him into a rough man-hug.

The other two had to drag Ky away from Bridget.

"We've got to get our own dog," Harry said as they left. "Otherwise, Ky's going to steal Hammer's."

"Fuck yeah," Ky agreed as the gate closed behind them.

Hammer and Micah settled into lawn chairs. Hoping for an ear rub, Bridget sat next to Hammer and nudged his hand. He smiled at her and obliged.

Micah gave her a mocking grin. "Enjoying yourself, Bridget?"

*Bastard. And yes.*

"Seriously, Micah," Hammer warned him. "You have to tone down the crazy."

Micah just smiled at him with an expression as sweet as Sam's. Bridget watched, jealousy thick in her stomach. She wasn't quite sure which man she was coveting but she knew she didn't like this development. She'd already been dumped by Micah—she really didn't want to repeat that with Hammer.

When Hammer got up to get more beer, Micah waited until he was in the house and out of earshot before turning to Bridget.

"Stick close to this guy," he told her, low-voiced and fast. "I'm not sure how much help he'll be if Carlson's guys shoot a tranq dart in his ass but he'll protect you more than I ever could. In the meantime, I'm trying to find —"

Micah broke off as Hammer emerged from the house with a couple uncapped bottles of beer. He offered one to Micah, who accepted it with a nod of thanks. Instead of retaking his seat from earlier across from Micah, Hammer sat next to him.

"So tell me about this Bart Carlson," Hammer requested genially enough, although a thread of steely command ran through the words. Bridget could sense both of the men's tension, a combination of attraction and something else. Whatever it was made Bridget's heart pump faster. She lay down, feigning calm.

"What do you want to know?" Micah stalled, playing with the label on his beer.

"Whatever you know." Hammer smiled, showing his teeth. Bridget whined softly, feeling the air thicken between the two men.

Micah flashed a casual smile without meeting Hammer's eyes. "That's not much. He owns the company Blue Star, lives in a big-ass house at the edge of the city. Other than that, I just know he collects dogs and isn't very nice to his pets."

Shifting infinitesimally closer to Micah, Hammer lowered his voice. "See, I'm thinking that you know more than that. I'm thinking that you know a lot about many things, including a naked woman who showed up in my house last night, knowing a whole hell of a lot more about me than she should."

Micah jolted, his face paling. "Fuck."

"Fuck indeed," Hammer said, still in his calm, reasonable, scary voice. "So tell me—what kind of scam are you running? Is this to find out what I know about Carlson? Did he hire you to spy on me? Or is this just a robbery ploy?"

"No! Neither," Micah burst out, pushing to his feet. "I'm just asking you to keep the dog safe, that's all. You think I'm one of Carlson's asshole thugs?"

Hammer stood up too, looming over Micah, using his extra three inches of height to full advantage. "There's more to this than just a fucking mutt."

Micah glared, not backing down from Hammer's considerable bulk. "She's not just a fucking mutt!"

At Micah's words, Bridget stopped breathing. Was this it? Was Micah going to tell Hammer the truth?

“Fine, she’s not a mutt,” Hammer snapped. “She’s some kind of exotic breed of dog that Carlson wants. You’re not working for Carlson, you have no ulterior motive and you’re not the worst fucking liar I’ve ever seen in my life. Just stop with the bullshit, okay?”

“Fine!”

The men’s faces were only inches apart. There was a tense, three-second silence as they stared at each other, breathing hard—and then Micah grabbed Hammer’s head with both hands and yanked him in for a kiss.

## Chapter Nine

Bridget stared.

After a startled moment, Hammer grabbed Micah by the biceps and jerked his mouth away. "Quit trying to get out of answering my questions," he growled, his chest heaving with each breath.

"You told me to quit lying," Micah reminded him, his voice hoarse. "I'm not lying about this."

The two men stared at each other for an infinite moment before Hammer shoved Micah up against the trunk of the big oak tree. Micah glared up at him with a strange mixture of defiance and pleading.

"Shit," Hammer sighed, sounding defeated. "I know I'll regret this." Lowering his head, he kissed the other man, hard.

Bridget watched, entranced, as Micah appeared to melt beneath the embrace. Leaving the two men alone to give them privacy never occurred to her. She felt a connection to both of them. She could hardly consider the idea that she'd lose both Hammer and Micah.

*If that happens, she thought mournfully, I'll stay a dog forever. I'll go herd sheep on some remote mountain somewhere.*

Watching the two men kiss broke Bridget out of her self-pitying thoughts. Hammer still held Micah pinned against the tree with his body, kissing him with such ferocity that Bridget shivered. One of Hammer's hands was wedged between their bodies. Although she couldn't see for sure, she imagined that his fingers were cupped around Micah's erect cock, squeezing and massaging, torturing the stiff shaft that was trapped beneath his clothes.

Fascinated, she took a step closer. Hammer nibbled the other man's jaw, licking a line to Micah's ear and closing his teeth on the lobe. Micah's eyes were half-closed and glazed with desire, although they sharpened when they landed on Bridget. He pulled back.

"What?" Hammer asked.

Micah shook his head. "It's Bridget."

Hammer turned to look at her. "Go stare at something else. I'm busy." Instead of resuming the kiss, though, he glanced around. "Actually, some of the neighbors are probably watching too. This fence is great for ground-level, but I'm sure the second-floor windows give the neighbors a pretty interesting view."

"Right," Micah dropped his eyes, still pinned against the tree.

"Want to come inside?" Hammer asked, leaning in to give him a kiss on the temple.

"Yeah," Micah said enthusiastically and then flushed. "That'd be okay," he amended more casually.

Hammer laughed as he stepped back, still holding Micah's hand. "C'mon then, crazy boy." He opened the sliding glass door and hauled the other man into the house with Bridget following close behind. Once he locked the door, Hammer closed the vertical blinds and turned back to Micah.

"Strip," Hammer ordered. Fingering the buttons on his shirt, Micah looked as if he were debating whether to obey. "Now." The steel running through Hammer's voice must have convinced him because Micah threw off his shirt and dropped his pants in record time. He leaned over to yank off his shoes and socks, and then he straightened, standing in only his boxer briefs, his thumbs tucked into the waistband and his lower lip caught in his teeth as he hesitated.

"Everything." Hammer's voice had gone gravelly, just as it had the night before. "No, wait."

Bridget and Micah stared at him.

"Don't move," Hammer ordered. "I have to grab a few things. I'll be right back." He disappeared into the hall, leaving the other two looking at each other.

"You going to just watch us all night?" Micah asked her.

No. Before she even made a conscious decision to change, she was standing on two feet, naked except for the collar.

"Shit," Micah sighed, looking her up and down with hungry eyes. "You look even better naked than I imagined."

Bridget walked over to him, standing close enough to see the sweat dotting his skin. "Are you just messing with Hammer?" she asked sweetly. "Because if you are, I'm going to turn back into a dog and bite off your balls."

He stared at her, startled, and then grinned slowly. "No. The guy's hotter than fuck. Are *you* messing with him?"

"No," she told him, leaning closer. "I think I love him."

Micah jerked back a little, his face tightening.

"But then I wonder," she continued, "if I love him, how can I want *you* so much?"

Grabbing a handful of hair, he yanked her in for a hard kiss. When he released her, she was gasping for air.

"What the fuck?" Hammer's voice from the doorway brought both their heads around.

Bridget didn't know what to say. She hadn't thought it through, hadn't thought past wanting to join in, wanting to do more than just watch. Now she had no idea what to tell Hammer, no explanation of why she was in his house again, still naked.

"I knew you two were involved," Hammer said, walking toward where they stood, frozen. "I didn't know how you got in or who you were or what you were doing here, but I knew there was some connection."



"Do you want me to go?" she asked, barely able to speak for fear he'd say yes.

Hammer laughed harshly. "Are you kidding? Here I was, feeling guilty for cheating on some strange woman who broke into my house last night and here you are."

Relief rushed over her in an overwhelming torrent. She grinned and jumped at him, wrapping her arms around his neck and covering his face with kisses. "Good. I don't think I could've stood just watching."

Imitating Micah, Hammer grabbed a handful of her hair to hold her head still so he could kiss her mouth. "What, were you hiding in the bushes or something?"

Shrugging, Bridget non-answered, "Or something."

He shook his head, looking over at Micah and back to her. "You two are weird. Hot, but weird."

Bridget just laughed, happy to be back in his arms as a person again. Stretching up, she nipped his earlobe. She felt the rush of air fill his chest as he inhaled and his hand came down sharply on her bare ass. The sound of the smack filled the kitchen. It was her turn to suck in a breath, loving the way the sting warmed to a burn.

She glanced over her shoulder at Micah, who was staring at her ass where she was sure a red handprint was forming. The bulge at his crotch strained the front of his underwear.

"Why aren't you naked?" Hammer asked Micah. "Here," he unhooked Bridget's arms from around his neck, "go help him."

She went eagerly, kneeling on the tile floor in front of Micah and running her fingers beneath the waistband of his boxer briefs, searching until her fingertips found the slippery head of his cock. He groaned as she explored blindly, drawing tiny circles through the wetness that leaked from the tip. Glancing over her shoulder, Bridget saw that Hammer was right behind her, watching, his face tight with desire. From her kneeling position, the men appeared even bigger than they really were, two horny giants, hard and ready to fuck her silly.

Hungry moisture slid from her pussy to wet her thighs. Wanting to prolong the moment, Bridget used her other hand to explore the contours of Micah's balls beneath the cotton fabric. Leaning forward, she pressed her mouth to the white bulge in front of her.

Micah groaned, tangling his fingers in her hair and holding her against his crotch. Bridget moved the fabric with her lips and fingers, her other hand teasing the bare skin she'd found beneath his underwear. Hammer's hands joined Micah's at her head, holding her there. Bridget almost smiled – as if she was going to move away. She didn't want to be anywhere else than on her knees between these two men.

Pinching a fold of fabric between her teeth, careful to barely scrape the flesh underneath with their hard edges, she pulled the underwear out and down, releasing his cock from its cotton prison. Bridget rubbed her face on the shaft, the skin silky soft against her cheek and lips but hard as rock beneath. She nuzzled his balls, tight beneath

his erection, loving the smell and feel of him. Their last encounter had happened so fast, so unexpectedly, that enjoying him like this, taking her time, was a treat.

Micah's hands tightened in her hair, holding her head still as he directed the tip of his cock toward her lips. Obviously, he wasn't feeling the need to take his time as much as she was. Still she teased, refusing to open her mouth enough to allow him in. Instead, she lapped at the head with tiny flicks of her tongue, exploring the narrow slit that was flavored with pre-cum.

"Suck it," Micah snarled but she still delayed, enjoying her small revenge for the way he'd treated her after that night at the bar.

"Stop," Hammer ordered, and Bridget thought at first he was telling her to stop teasing. When she looked up at him, though, he was leaning in to kiss Micah. When he pulled back, he commanded the other man, "It's your turn to suck it."

With some regret, Bridget gave Micah's cock a final kiss and, still on her knees, turned to unfasten Hammer's jeans. As Micah pulled off the other man's shirt, she pushed Hammer's jeans and underwear over his hips, using the opportunity to rub her nipples over the rough fabric on the way down. She took off his shoes and socks and tugged his jeans and underwear off. Spreading her knees wide so the cool air hit the wetness of her pussy with a rush that made her gasp, she scooted back so she could lower her chest to the floor and press her pointed nipples onto the cold hardness of the tile.

Kissing Hammer's ankle, she slid her tongue around the bone and then switched to the other foot, feeling the fine tremor of his muscles.

"Up," Hammer ordered. "Before we lose it completely and fuck you there on the floor."

Bridget stood reluctantly, not sure what was wrong with the idea of fucking her on the floor. She didn't want to move but she also really didn't want this experience to be over yet. Hammer pulled over a kitchen chair and sat on the edge, his legs spread.

"Hands and knees," he demanded, looking at Micah, who immediately complied. Unlike Bridget, Micah didn't tease. Instead, most of Hammer's considerable length disappeared into his mouth on the first swallow. Hammer's head fell back with a deep groan and Bridget leaned closer, lured by the slide of Micah's mouth up and down the thick, dark cock.

Before she could join in, Hammer grabbed the lube he'd brought down and offered it to her. "Make him ready for me," he gritted out, the muscles on his jaw standing out in severe relief.

Accepting the lube, she moved behind Micah. Trailing one hand up his leg, she reached between his thighs and gently squeezed his sac. His whole body jerked under her touch and she smiled, enjoying the power of her position. She could do whatever she wanted with him and he had to take it. Sliding both hands over his ass cheeks, she dug in her fingers, loving the taut resiliency of his muscled rear.

Leaning over his back, she wrapped her arms around him so she could smooth her hands along his chest, flicking his small nipples with her nails. She looked up to see Hammer watching her as his hands guided Micah's head up and down on his cock. Lightly scoring his chest with her fingernails, Bridget licked her way down his spine, not stopping until she dipped into the crease that divided his ass cheeks.

Her hands found his cock and played with it as she kissed and bit the round curves of his butt. His hips jerked involuntarily when her fingers closed around his erection and he shoved his cock into her grip.

"Don't let him come," Hammer warned. With a pout, Bridget released Micah's shaft, turning her attention to his ass. Feeling very brave, she picked up where her tongue had left off. Pushing his cheeks apart, she licked down to his puckered hole. It wasn't something she'd ever tried or thought she'd like, but there was a pleasurable naughtiness to the act. Plus, if the way he was clenching his ass cheeks in her grip was any indication, this was driving Micah crazy.

The first touch of her tongue on his anus was just a light flicker but Micah reared up, pulling away from Hammer's cock.

"I can't take it," Micah gasped. "I'll explode if she does that."

"I think you can take it," Hammer told him, leaning over to kiss him. Bridget shifted so she could watch the men, fascinated by the meeting and separation of their mouths, the way Hammer caught Micah's lower lip in his teeth, tugging before he let it slip away.

Opening his eyes, Hammer saw her watching and smiled. "Go on," he told her, "Eat his ass. He won't come." The last was said as a command and Micah bit his swollen lip. Under Hammer's gaze, he nodded.

"Do it," Micah grunted. Hammer grinned in approval and kissed him again.

Bridget knelt behind Micah. She kneaded both cheeks before pulling them apart to reveal her target. He clenched beneath her gaze and she smiled, knowing that feeling of needy anticipation, that desperate want mixed with a touch of fear.

Moving close, she touched his opening with her tongue, loving how he jerked beneath the tiny caress. She lapped at it again, circling in a smaller and smaller spiral until she speared her tongue inside him, feeling him clench around the invasion. Again and again, she pushed her way inside, until his hole was wet and his muscles relaxed, allowing her in.

It wasn't enough. She wanted to go further, to enter him fully. Pulling back, she heard Micah's protesting groan. She picked up the lube and smeared a generous amount on her fingers. An odd shyness overtook her and she glanced at Hammer, who gave Micah a final kiss before moving to kneel behind Bridget. His arms bracketed her sides as he squeezed Micah's ass cheeks, pulling them open to reveal his hole, shiny now from her saliva.

Hammer nuzzled the side of her neck above the collar. "Make him ready for my cock," he growled, making her shiver. His teeth closed gently on a tendon running the

length of her neck and she pressed her body back against him, feeling the stiff length of his erection burning against her back.

Obediently, she nudged one slick fingertip inside Micah, both hearing and feeling his groan at her entry. The sound excited her and she pushed in farther, her senses overwhelmed by the grip of Micah's body as Hammer licked and nibbled at her shoulder.

When her finger was buried to the hilt, she drew it out and slid it back in with ease. She slipped another finger into his lubed ass, slipping the length of both digits deep inside him. Bridget liked the play that two fingers gave her to widen and stretch his opening.

She'd never explored a man like this before and was fully enjoying it, noting which movements made Micah jerk and moan with pleasure. Now that she was inside, Hammer released his ass cheeks and moved his hands to Bridget's breasts, pinching and tugging the nipples. She gasped at the sharp flare of sensation that radiated from his touch. He was rougher than anyone she'd ever been with and she was shocked that she was so turned on by that.

Thrusting a third finger into Micah's ass, she heard him groan as he pushed toward her. Her fingers must have touched a sweet spot because his muscles tightened, trapping her hand in place. When he relaxed, she plunged her fingers deep, trying to find that spot again.

Micah swore, panting, and Hammer pulled Bridget away. She cried out in protest, not wanting to withdraw from the hot grip of Micah's body, but Hammer was relentless. Ignoring her objection, he picked her up off the floor and sat her on the table.

The cold wood under her ass was a shock and she jumped. Hammer grinned and pushed her away from the edge, nudging her knees apart until she sat, spread open and exposed. Micah was watching, still on his knees, his eyes smoldering green from beneath his tangle of hair.

Bridget's breath caught. She loved that savage, lust-filled look, the one she'd never thought she'd see again.

"What do you want to do?" Hammer asked Micah. Bridget looked back and forth between the men. When Hammer was aroused he held on to his control until the very end, while Micah got wild. She loved the difference and found both incredibly hot.

His eyes narrowed, Micah looked at Bridget and then back to Hammer. "Whatever you want," he finally snarled. His words were compliant but his tone was fierce, as if he was fighting the need to give in. Bridget wriggled against the hard surface of the table, utterly turned on by Micah relinquishing control to Hammer.

"I want you to eat her pussy," Hammer commanded, his voice rough, as if Micah's capitulation affected him just as strongly as it did Bridget.

Micah didn't hesitate. Surging to his feet, he bent over the table and buried his face between her thighs, gripping her legs above the knees, pushing them so far apart that Bridget thought she might break. Toppling back, she caught herself on her hands, her

arms shaking as they supported her weight. She loved it, though—the pulling stretch of her inner thighs, the way his fingers dug into her legs—it all added to the mind-blowing pleasure radiating from her pussy.

His teeth caught her clit lightly and she cried out, her thighs clenching, fighting the grip of his hands, trying to close her legs around his head to keep him there forever. Despite her efforts, he released the nub of flesh with a lick before moving to her pussy and plunging his tongue inside her, mimicking what she'd done to his ass just a short time before.

Bridget glanced up at Hammer, who was watching them as he rolled on a condom. Chest heaving and shiny with sweat, Hammer's eyes were fixed on the head between Bridget's thighs. When his hand smoothed over Micah's ass cheek, Micah lurched forward, his chin bumping Bridget's clit.

She gasped, her body jerking with pleasure.

"Sorry," Micah muttered, smoothing a hand down her thigh in apology.

Bridget choked on a laugh. "Don't apologize for *that*!"

After glancing up as if to make sure she meant it, Micah gave an evil grin and tucked his face back between her thighs. His tongue danced up and down her labia before flickering against her clit. Bridget's hips thrust up toward his face, wanting more. Instead, he backed off, lightly kissing and nipping her inner thigh. She growled.

A crack echoed through the room and Micah's body jerked as he grunted. Startled, Bridget looked up at Hammer, who was raising his hand again. He brought it down against Micah's ass cheek for a second spank. Pressing his face into Bridget's thigh, Micah panted, his whole body stiff and quivering.

Hammer waited, running gentle fingers over Micah's red ass. "More?" he asked.

Micah's answer was muffled by Bridget's leg.

"What?"

Lifting his head, Micah snarled, "Yes!" Dropping his head so that his hot cheek rested where Bridget's leg joined her hip, he added in a surly mutter, "Please."

Bridget saw Hammer smile, although desire added a fierce edge to his expression. "Manners even," he teased roughly. "Looks like the discipline is working already." Instead of delivering what Micah had just begged for, however, Hammer bent his body over Micah's, lining his erection up with his ass.

From her sitting position, Bridget could watch Hammer work the head of his cock into Micah's lubed hole, while at the same time see Micah's expression of tortured ecstasy, feel his fingers dig into her thighs as he was stretched and filled.

Hammer's controlled expression cracked as he worked his way in. Watching him, Bridget could almost feel the squeeze of Micah's body around Hammer's cock, the hot slide of the lubed passage. At her groan, Micah turned his head and began to suckle her clit as two of his fingers slid into her pussy.

She moaned, wanting to let her head fall back and her eyes slide closed. She fought it, needing to watch the two men. Pulling his fingers from her pussy, Micah burrowed them between her cheeks to her rear hole and pushed inside her.

Bridget gasped at the entry as his tongue speared into her pussy, taking the place his fingers had vacated. As he licked, plunging his tongue into her, his fingers worked an inch more deeply into her ass. Micah mimicked the movement of Hammer's cock, allowing Bridget to feel what Micah was experiencing.

Gripping Micah's hips, Hammer thrust in, burying his thick erection to the hilt. Micah groaned, the warm air from the sound blowing against Bridget's sensitized flesh, and plunged his fingers deep into her ass. The three of them paused for a moment, breathing hard.

Hammer released Micah's hips and brought his hand sharply down on the side of the other man's ass. Micah jerked, his fingers driving another fraction inside Bridget. Unable to continue his attention to her pussy, he pressed his forehead into her thigh, gasping against her skin at the next spank.

As Hammer's palm continued to fall against Micah's ass, sometimes softly and sometimes with enough force to draw a grunt from Micah, Bridget absorbed the shocks of his body, feeling each stroke as if it had landed on her own ass. When the spanks stopped, she made a small, disappointed noise.

Leaning over Micah, Hammer withdrew his erection and then thrust in again, out and in, picking up a regular rhythm that Micah imitated with his fingers in Bridget's ass. She matched her hips to the movement of his hand, tightening around his fingers every time they were buried deep within her.

Micah flicked her clit with his tongue, over and over, adding that sensation to the building pleasure the movement of his fingers was creating. She was panting, gasping for breath, pushed higher and higher by not only what was happening to her own body but by the way Hammer thrusts were quickening, his excitement fast spinning out of control, and Micah's small noises as his ass was plundered.

Reaching around to grasp Micah's cock, Hammer bent to kiss his shoulder. With a strangled yell, Micah came, his body bucking beneath Hammer. The sight drove Bridget over the edge and she fell into her own orgasm, arching back as she cried out, her ass clamping around Micah's fingers.

Unable to stay in a sitting position, she melted back onto the table. Her muscles wouldn't hold her, even though she badly wanted to watch Hammer's control shatter as he came. She heard it though, his guttural groan as he spilled. When Hammer withdrew, so did Micah's fingers from Bridget's ass, setting off another spasm of pleasure.

She sighed, content and satiated, her eyes drifting close. The only sound was heavy breaths from three sets of lungs as they recovered.

"You can't sleep on the kitchen table," Micah told her, shifting off her as he straightened.

She frowned. "Why not?"

Hammer laughed. Reaching down, he swung her up and over his shoulder in a fireman's hold. With a shriek of surprise, Bridget scrambled to grip whatever she could.

"Grab the lube and stuff, would you?" he asked Micah and hauled her out of the room. As he carried her through the house and up the stairs, her search for a hold turned into a sensual exploration of whatever she could reach—his back and ass and hips. She kissed the spot on his back directly beneath her face.

He slapped her ass lightly, either a warning or a promise, she wasn't sure. Hoping it was the latter, she pinched his ass cheek, marveling at the tight, muscular globe beneath her fingers. Hammer spanked her again, this time a little more sharply.

"Watch yourself, baby," he warned and she squirmed with pleasure as her ass tingled.

*I'll watch myself right into a spanking*, she decided, wiggling in his hold again. Once in his bedroom, he swung her down and onto the bed in one movement. The guys tumbled into bed with her, one on each side.

Now that she was on a bed, Bridget's sleepiness had completely disappeared. Turning toward Hammer, she kissed him, long and deeply. Micah tucked himself against her back and she twisted her head around so she could kiss him as well.

"You thinking of starting round two?" Micah asked, breaking the kiss.

"Maybe," she told him, a smile curling the corners of her mouth. "Why?"

He groaned theatrically. "A man's work is never done."

Hammer laughed. "You know it." He heaved himself to a sitting position and then to his feet. "Who's for a shower first?"

"Me," Bridget answered, darting into the bathroom.

"Me," Micah seconded, following close behind.

Bridget ended up between the guys in the shower. She looked up at one and then the other. They were tall enough and broad enough to block pretty much all the spray.

"Any chance of getting some water here?" she asked, hands on her hips.

Micah nuzzled her neck. "Want to get wet, do you?" he growled.

She laughed, elbowing him off even as a shiver went down to her toes. *Yes.*

"Here," Hammer reached for her throat. "Better take this off."

Bridget had no idea what he was talking about until he began unbuckling the collar. "Right," she said, feeling stupid. She'd gotten so used to wearing it she hadn't even remembered it was on. Hammer pulled it free, tossing it over the shower door as he leaned down to lick her throat.

Micah lifted her hair and nibbled on her nape from the back. "As collars go," he murmured, "that one isn't bad. It's pretty hot, actually." Sliding a hand over her belly, he pulled her against him, pressing his burgeoning erection against her lower back.

"Maybe she should have a shock collar," Hammer suggested to Micah wickedly. "We could keep her in line."

Micah snorted. "All you need for that is that big hand of yours on her ass."

"Sounds good," Hammer agreed, his voice immediately growly at the idea.

*God, does that sound good,* Bridget thought, still a little shy about saying it out loud. "It worked for you," she told Micah over her shoulder and he nipped the side of her neck in retaliation.

Hammer began soaping her breasts. "You're too short," he complained. "Boost her up, would you?" he asked Micah.

Wrapping his hands around her waist, Micah easily lifted her so that she was face-level with Hammer.

Bridget squeaked. "You guys haul me around way too much," she told them, although she wrapped her legs around Hammer's middle and grabbed his shoulders to support her weight.

"If you weren't such a tiny person, we wouldn't have to keep tossing you around like a football," Micah informed her, soaping her back.

"Sure, blame the victim," she teased. "Hand me some of that soap, would you? Might as well do some cleaning while I'm up here." She rubbed the top of Hammer's shiny head. "I can see all the cobwebs from this position."

"Hey!" he protested, laughing as his soapy hands slid around to cup her ass. Pressing his chest against her back, Micah reached around to play with her breasts, catching her nipples in slippery fingers. All thoughts of washing or making any more smart remarks completely disappeared from Bridget's mind. Leaning back against Micah, she reveled in having four big male hands sliding over her body.

"I want to be inside you," Micah growled in her ear, his voice rough. "I think bath time's over."

Both men went into efficiency mode, washing and rinsing all three of them in record time. Although Bridget missed the leisurely and soapy exploration they'd started in the shower, her adrenaline ramped up as she thought of what was to come. As she toweled off, her anticipation built until the brush of the towel across her over-stimulated nipples was almost painful.

Glancing up, she saw that both men were watching her, wearing almost identical predatory expressions. Feeling like a rabbit being stalked by two wolves, she took a couple steps backward toward the door and darted out, dashing into the bedroom.

Hammer caught her and tossed her onto the bed. Right behind him was Micah, who straddled her before she could roll away. After tossing Micah one of the condoms he'd brought up, Hammer rolled one on his own erection.

"Here." Micah handed his unwrapped condom to Bridget. Touching him more than was really necessary, she eased it over his cock, enjoying the small groan that Micah couldn't restrain. Hammer caught her wrists and pulled them over her head, holding



them there with one hand as he kneeled by her side. Leaning over, he kissed her as the fingers of his free hand played with one of her nipples.

Nipping at her lips, he demanded entrance and she allowed him in, loving how his mouth ravaged hers, how Hammer kissed her as if he was starving for the taste of her. His hand on her breast plucked at her nipple, his fingers just rough enough to shoot threads of pleasure through her chest down to her pussy.

Her hips bucked impatiently beneath Micah, wanting more. He held her down easily but that just increased her hunger, her desperate need to be filled.

"Wild thing," he growled, stretching full-length over her, pressing her body into the mattress. She loved that, being restrained, held down by two men. Micah licked her throat, traced her collarbone with his lips. He kissed and nibbled his way down to her breast, stroking the underside with his tongue and making Bridget gasp and arch into the touch.

He drew a twisting spiral toward her nipple with his tongue and Hammer's mouth joined his there. Bridget cried out at the dual attack on her breast as Hammer continued working her other nipple with his fingers, pinching and pulling as his tongue tangled with Micah's.

Micah gave a final suctioning pull and then moved to her other breast, sucking and licking her nipple and Hammer's fingers indiscriminately. Closing his teeth lightly, Micah scored the swollen nub, sending Bridget almost twisting off the bed.

As Hammer teased Bridget's earlobe with his tongue, Micah worked his hips between her thighs, the head of his cock nudging her pussy. She raised and spread her knees, opening herself to him, and Micah took the invitation. He plunged into the heat and wetness of her body, filling her in one thrust. Crying out in relief and ecstasy, Bridget gripped his hips with her thighs, her hands twisting in Hammer's hold, more for the pleasure of the restraint than any desire to be set free.

Instead of thrusting, Micah grunted, "Turning," at Hammer, who released his grip. Micah rolled them, reversing their positions so Bridget was on top, still impaled by his cock. She tried to sit up, to raise and lower herself on him and create that wonderful friction she craved, but Micah held her still.

When she felt Hammer's hands on her ass, Bridget knew what was about to happen and apprehension filled her. She'd never had a cock in her ass, much less at the same time her pussy was stuffed full.

"Shh," Micah soothed. He must have felt her tense, because his hands smoothed over her back as if to calm her. "It'll be fine."

"We'll go slowly," Hammer promised, brushing her tight back entrance with a cool, lube-slick finger. He took his time, circling her hole and then dropping to where Micah's cock stretched her pussy. As Hammer traced where their bodies met, Micah swore.

"You're not helping," Micah growled at Hammer, who huffed a laugh. "I'm already dying here, holding still when she's so fucking tight."

Bridget could feel the sweat on Micah. Ducking her head, she licked the dent above his breastbone and felt his breath shudder out of him.

"Now you're both ganging up on me," Micah rasped. "Just remember – revenge is a bitch!"

Bridget laughed, abruptly stopping on a gasp when Hammer slid a thick finger into her ass. "Cheater," she accused him, her body tightening around the intruder. She must have squeezed Micah as well, because when he swore again it was almost a sob.

"You don't like it?" Hammer drew his finger out and plunged it in again, twisting as he penetrated. "Well?" he asked when she didn't answer. He began to pull it out again and she clamped around it.

"No!" she cried. "I mean yes! Please, I like it."

To her relief, he immediately pushed inside her again, adding a second finger. Bridget caught her breath. The edge of dark pleasure was back and his fingers were suddenly not enough.

"Please," she begged as he drove his fingers into her.

"Please what?"

"I need you inside me," she told him.

"I am inside you," Hammer said, twisting his fingers as he thrust and making her cry out at the lurch of pleasure.

"Please," she whimpered, desire driving her past pride. "Please fuck my ass."

Micah groaned. "Do it, you teasing fucker!" Bridget felt better when she heard the desperation in his voice – she wasn't the only one on the edge.

"I'd be happy to." Even Hammer's habitually calm voice was strained and Bridget felt a tremor run through the hand that gripped her hip. If she hadn't been so desperate, she would have smiled. He wasn't as in control as he pretended to be.

Then his fingers pulled free and the head of his erection was demanding entrance and all rational thoughts were erased from Bridget's brain. The tip of his cock slipped into her, feeling incredibly huge despite the generous amount of lube he'd worked into her ass.

Pulling her head down to his, Micah kissed her, distracting her with his lips and tongue. Bridget nipped his lip, not wanting to be distracted. She wanted all her attention on what was happening, on the burning stretch of her rear entrance as Hammer pushed inside her, filling her fuller than she'd thought possible. The heat of pain melted into the most intense pleasure she'd ever felt and she cried out into Micah's mouth.

"Okay?" he asked. She opened her eyes and, seeing his concerned face, felt a twinge of guilt at biting him.

"Better than okay," she gasped, as Hammer drove his cock in to the hilt. He rested some of his weight on her back as he leaned in to kiss her shoulder. With a shiver, she clenched around both cocks, drawing groans from the men. "This feels...amazing."

It was true. Every other sexual experience paled in comparison to this double invasion. She was pinned between them, jammed full of hard, thick cocks—it was heaven. Hammer slowly drew out and then slid back in, rubbing against Micah's cock the entire way, with just a thin barrier between them.

The two men found a rhythm, pulling her up and pushing her back down, sliding out and then ramming home again, battering her between them. Bridget couldn't do anything except go with the motion, loving every stroke even more because of how helpless she felt, trapped between these huge, aroused men.

They were moving faster now, pounding into her from both sides. Bridget was caught, thrown higher and higher, pummeled by thrusts that grew rougher and wilder until she screamed her release, her entire body drawn tight as her orgasm crashed over her.

Colors exploded behind her eyelids as her body shuddered, overloaded with pleasure. Reaching behind her, she gripped Hammer's hip, pulling him tight against her as her other hand scrabbled to grip Micah's arm. She needed to anchor herself before she flew off the bed in a thousand multicolored bits.

She was vaguely aware of the men coming shortly after she did. Limp and boneless, her brain wiped clear of everything except the leftover fizzles of pleasure, she felt a slight disappointment that they couldn't be bare inside her, filling her front and back with hot jets of cum.

Hammer pulled free of her ass, setting off another rush of sensation and making her shiver with pleasure. He lifted her free of Micah and she sighed as he slid from her body, leaving her empty. Tucking her back against his chest, Hammer settled them both on their sides and curled his body around her, surrounding her with warmth.

Micah turned to face them, leaning in to kiss first her and then Hammer.

"Thank you," he said quietly, before slipping off the bed and heading for the bathroom.

Hammer's arm tightened around her waist. "You running off again?" he asked. She shivered as his warm breath brushed across her ear.

Yes. She shrugged.

With a sigh, he gave her another squeeze and then released her. "I figured."

Bridget bit her lip as she slid off the bed and stood, pausing when Hammer spoke again.

"If you ever want to have a normal date—you know, knock on the door, wear clothes, grab a bite, that sort of thing—just let me know. It might be kind of nice. You can even bring your cute boyfriend along, if you'd like."

Glancing over her shoulder, she saw he'd propped himself up on his elbow and he was smiling his usual crooked grin. For some reason, the sight made tears pop into her eyes. Turning her head quickly so he wouldn't see that she was about to cry, she gave an awkward nod and hurried toward the bathroom.

She knocked before opening the door but Micah had already gone, having slipped through the other door into the hallway. As she stepped into the bathroom, Bridget's foot bumped something. Glancing down, she saw it was her collar. She picked it up and buckled it around her neck, trying very hard not to bawl her eyes out.

Hammer found her downstairs ten minutes later, gazing out the living room window.

"There you are," he said. Walking over to stand next to her, he reached down to scratch her ears. "I wondered where you'd wandered off to."

They both stared into the night for a few moments.

"Did she go out there stark naked or did she have clothes stashed in the bushes?" he asked. Bridget didn't answer but leaned against his leg, tilting her head so he would get the itchy spot.

"At least they didn't take my wallet," he sighed, moving over to close the vertical blinds. "Or the TV."

Bridget looked at him sideways, insulted.

"I don't know what those two are up to but I wish they'd just tell me."

*I wish you'd believe me if I did tell you.*

Hammer headed for the stairs. "Come to bed, sweet pea," he said over his shoulder. "I don't feel like sleeping alone tonight."

Bridget watched him climb the stairs, wishing that things weren't quite so complicated. With a sigh, she followed him up to bed.

## Chapter Ten

Hammer had just swung the car door shut when a dark blue SUV pulled up next to them and Mac hopped out of the front seat.

"Hammer! Hang on a sec," she called.

He waited for her to circle around the front of her vehicle. "What's up, Mac?"

"I ran those prints you gave me."

Hammer's eyebrows shot up. "Already?"

"Slow crime day, what can I say. So most of them were you of course, there were a couple that didn't match anyone in the system, then there was a realtor, Maggie Braiser, who'd had a DUI ten years or so ago—I assume she was involved in the sale of your house?"

He nodded. "Maggie had a DUI? Huh."

"And then there was another woman, Bridget Grace. She'd been fingerprinted four years ago for her public school pre-employment screening. She's a teacher at Roosevelt Elementary. First grade."

"Bridget?" Hammer repeated.

*Shit.* In all the excitement, she'd forgotten about the whole fingerprint deal.

"That's her. She mentioned something about a kid in her class. What's a first-grade teacher doing in my house in the middle of the night?"

Mac shook her head. "That's not the most interesting part. We set off a bunch of red flags by running her print. Apparently this woman's been reported missing. Walked out of an emergency room without being treated, dropped her purse and all her clothes in the parking lot, left her car and hasn't been seen since."

*I have to call Jodi, let her know I'm okay,* Bridget thought, guilt swamping her. She hadn't even considered how her friends would be feeling when she disappeared.

"What the hell?" Hammer rubbed his head, staring at Mac. "It doesn't make any sense."

"Don't look at me—I know less than you do. All the contact info for the Missing Persons guy is in here. I told him you'd call." She handed him a large manila envelope and moved back to her driver's side door. "Let me know what happens."

"Thanks, Mac," Hammer told her, frowning as he watched her back out of her spot and drive away. He looked at Bridget, who was doing her best not to look incredibly guilty. "What the *fuck* is going on?"

Hammer parallel parked on the side of the road a few blocks down from Bart Carlson's gym and lowered his and Bridget's windows to the halfway point.

"Watch the car, sweet pea," he told her, leaning over to pull a small box from his bag on the floor of the passenger seat. "Carlson's not getting away from me twice." He popped open the box to reveal a matchbox-sized magnet attached to a small box.

*GPS tracker?* Bridget guessed.

Palming the device, Hammer grinned. "Be right back."

Bridget watched as he walked casually down the street, heading toward the gym parking lot. He turned in and disappeared from view. Shoving her head through the open window, Bridget whined. It was a lot harder to be obedient when they weren't having sex, especially when she couldn't see what was going on.

Despite her best efforts, Bridget couldn't fit anything except her head and one paw out the window. She tried to force another paw through the opening but panicked when she realized that, if she got stuck, she'd have to wait for Hammer to come back and free her. When he finally did, he'd probably laugh his ass off the entire time.

With this possible scenario burning her brain, Bridget retreated back into the car and scrabbled against the door with her paw.

*Damn not having opposable thumbs*, she thought for the millionth time since she'd become a dog. She managed to work one of her pads into the opening behind the door lever and jerked her paw toward her. The handle thumped against her paw pad cruelly and the door remained stubbornly closed. Glancing around, she debated changing into a person just for the few seconds it took to open the car door. Unfortunately, the street was busy with other cars and a few pedestrians. If she tried to change, she would be spotted for sure.

With a growl of frustration, Bridget tried again, wedging her paw under the handle and yanking. To her surprise, it opened, tumbling her out onto the pavement. She yelped as she landed in a heap. Standing up, she shook herself off and bumped the door closed with her shoulder. It didn't appear, from her quick glance around, that anyone had noticed a large dog free herself from the car or, if someone *had* noticed, at least no one seemed interested in her.

Hurrying after Hammer, she stayed alert for the sight or smell of Carlson or his paid muscle. Bridget turned into the parking lot entrance and scanned it, immediately spotting Hammer walking along the closest row of cars, tossing his keys casually in the air. Now that she could see him, her hurried steps slowed to a walk and she watched him carefully.

*What are you doing?* the more cautious part of her brain demanded. *He's been taking care of himself for a long time now. He doesn't need you as a sidekick.* Bridget ignored the inner voice, focusing on moving closer to Hammer. She wove between the scattered cars, keeping him in sight, watching as he tossed the keys higher and slightly off-center. He missed the catch and Bridget heard him make a soft, annoyed sound as he bent to pick them up.

From her vantage point, she saw Hammer slip a hand beneath the black car he crouched next to before scooping up the dropped keys.

*Carlson's car*, she realized, feeling stupid for not immediately recognizing it. Hammer walked another ten feet toward the gym entrance and then stopped, dropping his shoulders and giving a short, irritated shake of his head before pivoting on his heel and walking back in the direction he'd come.

It took Bridget several seconds to figure out Hammer was pretending as if he'd forgotten something in the car.

*That man should never be a mime*, she thought with an amused huff. *He stinks at this acting stuff.*

Bridget was so entertained by his over-the-top performance that she missed her chance to dart back to the car. Hammer had spotted her. Now she could read his body language just fine—he was *pissed*.

She watched him approach, her tail sinking between her legs.

"How did you get out?" he hissed as he approached. "Come on, let's go." Hooking his fingers under her collar, he took long, fast strides across the parking lot toward the street. Bridget had to trot to keep up. "Obviously we need to work on a few basics. When I say, 'stay', I fucking mean 'stay'. It's kind of difficult to be inconspicuous when there's a huge-ass dog following me around instead of staying in the fucking car like she's supposed to!"

Hammer turned onto the street and headed for his car, still towing Bridget along with him. While her human side was offended by his expectation that she'd brainlessly obey, her dog side wanted to grovel, to slink along almost on her belly and lick his hand in apology. The human in her was also annoyed at the "huge-ass" description.

When they reached the car, Hammer opened the door for her. "How the hell you fit through that window..." he grumbled, trailing off as he stomped around to the other side, opened the door and slid in. He slammed his car door shut hard enough to make Bridget flinch. She curled up in the seat as well as her large size would allow and rested her chin on the console, giving his nearby elbow an apologetic lick.

"Yeah, you better suck up," he growled, glancing down at her. She was happy to hear an amused edge to his voice. "I have half a mind to buy some dog food. The generic kind."

Bridget winced and licked him again, adding a pathetic whine.

Starting the car and pulling away from the curb, Hammer grunted.

Sitting up, she tried her last-resort pose—head cocked, paw offered, eyes entreating. Hammer took a corner too fast and she almost fell over.

He laughed. "Fine, fine. Don't hurt yourself. Just appreciate how easy you have it." His hand rumbled her ears.

*Oh I do*, she thought, her eyes half-closing in bliss. *I definitely do.*

Hammer had gotten the grill out again, which Bridget greatly appreciated. Although it seemed silly to be so interested in food when her life was such a crazy mess, she couldn't help it. She was starving all the time – especially for meat.

As he cooked, he glanced frequently at the gate. When Micah showed up around seven, Hammer didn't look surprised. He just offered Micah a burger and asked the question he'd been trying to figure out all day.

"So what's the connection between a photographer, a missing first-grade teacher, a stray dog and Bart Carlson?"

"You know my work?" Micah asked, obviously stalling.

"Your address, living relatives, occupation, traffic offenses, plus a few odds and ends. I can't run prints myself but I can get the basics off a name, birth date and social security number. Don't ask me how I got the last two." Hammer pushed the plate with the hamburger into his hands. "Here. Eat."

"Ah." Micah squeezed ketchup onto his burger. Obviously, like Bridget, his appetite didn't disappear under pressure. "I thought you might have seen my photography?"

"No." He made his own burger, shoveling the remaining two onto a plate for Bridget. "I assumed photographer meant weddings, graduation pictures, baby shots – stuff like that."

Micah shuddered. "No, thank Christ. I do some commercial work – wildlife mostly – and then artsy shit the rest of the time."

"You don't seem too impressed with your own art," Hammer observed, his mouth quirking up at the corner. "And I do realize that you haven't answered my question."

Micah shrugged, swallowing a bite. "I never know if my pictures are any good. Sometimes people will go nuts about one that I didn't even want to put in the show and no one will even look at my favorite one of the bunch, one that I could look at for hours." He looked up at Hammer. "And I was waiting 'til we're done eating before I told you what was going on. It's easier just to show you."

Bridget stared at him. Was he seriously going to tell Hammer? She half hoped it was true and half dreaded Hammer's reaction to her deception.

Hammer crammed the last half of his burger in his mouth. "Okay, I'm done. Let's go," he muttered around the food.

Grinning, Micah took his last bite. "In a hurry?"

"Yeah." Hammer swallowed. "You guys are driving me nuts."

Glancing down at Bridget, Micah said, "Well, at least we don't have to wait for piggy here to finish. Did you even chew?"

Offended, she refused to look at him.

Hammer grabbed Micah's and Bridget's empty plates. "Done. Now spill."

"Fine," Micah conceded. "But let's go inside. I don't want to do this out here."



"Do what?" Hammer asked, not moving.

"Some things you need to see to believe," Micah told him with a small grin, which quickly fell away. "C'mon, Bridget. It's showtime."

Bridget trailed along behind the men, not wanting Hammer to know it had been her all along, that she had listened to the confidences he thought he was telling a dog.

*I watched him in the shower!* she remembered, whimpering in her brain. *And that was way before we had sex.*

Hammer, his big body tense, walked behind the other man. Bridget trotted forward a few steps so that she could lick Hammer's hand, a final apology before he could see her change into her human form and refuse to talk with her ever again. He jumped at the touch of her tongue, his hand fisting before he glanced down and saw it was her. He ran his fingers over her head in a caress and Bridget reveled in it, her final pat from this sweet, strong, sexy, amazing man. If she had been a person at that moment, she would have cried. Since she couldn't, she just let out a mournful whine.

Once inside, Micah stripped off his shirt.

"What..." Hammer swallowed. "What are you doing?" His voice sounded croaky as, unblinking, he watched Micah unbuckle his belt.

Glancing up from under his shaggy bangs, Micah gave a slow smile. "Getting these out of the way," he purred, letting his pants drop to the floor.

"Fucking you isn't going to distract me," Hammer protested, although he looked very distracted already. Bridget could smell the lust on him, pooling from his pores with his sweat.

Micah hooked his fingers in the waistband of his underwear. "Did I ask you to fuck me?" he asked, and yanked his final piece of clothing down his legs and kicked it away.

Hammer was breathing hard, air pumping in and out of his lungs. "Last night, if I remember right, you asked. In fact, you were begging for it." He took a single step toward the naked man who was glistening with excited sweat before Micah changed, his body morphing into a dog shape.

Within seconds, he was standing on four paws on the floor, looking up at an open-mouthed Hammer.

Seeing Micah in dog form triggered something in Bridget and she padded over to him. Instinct kicked in and she licked his muzzle, lowering her body and tucking her tail, strangely excited and happy in a dog-like way to see him in this shape.

He stood tall as she fawned over him, the human part of her confused and annoyed at her behavior. When he finally licked her ear, a rush of happiness flooded her and she wriggled with joy. Too soon, he began to change form again, his limbs lengthening until he stood naked in front of Hammer, who hadn't moved since the first transformation.

"Change, Bridget," Micah commanded, and Bridget found herself halfway into human form before she realized she was obeying him. Unsure of how to reverse the

change once it had begun, she finished the switch. As she stood in front of Hammer, waiting for him to react, to *move*, her heart pounded in her chest, deafening her.

"Holy fucking balls of fire," Hammer whispered finally, blinking hard several times. "I've finally gone completely insane."

"You don't think we're the crazy ones anymore?" Micah smirked and Bridget reached over and gave his shoulder a shove.

"Leave him alone," she scolded. "It's really freaky to find something like this out. Give him more than five seconds to process." Turning to Hammer, she asked, "Do you want us to leave for a while?"

He stared at her for a few seconds and finally shook his head. "Don't go," he told her, gently running a finger down her temple and cheek. "I don't get it. You feel so real."

"I *am* real," she reassured him, stepping close enough to press herself against him. "You're *not* crazy. When I first started to change, I was so sick I thought I was hallucinating."

Micah made a small noise. "Was it bad?" he asked.

She glanced over at his serious face and shrugged. "Yeah, pretty bad—especially when strange men were chasing me and shooting me with tranquilizers and breaking into my house." When she saw Micah wince, she relented a little. "But it wasn't all bad. I like being able to run fast. Plus, everything seems a little more exciting. Things that would have terrified me before the dog thing are now kind of...thrilling." She blushed and looked away, not able to meet either of the men's gazes. "Like last night."

Hammer's arms circled her, pulling her tightly against him. She squeaked, unable to breathe. "Sorry," he said, loosening his grip a little. "So that's why you have the same name as the dog."

"Yeah." She rested her cheek against his chest.

"And that's why you're always wearing this." He ran a finger over the collar around her neck.

"Yeah. Well, that and I kind of like it now," she admitted and his arms tightened again.

"Looks good on you." Micah's voice was so close behind her that Bridget jumped. "And I'm not all that big on collars." He brushed her hair aside and kissed the nape of her neck above the strip of leather and rhinestones. With a shiver, she tipped her head back and Micah closed his teeth on the curve where her neck and shoulder met.

Her eyes opened a crack and Hammer filled her vision, his face showing a mixture of confusion and wariness and lust.

"We should talk," she said, trying to shake off Micah's hypnotizing mouth, but he was persistent. Exasperated, she finally sent an elbow into his stomach. "Ow!" she yelped. It was like elbowing a wall.

"No," Hammer said, and Bridget and Micah both went still, waiting. "We're going to fuck first. If this is just some crazy-time hallucination or whatever, I don't want to waste it talking. Later. We'll talk later."

"Okay," Bridget agreed, happy to put off any unpleasant discussion about poking her nose into his shower or listening to his confidences or any other less-than-stellar behavior she'd done while in dog form. She started unbuttoning Hammer's shirt, kissing his skin as she exposed it.

Reaching over her head, Hammer pulled Micah in for a hard kiss. "Run upstairs and grab the stuff," he ordered, and Micah was gone. Bridget unbuttoned faster, roughly pulling his shirt tails out of his pants, turned on by Hammer's commanding tone.

As the last button fell open under her fingers, she flicked her tongue in and out of his bellybutton, loving the way his stomach muscles rippled beneath her touch. She knelt to unbuckle his belt and then set to work on the button and zipper on his pants, her breathing quickening when she saw the growing bulge beneath the fabric.

Letting the pants fall, she worked the material of his boxer briefs over his erection and skimmed everything down his legs. Bridget stared hungrily at the huge, dark cock rising from his groin. When she leaned in, intent on licking the tip of his shaft, Hammer stopped her with a hand on her head.

"Everything off," he grunted. Her lower lip slid out in a pout at the delay but she went to work, pulling off his shoes and socks. He stepped out of the pool of fabric at his feet and shrugged off his shirt, letting it fall to the floor to join the rest of his clothes.

"Now?" she asked hopefully, and he made her wait several seconds before nodding. With a small smile, Bridget leaned in and kissed his thigh, licking her way up his leg and then moving to the other thigh and nibbling her way down that one.

Hammer growled and she laughed, enjoying her small revenge for making her wait. Nuzzling his erection with her lips and cheeks, she moved down to his sac and licked it. Bridget could feel tiny tremors in his thigh against her cheek as she sucked one of his balls into her mouth.

"Fuck!" It was Micah who spoke, dropping condoms and a bottle of lube at Hammer's feet before kneeling behind him. As Bridget switched, taking the other side of his scrotum into her mouth, Hammer widened his stance. Micah's mouth joined hers on Hammer's testicles, his tongue and lips bumping into hers until she abandoned his sac and kissed Micah, their mouths fighting each other for dominance until Hammer's hand on Bridget's head refocused her.

As she ran her tongue around the head of Hammer's cock, probing into his slit and drawing out beads of salty pre-cum, Bridget cradled his balls in one hand and reached through his legs to grasp Micah's erection with her other. He gasped, the sound muffled, and she guessed that he had his face buried in Hammer's ass, his tongue plunging into his clenching hole.

This image made her whimper and squeeze her thighs together, slick with excited moisture. Sucking the head of his cock between her lips, Bridget felt Hammer's hand tangle in her hair, taking control of any motion her head might make. Her helpless position thrilled her, melting her insides into liquid desire. Relaxing her throat, she let him do what he wished.

Hammer buried his cock in her mouth and she swallowed frantically, trying to take his length. Her lips were stretched around him, pushing the boundary of what she could accept, but that just excited her more. She sucked at him, pressing her tongue to the underside of his cock, loving the taste and force of him.

"Enough," he rasped but she wanted more. With a sound of protest, she swallowed him as deeply as she could, the back of her throat working on the blunt tip. "Stop," he commanded, his voice a growl now. He tugged at her hair, gently but intractably bringing her head up. Bridget licked the head of his cock as she was pulled off, a final taste of the beautiful shaft before it was out of her reach.

"Brat," Hammer growled, although a smile quivered on the edges of his mouth. "We need to work on getting you to follow orders."

*Yes please.* Instead of answering, she released her hold on both men and stood up under Hammer's urging. Even at her full height, Bridget felt tiny next to his bulk.

Micah was still behind him and Bridget peeked around behind Hammer to see. Holding Hammer's tight cheeks apart, Micah did indeed have his face pressed into the crack of the other man's ass and Bridget moaned. It was almost as hot to watch as it was to participate.

After only a few seconds had passed with Bridget's hungry gaze fixed on Micah and his busy tongue, Hammer slid his hands down to cup her ass and picked her right off the floor. Her surprised cry brought Micah's head up, his lips parted as he panted for breath. Bridget wrapped her legs around Hammer's waist as Micah scrambled to grab a condom.

Kneeling in front of Hammer this time, he rolled the protection on the cock in front of him and then stood up. Micah pressed his lightly furred chest against Bridget's back, his arms reaching around her so he could cup her breasts in both hands. His fingers caught her nipples in a quick, tight squeeze before allowing them to pop free. He kissed a line from her neck to her shoulder.

Holding her as if she weighed nothing, Hammer lined the tip of his cock with her pussy and entered her with one smooth thrust. They both cried out as he filled her and Micah groaned. His erection pressed against her ass, so hot that Bridget felt as if she was being branded.

"Hold her," Micah gritted out and Hammer gave a short nod, lifting Bridget almost all the way off his cock and driving back into her. Micah's heat disappeared and Bridget whimpered at the loss, the sound turning into a cry as Hammer pulled out and slammed into her again.

Stroke after stroke, Hammer thrust into her, with Bridget clinging on as best she could, her arms and legs tangled around him. Micah returned, pressing against her back again, probing between her ass cheeks with the slippery, blunt tip of his cock. As Hammer's shaft retreated, Micah's advanced, pushing inexorably through the tight resistance to lodge the head into her ass.

Bridget gasped for breath, clenching on Micah's cock, loving the wild burn of his invasion. He hadn't used his fingers to gently stretch her and the intensity of his entry overwhelmed her. Pressing her forehead against Hammer's shoulder, she panted, colors splashing behind her squeezed-shut eyelids.

Both men paused, Hammer's cock fully lodged inside her while the broad tip of Micah's stretched the entrance to her ass.

"Okay?" Micah asked, his voice ragged with need. He stroked her back with one hand as his other covered Hammer's on her hip. It took a moment for his question to register. Bridget finally raised her head and nodded. When the men still didn't move, she leaned forward to kiss Hammer, pressing her lips hard against his until he growled and took over the embrace, shoving his cock more deeply into her and making her mew against his mouth.

She broke the contact, turned her head and twisted so she could kiss Micah, who cupped her face in his hand, holding her in place as his tongue delved into her mouth. Opening, she allowed him in, sucking at his tongue, loving the heat and taste of him. As he kissed her, Micah pressed forward, stretching her ass around another inch of his cock.

Wanting more, she moaned against his mouth but he hesitated, as if worried about hurting her. The pause made her frantic—she needed the friction of the thrust and retreat, the incredible pleasure of two rigid cocks filling her front and back. With a growl, she sunk her teeth into Micah's lip.

He snarled and drove his thick spike deep into her ass. Bridget gasped, clamping onto both cocks, holding them within her body as ecstasy poured through her. Both men pounded into her, propelling her higher and higher each time they entered, each time filling her so full she thought she'd explode with pleasure.

They were moving so fast, so hard that she couldn't match the rhythm with her hips. All she could do was cling and take their thrusts, reveling in the strong fingers digging into her hips, holding her securely. She was helpless between them, trapped between two chests as hard as rock walls as they drove into her again and again until she was flung into an orgasm so strong she thought the world was shaking.

Her arms and legs tightened around Hammer and her body grew taut, every nerve ringing with pleasure. With a grunt, he dug his fingers into her hips and his thrusts grew wild, flinging her back onto Micah's cock as he drove deeper and deeper into her pussy.

With a roar, Hammer threw his head back and shuddered, holding her hips tight against him as he came, his cock buried deep inside her. His orgasm set Bridget off

again and she convulsed around both erections. Micah sucked in a harsh breath as she gripped him. Reaching past Bridget's body, he grasped Hammer's hips and began to thrust, keeping Hammer lodged inside her as Micah's cock plunged in and out of her ass.

"Wait!" Bridget gasped, barely able to speak as she felt yet another orgasm coming. She fought it, struggling weakly, but the ease with which the two men held her sent her over the edge. Exhausted from pleasure, she sagged between them as Micah drove deep within her and exploded with a guttural shout.

When they finally peeled their bodies apart, Bridget's legs wouldn't support her. Micah carried her into the shower and the two men washed her and each other in silence. They dried off and piled into bed. Bridget's eyes were closing almost before her head hit the pillow.

"Tell me about the dog thing," Hammer demanded. Micah groaned.

Opening a cranky eye, Bridget grumbled, "Really? You want to talk *now*? What's wrong with just rolling over and going to sleep?"

"Rolling over and going to sleep sounds good," Micah agreed, his face buried in a pillow.

"The two of you can turn into *dogs*," Hammer said. "I figured I was just nuts but this hallucination doesn't seem to be ending."

With a sigh, Bridget dragged herself to a sitting position, resigned to the fact that she wasn't going to get any sleep anytime soon. "Okay, so what do you want to know?"

Hammer eyed her severely. "Well first off, why you pretended to be a dog."

"I *was* a dog," Bridget insisted, squashing down the usual surge of guilt. He gave her a look and she dropped her eyes. "Okay, fine," she muttered. "I was being chased by bad guys and wanted to hide out. I was hungry, wet and desperate, and I knew that if I changed back into a person, I'd be hungry, wet, desperate and *naked*. You ran by and I liked your...um," *cute ass*, "kind eyes, so I decided to take cover at your place. I just couldn't seem to..." She trailed off and stared at the ceiling, knowing her face was bright red.

"Stay out of my bed?" Hammer finished for her. She risked a quick glance at him, unsure if he was angry or not. His face was unreadable.

"Pretty much," she sighed.

"Or keep from watching me in the shower?"

Micah lifted his head. "You watched him in the shower?" he repeated. "As a dog?"

"Wouldn't you?" Bridget shot back.

Eyeing Hammer thoughtfully, Micah shrugged. "Probably."

Hammer wasn't done yet. "And listening as I told you things I *thought* I was telling to a dog—a *normal* dog, I mean. As in one that couldn't understand."

"It wasn't anything bad," Bridget protested. "Everything you said just made me like you more!"

"I told you I'd fucked guys," he shot back. "That I thought Micah was cute."

Micah raised an eyebrow. "So? Even if you hadn't told her, I think she would've figured out the whole 'fucking guys' thing last night."

"Exactly." Bridget nodded. "And of course you thought Micah was cute. *Everyone* thinks Micah is cute."

"Yeah?" Micah asked, with such an annoyingly cute grin that Bridget thumped him with a pillow.

"I *am* sorry, Hammer," Bridget told him earnestly, ignoring Micah's pillow-muffled grunt of protest. "Really. I felt bad about it but I was a little freaked out about the whole dog-changing thing and the guys chasing me and everything. You were so nice—feeding me hamburgers and letting me sleep with you on the bed and talking to me all the time." She glanced down, a little embarrassed. "I felt so *safe* with you."

"Huh," Hammer grunted and Bridget chewed her bottom lip, waiting for his reaction. "Don't forget I bought you that collar too."

She laughed, so relieved that he wasn't mad anymore that she was almost giddy. "I was just happy you didn't get me the pink one."

A small grin peeked out. "I liked the pink one," he sighed, but then laughed. "I should have gotten one of those nasty-looking prong collars. Bet you would've changed a whole hell of a lot quicker."

"I would've changed right there in the aisle, naked or not," Bridget told him, making a face. "Just spending the five minutes in a slip leash was bad enough."

"Slip leash?" Micah arched an eyebrow. "A little kinky but still kind of hot."

"Not to turn the conversation away from accessories but the two of you still need to tell me what the fuck is going on," Hammer reminded them.

"I don't know all that much," Bridget admitted with a shrug. "Micah, I think you're the expert here."

He pushed himself to a sitting position. "If I'm your expert, we're in trouble." Micah ran his hand over his head, rumpling his hair even more. Bridget tried hard not to be distracted by his bed-head look or the way his arm muscles flexed with the movement. She couldn't stop from snuggling up to his side though. He dropped his arm around her shoulders, pulling her against him.

"You're the closest we've got," Hammer told him. "Unless there's some sort of High Chancellor of Dog-Human Switcheroo somewhere, just dying to educate us. So spill."

*Hammer sounds a little cranky,* Bridget thought, eyeing him closely. *Maybe he feels left out.* Reaching over, she grabbed his hand and tugged, pulling him toward her and Micah. After some initial resistance, he shifted over, lifting her onto his lap and tossing his arm around Micah, pulling him close.

"Well," Micah started slowly, leaning into Hammer and picking up Bridget's hand to play with as he talked. "I was born this way. My brother Joey was too. Our mom died just a few months after we were born. Our dad taught us how to deal with it—how to hide it, how we could never, ever bite anyone." He flashed a quick glance at Bridget, who squeezed his hand.

"So your dad was a...whatever you call it—were-dog?" Hammer asked.

"Not that we ever knew," Micah said. "At least, we never saw him change. Joey and I think it came from our mom."

"Do you—we—*have* to change?" Bridget cut in. "How often? And what's with these crazy meat cravings? I could eat about a dozen hamburgers right now."

"Yeah, we have to. If I don't change after three or four days, I start getting restless. The longest I've gone is six days and then I couldn't control it—hair was just popping out all over me." Micah grinned. "As far as the food thing goes, you saw our cart at the grocery store. After you change, you're pretty much desperate for meat. I think it requires a lot of protein." He slid his hand up her leg to squeeze her thigh. "Plus it makes you hungry for other things too."

"I *wondered* about that!" Bridget tried to shift around on Hammer's lap so she could face Micah. Hammer grunted as her elbow accidentally dug into his stomach.

"Wait," Hammer grumbled, rearranging her so she sat sideways on his lap, her legs across Micah's.

"I've never acted like...um, this," she gestured at the three of them, "before, so I wondered if this dog thing was making me...ah..." Her words stumbled to a halt as she blushed.

"Horny?" Micah suggested, smirking.

"Hot for the two of us?" Hammer offered, his fingers slipping between her legs to brush against her clit.

She sucked in a breath, squirming in his lap.

"Desperate to have both our cocks inside you?" Micah growled, his hand joining Hammer's between her legs. Instead of Hammer's gentle teasing, however, Micah ruthlessly thrust two fingers into her pussy. Bridget whimpered, already wet and ready for his entry, but Hammer pulled Micah's hand away from her. She made another small noise, this one from loss.

"Focus, Micah," Hammer commanded, although his voice was rough with desire. "You and your brother can change—have you met anyone else who can?"

Micah slanted him a sideways look. "Besides Bridget?"

"Yeah, smartass." Hammer eyed him sternly and Micah dropped his gaze. "I've already seen what Bridget can do firsthand."

"My brother got a groupie pregnant," Micah said, his face serious. "He was on tour in Texas when he slept with her, although he doesn't even remember it. She shows up a year later, dumps the baby and takes off. We don't ever see her again."



"Did she see Sam change?" Bridget asked.

Micah shrugged. "Don't think so. He didn't change with us until he was almost four. Probably a good thing—she might have sold him as a circus freak or something."

"So I have Sam in my class and he bites me—*why* did he bite me, by the way?" she asked Micah, who winced.

"He liked you," he told her. "I think he sensed that I was totally obsessed with you after that conference, so that just made it worse."

"What?" Bridget didn't know which part of that was more confusing. "Made what worse? And you were obsessed with me? I would have thought obsession might lead to...I don't know, *calling* after you make out in the alley with someone?"

"Hey, I was doing the right thing," Micah protested. "How could I have had a relationship with anyone? You're obviously not a fuck-once-and-leave kind of girl, so I had to stay away from you."

"How did you know I'm not a fuck-once-and-leave kind of girl?" she demanded, feeling the residual sting of his dumping.

"Because," he gritted out, leaning in, his eyes fierce, "I just did. And now that we've fucked, there's no way in hell I'm leaving you." His gaze turned to Hammer. "Either of you."

A little intimidated by his intensity, Bridget just nodded and asked, "But why did Sam bite me if he likes me?"

Calming a little, Micah sighed. "I don't know for sure. I kept asking him why and he just kept crying and saying he was sorry. I think he had the idea that if you were like us, you would come live with us, be his mom."

"Oh," Bridget said softly, her heart aching for little Sam. "Poor baby."

"I know," Micah agreed, turning so he could lay his head on her breast. "I've had a rough week."

Bridget gave a surprised laugh and tangled her hands in his hair to pull his head away from her chest. "Ass," she insulted him fondly. He refused to leave and turned his head so he could catch one of her nipples in his mouth. She caught her breath, amazed at the speed of Micah's mood swing.

"Micah." Hammer was obviously struggling to keep his voice stern and not laugh as well. "No sex until I have answers."

Reluctantly sitting back, he gave a resigned shrug. "Fine. What else do you need to know?"

"Tell me about Bart Carlson."

In a flash, all humor left Micah's face. "After Sam told me what he'd done, I found out where Bridget lived and—"

"How?" she asked.

"What?" Micah looked at her, blinking innocently.

"How'd you find out where I lived?" she demanded.

"I pulled the fire alarm at school and looked in your personnel file after everyone went outside." Ignoring her shocked expression, Micah continued, "When I got to Bridget's, I found two men – both Carlson's guys – had broken in to her house. There've been rumors that Carlson has a fascination with...oddities, human and otherwise, so I'm thinking that he's set his mind – and wallet – to capturing a were-mutt. I called Joey, told him to get his ass back here and pick up Sam. He did and I tracked Bridget to your house."

Hammer nodded, obviously thinking. "So how did Carlson know about Bridget so quickly? *You've* lived in the area undetected for years."

"I went to the emergency room," Bridget admitted.

"You did *what*?" Micah demanded.

"I was really sick!" she shot back. "I didn't know what was happening to me. Besides, how was I supposed to know there was some evil doctor in Carlson's pocket looking for people who can turn into dogs?"

Hammer laid a soothing hand on her leg. "So what happened at the hospital?"

"A nurse saw my hand change into a paw," Bridget said. "She freaked out and ran to grab a doctor. He was giving me the major creeps, so I left. The doctor and another guy followed me out. I was hiding between the cars when I changed. There wasn't anything I could do – my body just did it. So now I think I'm hallucinating..."

"I know that feeling," Hammer interjected. "It's not good."

"Exactly." She patted his chest. "I run for the woods next to the parking lot and almost make it before one of the guys shoots a tranquilizer dart into my butt."

"Oof," Micah said, wincing in sympathy.

"Definitely 'oof'," Bridget agreed, nodding. "So I manage to go just far enough to fall over the edge of a ravine."

Hammer jerked in reaction and she patted him again. "It was actually a good thing," she reassured him. "I wasn't hurt by the fall and landed against a fallen log. That and the avalanche of leaves I brought down hid me from the guys. I woke up the next morning and went home – still in dog form, since I was too paranoid to venture into the parking lot. Plus there's the whole clothes thing."

"Doesn't seem to bother you now," Micah teased, pinching a nipple. She swatted at him, pretending it hadn't caused heat to rush right to her pussy.

"Don't discourage her," Hammer reprimanded him. "I hope she never starts wearing clothes." He tweaked the other nipple, slightly harder than Micah had. Bridget couldn't even pretend to be annoyed this time since she was too turned on.

"You guys done?" she asked. She tried to sound firm but was afraid that the words came out sounding more provocative than anything.

"Never." Hammer tugged at the point of her breast, drawing a needy sigh and a squirm from Bridget.

"Stop," she protested halfheartedly. "I thought you wanted to hear what happened." Her words ended in a husky rush as Micah's fingers delved between her thighs.

"You're right," Hammer said, although his hand contradicted what he was saying, grasping her knee and spreading her legs and watching as Micah's fingers disappeared inside her. "Keep talking."

She stared at him, her eyes starting to glaze with desire. "What?"

"Talk," he ordered, tugging on her nipple, watching hungrily as Micah drew out three fingers, slick from her juices, and drove them back into her pussy.

She whimpered. "But I can't think..." Bridget trailed off with a moan when Micah pressed his thumb against her clit, his fingers still deep inside her.

"Talk," Hammer said again, bending his head down to kiss her. Pulling back, he added, "You can't come until you finish your story."

"Um..." She really *couldn't* think. Micah had shifted over her, his lips moving up her belly to her breasts. "I, um, went home..." Micah was sucking on one nipple as Hammer's fingers pinched the other, just hard enough to make pleasure flare in her belly. Feeling her body wind up, each nerve tightening, Bridget knew she didn't have long before her orgasm.

"I went home, the guys broke in, I hid and snuck out, saw Micah, ran away and found Hammer!" she gasped out in one breath. "Now please can I come?"

"No." Hammer released her breast and pushed Micah back. When she felt Micah's mouth leave her nipple and his hand disappear from between her legs, Bridget couldn't help it—she let out a disappointed wail.

Although Micah's eyes were lit and his cock stood stiffly, he obeyed Hammer, waiting for the other man's next command. Bridget wasn't sure why but for some reason, Micah's obedience was incredibly arousing.

"That's really hot," she said out loud before she thought, blushing when both men looked at her as if waiting for an explanation. "Just that Micah's so big and he's so bossy usually," she fumbled, searching for words. "But you can order him around. I know it's nuts but that makes me crazy—in a good crazy way, I mean." She stopped, confused. "Did that make sense?"

Hammer smiled. "I think so. You like it when I order Micah around."

*God, this is embarrassing.* "Yeah," she admitted, her face turning a whole new shade of crimson.

"Bossy?" Micah repeated, his eyebrow arched. His erection hadn't eased. If anything, it had swelled even larger at her words.

"Yeah," she said, more defiantly this time. She gave Micah a so-what-are-you-going-to-do-about-it look.

He smirked and Bridget's stomach dropped. She knew she shouldn't have baited the bear. Micah moved to kneel by Hammer's feet, dropping his chest toward the bed and kissing the other man's instep.

"So, Master," Micah purred, slanting a look at Bridget, who rolled her eyes. "What can your humble slave do to please you?"

Bridget looked at Hammer, dying to find out how he'd respond. He was quiet for a few seconds.

"Here," Hammer finally responded as he lifted Bridget off his lap and held her toward Micah. "Take this disobedient girl and punish her."

Micah sat back on his heels, staring at Hammer. "Oh shit," he muttered. "You're going to play. I'm in so much fucking trouble."

Hammer grinned at him, showing all his teeth. "Too fucking right."

"Wait," Bridget finally yelped, having been completely distracted by the exchange happening in front of her. "Punish?"

"Quiet!" Hammer rumbled. "Or we'll have to gag you."

*Gag?* She almost said it out loud but held back just in time, pretty sure Hammer would carry out his threat.

Swinging his legs over the edge of the bed, Micah reached to haul Bridget onto his lap, facedown across his knees. She almost yelped but swallowed it back, the threat of the gag still fresh in her mind. Her heart was pounding, her breathing fast, and she'd never been so wet in her entire life.

"How many?" Micah asked.

Hammer got off the bed and stood in front of them. "Ten," he commanded.

Swallowing, Bridget felt her ass cheeks clench at the order. It was one thing for Hammer to give her an impromptu swat in the middle of sex but this planned spanking was a whole different deal. Every second of anticipation was twisting her nerves tighter, until she had to bite her bottom lip to keep from begging Micah to just *do* it, to quit dragging out the suspense until her entire body was tense and quivering.

When Micah's hand finally touched her skin, Bridget jerked, even though he merely stroked the back of her thigh. Hammer chuckled and she looked sideways toward him. From her vantage point across Micah's lap, Bridget thought Hammer's rigid cock looked huge, extending stiffly from his body. She desperately wanted to lick it, to wrap her lips around it and swallow it to the back of her throat.

The crack of Micah's hand landing on her ass cheek refocused her attention with a jolt. Before Bridget could catch her breath from the first stinging spank, his hand fell again on the other side. Back and forth, sharp and soft, he alternated, bringing the blood rushing to the surface of her skin until each contact was almost unbearably sweet.

The threat of a gag forgotten, she moaned and cried out with each connection of his palm on her ass, squirming across his lap, trying desperately to grind her pussy against something but finding only air.

"Stop," Hammer barked and Micah instantly obeyed, leaving Bridget unsure whether she was glad or disappointed that it was over. Hammer's hand smoothed over her stinging skin and she pushed back into the contact, wanting more. Instead, Hammer lifted her off Micah's lap and laid her facedown on the bed.

As Bridget started to roll over, Hammer stopped her with a reprimanding slap on her sensitive ass. She yelped and froze, not moving a muscle until he gripped her wrists, pulling them up to one of the slats in the mission-style headboard.

"Hold this," he ordered and she clutched it with both hands. Hammer adjusted her position, moving her knees out and up so her hips stuck up in the air, legs spread as far as her thigh muscles would allow. He squeezed her ass cheeks, making Bridget hiss a breath of air between her teeth as he handled her hot skin. One of his thumbs slid into her pussy and she sighed, relieved at having some kind of penetration at last. Too soon, he withdrew his thumb and slid it up to her anus. Without hesitating, he pushed until her body had swallowed his thumb to the hilt.

"Oh!" Bridget gasped, thrusting her hips toward him, but he pulled out, leaving her empty again.

"Micah," he snapped.

"Yes sir?"

"I want you to fuck her," Hammer ordered.

"Yes sir." Although Micah didn't hesitate, his voice was guttural. "Pussy or ass?"

"Hmm..." As Hammer considered the question, Bridget buried her face in the bedclothes, knowing that an opinion from her would only earn her another smack on the ass. "Pussy. For now."

*Yes! Fuck me now!* Bridget muffled her desperate moan against the comforter. She was forced to wait endless seconds as Micah wrapped his cock in a condom. When still he hesitated, she twisted around to see him stroking his latex-covered erection, watching her with a wicked smile.

Finally, Micah knelt behind her and she felt the tip of his cock brush her entrance.

"Now?" he asked Hammer.

"Now."

At Hammer's command, Micah plunged into her, burying himself in one thrust. Bridget cried out, loving how her pussy stretched around his girth. Her muscles clamped around him, determined to keep him inside her, and Micah growled next to her ear, sliding out and shoving back in. His hips connected with her sore ass as he drove his cock home, his balls bumping her clit. Bridget shoved her ass back at him, wanting more, harder.

"Don't move." Hammer's order froze Micah inside her as Bridget whimpered in protest. She turned her head to see Hammer rolling on a condom and then slicking his erection with lube. Her impatience turned to anticipation as she waited to see where he was about to shove his thick cock.

Hammer moved behind Micah. Bridget felt him bear down at the same time that Micah groaned, a sound filled with ecstasy.

When Hammer spoke again, his voice was ragged. "Move. Now."

Micah obeyed instantly, frantically, fucking Bridget with hard, fast strokes. She knew that each downstroke slid his body off Hammer's shaft and each retreat impaled him anew. She imagined his pleasure as her body clutched his erection followed by the invasion of Hammer's cock into his own tight hole, and the image drove her wild.

"Please," she panted. "Please let me come!"

"Wait," Hammer directed, sounding just as overcome as she felt. "Micah, fuck her harder."

She wailed as Micah obeyed, pounding into her with such ferocity that she had to brace her arms against the headboard to keep herself from being forced up the bed. Sucking in ragged breaths, she tried to hold off her orgasm but felt control slipping away from her with each slap of his balls against her clit, each slam of his hips against her throbbing ass cheeks.

"Now!" Hammer grunted and Bridget let herself fly, screaming into the comforter as her body convulsed around Micah's cock. She felt him stiffen against her, groaning as he followed her into orgasm. Hammer continued to plow into Micah's ass, his thrusts shoving Micah's hips down, driving his cock farther into Bridget's clenching pussy and tossing Bridget into another orgasm before Hammer came with a roar.

Bridget melted onto the bed as the men collapsed to either side, breathing hard. She didn't move when they eventually shifted, rising to quickly toss the condoms and then settling back into the bed, wrapping their bodies around her. Micah curled against her back and Hammer tucked his arm under her head as he lay facing her, his other arm stretched across both Bridget and Micah.

She was just dozing off when Micah stirred against her back. "I'm sorry about the whole dog thing," he whispered.

"I'm not," she mumbled sleepily, giving his hand on her belly a pat.

"I should've taught Sam better," Micah went on. "I should've... Wait—what?"

Bridget gave a soft huff of laughter. "It's been fun. And you know what else would be really fun right now?"

"What?"

"Sleep."

"Oh, right." Micah paused. "Sorry." Tucking her more tightly against him, Micah relaxed into slumber.

Hammer grunted and moved in as well. "Why are you two still talking?" he grumbled.

"You're the one talking now," Bridget told him, yawning.

"Watch it, smartass," he told her, tangling his legs with hers.

Bridget was still trying to think of a clever response when she fell asleep.

It was late when she woke. Bridget could tell by the light turning the inside of her eyelids red that it was slothfully late in the morning to be lying in bed but she still didn't open her eyes.

Someone was playing with her hair and there was a hand on her hip, plus another teasing her nipples, so unless one of the guys had grown an extra hand, she was guessing that both of her companions were awake. She let her eyes ease open and saw a close-up of Hammer's face. He kissed her.

"Good morning," he murmured as he pulled away.

Micah leaned over from behind to bite her earlobe. With a yelp, she sat up. "Good morning," he said sweetly.

"Brat," she muttered, stretching her arms above her head and rolling her head. Despite a little soreness, which was to be expected after the crazy sex marathon that last night had been, she felt really good.

"So what's the plan?" she asked.

"For what?" Hammer's eyes were on her breasts. "The plan for breakfast? Or were you thinking more of the big picture?"

"I was thinking as far as what to do about Carlson," she told him, amazed at the sultry purr in her voice. Was this really her? "But you're giving me some ideas about what to do *before* breakfast." Feeling incredibly naughty, Bridget began playing with her own nipples.

Hammer growled and rolled on top of her, flattening her to the bed. Her surprised shriek turned into a laugh that faded to a sigh as he caught her mouth with his, kissing her until she forgot about everything.

"You two are so hot together," Micah said, his voice rough and his eyes bright with passion.

Hammer leaned in for another kiss but paused halfway. "Is that someone's phone?"

Bridget listened, hearing a faint ring from downstairs. "Not mine – where would I have carried it?"

"Shit!" Micah rolled out of bed and ran out the door.

Rolling them over so Bridget was on top, Hammer smiled his crooked grin at her as he tucked some hair behind her ear. "How crazy is this?"

"No kidding," Bridget agreed, smiling back at him. "It was great though."

"Yeah." He slid a hand across her back and down to her ass.

"I'm sorry again that I didn't tell you who – or what – I was...um, am. Whatever." She shook her head, having confused herself. "Are we okay?"

Squeezing her ass cheek, he nodded. "More than okay."

Wrapping her arms as far around his chest as she could, Bridget gave him a hug. "Good. I—" She broke off as Hammer pulled himself to a sitting position, dragging her along.

"What's wrong?" Hammer barked, looking over her head.

Twisting around, Bridget saw Micah in the doorway, his face set and his eyes wild. "What is it, Micah? Who called?"

He stared at them blindly. "That was Joey. He got him. He somehow figured out where he was."

"What?" Hammer asked. "Who'd Joey get?"

"Not Joey." Micah shook his head as if dazed. "Carlson. That bastard has Sam."



## Chapter Eleven

Bridget felt all her blood drain away, leaving her numb and empty. This was her fault. Sam, sweet little Sam, had been taken. She was the one who'd tipped off Carlson by going to the emergency room and showing off her brand-new paw to a doctor on his payroll.

It would have been an easy leap to figure out it had been one of the kids who'd bitten her. With just a few friends and her colleagues, she had a pretty small circle of non-five-year-old friends. When Carlson had discovered that Sam had been pulled out of school right about the same time she'd started changing, he would've been Carlson's prime suspect. Why did she ever go to the emergency room in the first place?

Pushing away from Hammer and off the bed, she stumbled to her feet and rushed toward the door. Micah grabbed her, ignoring her frantic attempts to push him off.

"Where are you going?" he demanded, seizing her elbow before she could drive it into his stomach.

"Let me go," she ordered, breathless from struggling. "I'm going to find Carlson."

"Naked?" Hammer demanded. He'd gotten off the bed as well and was standing behind her.

*Good point.* "Can I borrow some clothes?" she asked Hammer.

"Not if you're going to run off after Carlson half-cocked," he told her. "Take a breath, Bridget. Let's come up with a plan first."

She had to admit that having some course of action made sense. "Fine," she relented, sagging against Micah. "As long as we hurry."

As Hammer tossed on some clothes, including a shoulder holster, Bridget searched his closet. Nothing of Hammer's came even close to fitting her. She grabbed a t-shirt and yanked it on and it fell almost to her knees.

"Forget it," she said. "I'll just change into a dog before we leave the house."

"We don't even know where he took Sam." Micah stared over Bridget's head at nothing. He'd retrieved his clothes from the kitchen and dressed, but he still had a wild look, his skin drawn sharply over the bones of his face, and he was pale enough to be scary.

"We will," Hammer told him and Micah finally focused his gaze on him. "I put a tracker on his car."

Hope lit Micah's eyes. "Let's go then."

"Hang on." Hammer didn't raise his voice but it was firm enough to stop Micah in his tracks. "Tell us exactly what your brother said happened first."

"But—"

Hammer cut Micah off with a short shake of his head. "A minute isn't going to make any difference. When did your brother last see your nephew?"

Bridget held her breath as she looked between the two men. Micah was poised by the door, his fists clenching and releasing, looking as if he would storm out any second.

Finally, Micah blew out a breath. "Fine. Last night, just before nine. Joey was onstage for almost three hours and when he came back, Sam and one of his bodyguards were gone. The other guard was on the floor of the dressing room, unconscious."

"Where was this?"

"Miami," Micah told him.

"Wait," Bridget said, confused. "Last night? But it's what," she glanced at the bedside clock, "already after nine. Why'd he wait twelve hours to call?"

Micah's jaw tightened even more, making the muscles stand out beneath his skin. "He didn't want to tell me. He thought his security guys could track him down within a few hours and that way he'd look less like an irresponsible asshole when he called me."

"But that doesn't make any sense," Bridget argued. "He just looks like *more* of an irresponsible asshole for waiting."

"My brother is not really a thinker," Micah said through gritted teeth. "I should never have sent Sam off with him. Here I was, fucking around with the two of you, while..." Trailing off, he turned a fierce stare on Hammer. "We need to go. Now."

"Okay," Hammer agreed, heading over to his dresser. He pulled a gun from the top drawer and slid it into the holster. "Bridget, you stay here."

"Don't even fucking try it," Bridget stated evenly, her hands on her hips.

He looked at her, either trying to stare her down or trying to determine how serious she was. She glared back at him. With a shrug, he headed back to his closet to grab a jacket.

"Fine," Hammer agreed. "But you will do what I say at all times. Got it?"

Bridget nodded before she yanked her shirt over her head and changed into her dog form. Hammer watched, frozen in place for a moment.

"Shit," he muttered, giving himself a shake. "That's going to take some getting used to."

The flashing blip on the screen that indicated Carlson's car led them back to the industrial neighborhood Bridget and Hammer had followed him to earlier. As they slowly rolled down the apparently deserted street, Micah swore.

"Could he have known you were following him?" he asked Hammer. "Maybe found the GPS and tossed it into a dumpster in one of the alleys around here?"

"Possible," Hammer grunted, focusing on the GPS map. "There." He jerked his head at a dilapidated building to their left.

"Here?" Micah craned his neck to see as the car kept moving. "Hey, stop! You're passing it!"

"I meant to," Hammer told him, turning left onto another street. "I don't know what kind of surveillance Carlson has. We'll park a few blocks away and come back on foot."

"Right." Micah shook his head. "Of course. Don't know what's wrong with me. I'm not usually this clueless."

"What's wrong is that your nephew is missing," Hammer told him, reaching over to grasp Micah's shoulder and give him a comforting shake. "You're allowed."

Bridget leaned forward from her perch on the backseat and licked Micah's ear.

"That supposed to make me feel better?" he grumbled, although he tilted his head against hers for a brief second.

After parking on the side of the street three blocks away, Hammer turned to Bridget. "Any chance you'll stay in the car?"

She growled.

"Guess that's a 'no'," he sighed, climbing out of the car. "C'mon then." Bridget jumped through the front seats and slipped out his opened door, not wanting to wait to see if he'd open the back door for her. She could always change into human form and open the door latch herself but she figured minimizing her naked-woman-on-the-street time would be best.

Micah and Hammer were already hurrying down the street and she ran after them. The building holding the GPS tracker—hopefully still on Carlson's car—loomed in front of them. Although the warehouse had the initial appearance of being on its last two-by-fours, Bridget began to notice small details as they drew closer, details that belied the dilapidated first impression. None of the windows were broken or even cracked. Beneath the layers of graffiti, the walls were sturdy and solid, missing the cracks and holes that pocked the surfaces of the other buildings.

Hammer nudged Micah and Bridget before pointing toward a deep-set door in the sidewall. Looking closely, Bridget could barely see the closed-circuit camera, only catching a glimpse because it was moving, turning from side to side to sweep the area for intruders.

"Back to the car," Hammer whispered.

Turning toward him, disbelief covering his face, Micah protested, "We just got here. We've got to get in there and get Sam!"

"Think they'll just let us walk in the front door?" Hammer hissed. "I have an idea. Now get your ass back to the fucking car!"

As the two men glared at each other, Bridget slipped away. She had an idea too and it was going to get her in immediately. She was the one who'd caused this by going to the emergency room. She was the one who was going to get Sam out.

She trotted along the outside wall, keeping her nose open for smells that could tell her something. People had been here, more recently and in greater numbers than would make sense for an abandoned warehouse. She could pick out the scents of at least five distinct people as well as the metallic tang of guns. The hair went up on the back of her neck as she got a strong whiff of a familiar scent—it was one of the men who'd broken into her house!

Her heart hammering in her chest, she walked forward on shaking legs and sat down in front of the door—in direct view of the security cameras.

Micah was the first to break eye contact. "It better be a fucking brilliant idea," he spat, turning back toward the car.

"I don't have any other kind," Hammer said from behind him, his voice calm and a touch amused. Micah couldn't decide whether Hammer's excessive amount of reason and logic were reassuring or annoying as hell.

Micah blew out a hard breath. If he'd been on his own when he'd found out that Sam had been grabbed, he knew that he'd have gone nuts. With Hammer there, Micah had chafed at the delays, at stopping to think or plan, but when he'd settled down, he'd realized that it had been the smart thing to do.

He knew he tended to act first and think later. So, it seemed, did Bridget. Hammer, though...Hammer calmed him down. Micah gave an amused grunt. Except when it came to sex. Hammer definitely didn't calm him down then. At the thought of sex, he glanced over his shoulder at the other two—and came to a sudden halt.

"What?" Hammer asked, looking behind him and stiffening with shock. "Bridget!"

Micah broke into a run, back toward the warehouse door where they could see Bridget sitting, right in line with the cameras. Hammer grabbed him, yanked him to a stop and slammed him against a recessed wall. Fighting the other man's grip, Micah opened his mouth but Hammer slapped his hand over it.

"Quiet," Hammer hissed into his ear.

Micah froze, his chest heaving, trying to listen over his thundering heartbeat. Voices were coming from the doorway in front of where Bridget sat. There was the spitting sound of an air gun and then a yelp from Bridget. Micah jerked and then turned his face into Hammer's chest, not trusting himself to not make a sound. Hammer gripped the back of his head with a hand that shook, pulling Micah more tightly against him.

The door slammed shut and the voices were cut off, leaving Hammer and Micah caught in silence. They didn't talk as they made their way back to where they'd parked.

"Why the *fuck* did she do that?" Micah finally shouted when they were in the car, heading toward the main road.

"She thinks she can help Sam better from inside, I guess." Hammer rubbed his head and sighed. "I don't know."

"Shit." Micah stared sightlessly through the windshield. "It was bad enough worrying about Sam and now Carlson has Bridget too... What are we going to do?" He looked at Hammer and saw the other man's face harden.

"Get them out," Hammer stated.

Bridget came back through the tranquilizer fog, fighting for consciousness. Her eyes refused to open, her body trying to drag her back down into sleep, but a sound was tugging at her brain, refusing to allow that fall into oblivion. With an annoyed grunt, she struggled to throw off the drug's effect.

"Ms. Grace!"

There it was again. It was a squeaky whisper, so familiar, and it confused her, making her think she was in her classroom at school. Why was she sleeping at her desk? The kids must be running wild around the room while she dozed.

"Ms. Grace, please! Please don't be dead."

*Dead?* Her eyes popped open and brightness hit painfully. She winced, blinking against the white glare until her pupils adjusted to the light. There, through two layers of Plexiglas, was Sam. He looked tiny in his pajamas with cartoon space aliens printed on them. His hands and nose were pressed against the clear wall closest to Bridget.

*Sam?* she tried to say but only a whine emerged. Standing up on shaky legs, she realized she was still in dog form. Bridget shook herself, trying to clear the last of the fuzziness from her brain.

She was in a tiny room with Plexiglas walls, holes stippling the plastic at regular intervals. After having seen the exterior of the warehouse, she could hardly believe she was in the same building. Although it had a warehouse's high ceilings, everything else appeared to be a state-of-the-art laboratory.

White surrounded her. The walls and ceiling were stark white, as were the complicated-looking pieces of equipment that lined the wall across the room from her. The Plexiglas boxes were in a row, with Sam's next to hers. Each had a narrow cot and a toilet, giving them the appearance of plastic jail cells. The other seven stand-alone rooms looked to be empty, except for a large black dog curled into a miserable ball in the cell three down from Bridget's.

"He doesn't say too much," Sam told her, drawing her attention back to the little boy. "His name is Night."

Bridget looked at the black dog again, wondering if he was really a human.

"You *are* Ms. Grace, right?" Sam asked in a loud whisper. "Her hair is the same color – brown, like your fur."

*I wish I could talk to you*, she thought, but she'd already seen the cameras fixed in the top corner of her cage. Carlson couldn't know for sure that she was human and she wasn't about to give him the proof.

"If you are Ms. Grace," Sam said, "I wanted to tell you something."

Bridget cocked her head, watching him.

"I'm really, really sorry." His voice dropped to a faint whisper. "I hope you're not mad."

*Of course not, sweet boy.* She lifted a paw and rested it against the wall.

"Good," he sighed, sliding down to sit on the floor with his knees tucked into his chest. "I'm glad you're here," he told her, resting his cheek against the wall and closing his eyes.

*I'm not*, she thought sourly, eyeing the clear walls of her prison, *but hopefully it won't be for too long.*

"Hello."

Carlson's smell touched her nose after he spoke. Bridget jumped, her head twisting to see him walking from the far side of the lab.

"It took you a while to wake up," he told her as he approached her cage. "After the incident in the woods behind the hospital, we increased the dosage in our darts. I was beginning to think we'd gone a touch too high."

She stared at him, amazed that this sweet-looking lab geek was her captor. He was slight, with a white beard and only a short fringe of hair rimming his considerable bald spot. His eyes were blue and mild, and he had a quick smile. He looked like someone's genial uncle. Where were the crazy eyes and evil laugh? This guy seemed so...rational.

"It was good of you to visit us here," he continued. "I was racking my brain, trying to come up with the best plan to find you, and you appear outside the door. It was like my birthday and Christmas, all rolled into one." Carlson beamed.

Bridget knew that her impromptu plan to let herself get captured probably wasn't the brightest but she'd figured she could help more from the inside than out. Besides, looking at the outer walls of the warehouse, she'd had no idea that the interior would be so high-tech. She'd figured it would've been more of a shackled-to-the-wall type situation, although, now that she thought about it, she couldn't have escaped from that very well either. Bridget made a mental note to ask Hammer for lock-picking lessons once she got out. *If she got out...*

She shut down that thought immediately and refocused on Carlson, who was watching her with his head cocked, looking like a small, white-bearded bird.

"I've been looking for people like you for so long," he said. "I can't believe I've managed to obtain two within twenty-four hours."

Glancing over at Sam, Bridget saw that he hadn't moved, although his stiff posture proved he wasn't sleeping. A rush of anger flooded her that he had to go through this and her lip slid up, exposing her canines.

Patting the air soothingly, Carlson crooned, "Hush, puppy. Just relax and settle in, and you'll soon find it's a nice place around here. We're pursuing knowledge and you will help us so much. We know nothing about what happens in your brain and in your physical structure when you change from dog to human and human to dog. Each detail that we discover will be a breakthrough."

Bridget didn't know what was more insulting—the condescending singsong tone he used or his easy justification for keeping innocent people prisoners. Sick of hearing him talk, she turned her back to him and lay down.

Carlson clicked his tongue against his teeth. "Never mind. Get some sleep tonight and we'll talk again tomorrow. Oh and Bridget?"

She turned her head and looked at him before she could catch herself.

"Feel free to switch back and forth between dog and human. I haven't been able to observe that yet and would find it quite fascinating." His eyes glittered as he spoke.

*Okay, there's the crazy.* Bridget didn't know whether insanity based in the pursuit of scientific knowledge was better or worse than being just plain nuts. She turned away again, focusing on Sam, who was listening quietly, still huddled against the wall. If Carlson hadn't seen a human-to-dog transformation, that meant Sam hadn't changed. That was good. Maybe there was a chance of convincing Carlson that they were normal, just a dog and a boy, with no special scientific value.

"If you're reluctant, I'm sure there are ways to persuade you."

*And he's still talking. God, what a self-important ass.*

"After all, there are so many tests that need to be done on the boy here. See if he's worth what I paid that so-called bodyguard for him."

Her head whipped around. The glow in Carlson's eyes was back.

He gave a tiny, smug smile. She could tell he thought he had her. "Slightly painful tests, of course, but that's the price of science."

Her eyes narrowed and all the hair along her spine lifted as rumbling sounds made her entire body vibrate. It took her a few seconds for Bridget to realize she was growling. Only the Plexiglas wall prevented her from leaping at the man and ripping his throat out.

"Think about it, my dear Bridget. We'll see you bright and early tomorrow." With a final cold smile, he turned and walked away.

## Chapter Twelve

She turned back toward Sam, listening to Carlson's retreating footsteps and hoping that the little boy hadn't understood any of Carlson's threats. The man's scent lingered in Bridget's nose and she huffed out a breath, trying to get rid of the smell. The lights dimmed, all of the fluorescent panels going dark except for the emergency lights above their Plexiglas cells.

The lab was silent for several minutes before Sam spoke.

"I don't like him."

*You and me both, kiddo.*

"I wish I was in there with you." Sam rubbed at the glass as if he could feel her fur.

*Poor baby.* Despite not having accomplished much yet with her half-assed plan of letting them capture her, Bridget was glad the boy wasn't alone. Settling her nose on her paws, she watched him until he fell asleep, curled like a puppy on the floor.

Bridget had no idea what time it was. She was surprised by how bothered she was by that. Although the warehouse had windows showing on the exterior, the lab room must have been in the center of the building, since there were no visible windows in the entire huge space.

Rubber-soled shoes squeaked on the floor. The sound brought Bridget up and around, her eyes and nose searching the area. A skinny man was walking into the lab, his hand resting on the gun holstered at his hip. She caught a whiff of a scent she recognized—this was one of the guys who'd broken into her house, the more nasally sounding one.

He paused just inside the door, staring at her. Bridget looked back, not sure what to do. The man looked very young, with a receding chin and acne dotting his cheeks and forehead. His dark hair looked dirty and disheveled and he appeared to be trying to grow some kind of facial hair, with mediocre results.

Breaking eye contact, the man took a quick glance around the lab and hurried backward to the door, feeling for it blindly behind his back as if not wanting to turn his back on Bridget.

She lay down, facing the door this time, and waited. The silence pressed down on her, unnerving. All she could hear was Sam's snuffly breathing and the occasional hum of a ventilation fan, far away in some mechanical room.

It seemed like hours before the squeaky shoes approached again. He was still hesitant, his steps slow. Bridget sat up, watching as he entered the lab again. The man seemed to be on night-watchman duty. She wondered how long it'd been since he'd



been in last. An hour? Two? How close was it to morning, when Carlson would return, intent on torturing Sam if she didn't perform for him?

He was walking closer this time, pretending to be inspecting the medical equipment across the room while sneaking glances at Bridget. When he looked her way, she cocked her head and offered a paw.

The man started and stared, taking three steps toward her before stopping. Bridget sat up and begged. Starting to smile, the man walked closer, stopping ten feet from her cage. Turning over onto her back, she let her legs and ears flop where they would while she kept an upside-down eye on the man.

With a grin, he walked the rest of the way over until only four feet and the clear wall separated them.

"You're supposed to be some crazy werewolf?" he asked her.

Encouraged by the skepticism in his voice, Bridget sat up and offered her paw again. It had worked well enough on Hammer at their first meeting.

"Look like just a big, dumb mutt to me."

Swallowing back a growl at his description, Bridget wagged her tail and pawed at the wall, cocking her head in the most entreating way she could manage.

"Can't. The boss'd kill me." Lowering his voice, he added, "Really kill me."

*I could live with that,* Bridget thought, still annoyed that he'd broken into her home. *You might be my only hope of getting out of here but you're still an asshole.*

"Better get back to my rounds," the guard told her, turning away. Bridget whined and he looked at her over his shoulder. "Sorry. Duty calls."

She watched as he left the lab. Frustrated, she plopped down, resting her muzzle on her paws, settling in for another hour of boredom. Glancing idly over at Night, she caught his scent and stiffened.

He smelled...odd. Different than the dog that had chased her away from the farm, different than Micah, definitely different from Sam. Raising her head, she concentrated on his scent, mentally cursing her inexperience.

*Could he be human? Is he like us? If so, why does he smell so...strange?*

She stared at him through the dim light but he was just a circle of blackness, as dark as his name suggested.

An hour later, the guard stopped by with his evening snack. Bridget's mouth watered at the smell of his roast beef sandwich, so much that she was humiliated to realize she was literally drooling on the floor. Swallowing, she tried to restrain herself.

"Want half?" the guard offered. At Bridget's eager whine, he opened a narrow panel next to the door and slid it through. She ate it in two bites. Somehow, the taste of the sandwich made the guard seem almost bearable. Then she remembered his fascination with hookers and he lost the few points the sandwich had earned him.

The man laughed. "Enjoy it, mutt. That's the last beef you're getting for a long time. The boss likes to give the kid dog food and the dog people food, milk in a carton and cans of peaches—you know, that kind with the pull-off lid? Shit that only people can open up. Thinks it'll encourage you to do that changing thing."

Sitting with his back propped against her cage, he chewed on his half of the sandwich. Bridget lay down next to the wall serving as his backrest, pretending to herself that her motive was purely to get information. In no way was she hoping for another sliver or two of beef.

"The thing is," he said under his breath between bites, "that all this guy thinks about are dog people. I mean, what kind of obsession is that? I get obsessions about tits or ass or things like that, but dog people?" He shook his head. "Sometimes I wonder if they even exist."

Bridget's ears perked up at that.

Shoving the last bite into his mouth, he said with his mouth full, "That one's been here for a week," he jerked his head toward Night's cage, "and nothing. So I'm thinking, why are we guarding two dogs and a little kid?" The guard waved a hand toward Sam's sleeping form but didn't look at the boy. Instead, he stared at the floor silently for several seconds.

Bridget's brain raced. What should she do? How could she use this guy's lukewarm attack of conscience to her advantage? Before she could compile her thoughts into an actual plan of action, the guard climbed to his feet.

"But whatever," he said with a shrug. "It pays the bills so why should I care whether some old guy is totally wacko? Thanks for hanging out with me though, mutt. Graveyard shift gets a little lonely around here."

He walked out of the lab whistling, leaving Bridget wild with frustration.

She hated to do it. It went against every instinct she had. Bridget *knew* her plan could backfire in the worst way but it was her only chance. The guard had done his lab walk three more times, stopping by to chat at Bridget each time. She was assuming his visits were hourly, which meant his shift was probably nearing its end. She knew this guard. She knew his, as he called it, "obsession".

*Just suck it up and do it!* Taking a deep breath, Bridget changed.

Minutes ticked by and Bridget was beginning to worry that she'd missed her window of opportunity, that the guard's shift had ended and it would be Carlson walking in on her in all her naked glory. She began to shiver. Carlson wouldn't care that she was a woman or naked or anything like that. He would just be thrilled that she'd changed—and in front of cameras, no less.

*Shit.* What had she done? What a horrible mistake. Now there was a recorded image of her changing. Could the guard have been watching? She quickly dismissed the possibility. He would have come running in the second he saw that.

Shivering, her nipples prickled into hard points, Bridget crossed her arms over her chest and began to turn away. From the corner of her eye, she saw the guard walk in and she whipped back around, forcing herself to drop her arms and take the pose she'd been practicing since she changed. Bridget had no idea whether this was a sexy pose or not but it was the best she had. She taught first graders, for God's sake! Sexy poses were not part of the elementary education curriculum.

The guard took three steps into the lab and froze.

"Hi," she said in what she'd hoped would be a sexy, throaty voice but came out sounding more like the croak of a dying frog.

"Wha..." He stared, his mouth open. "How...?"

Bridget didn't know what to say next. Her plan had been wiped completely from her mind. She just stared back, naked and shivering and horrified that she was standing bare-assed in front of a stranger—a house-breaking stranger!

He made a sound that wasn't a word or even related to a word and took a step back. Panic rose in Bridget. He was going to run out of the room and call Carlson! She couldn't let him do that.

"Wait!" she called. He actually did stop and she almost fell over with relief. "Come over and talk." She shot a quick glance over to Sam and was grateful he was still asleep. The poor kid didn't need any additional trauma, especially in the form of seeing his teacher naked.

The guard hesitated and she held her breath. When he took a slow step toward her, she smiled, lightheaded with relief.

"It's okay," she encouraged him. "I don't bite."

Her teasing tone must have pricked his ego because he straightened his shoulders and walked toward her, stopping in front of her cage. His eyes ran up and down her body before flicking back to her face, his expression a mix of disbelief and fear and a heavy portion of lust. The lust gave her hope.

"You never told me your name," she said, attempting a purr and feeling fairly satisfied with the result.

"R-Ricky," he said, flushing at the slight stutter.

"Ricky," she murmured. "Thank you for the sandwich, Ricky."

His eyes bulged as he swallowed, his Adam's apple jumping. "No, ah, no problem. You really...? It was you that...?" He trailed off, gulping again.

Bridget smiled, not answering.

"So the boss was right?" the guard asked.

She just shrugged. "All I know, Ricky, is that changing always makes me really, really horny." Hoping that he couldn't see how her hands were shaking, she caught her

nipples and pinched them, half-closing her eyes in what she hoped looked like mindless desire and not complete terror.

His breath hissed out and she focused on him. Ricky's eyes were locked on her breasts as if he were hypnotized. She felt a surge of power laced with utter disgust for this man who was so easily controlled and she wondered if this was how strippers felt on a regular basis.

"Can you do anything for me, Ricky?" she breathed.

His head came up and his eyes narrowed with suspicion. "You just want me to let you out."

"You could always come in here," she suggested, running her fingertips across her belly. "I *need* you, Ricky. Please?" The last word came out with a baby-talk lilt and Bridget caught herself. He was already suspicious. She couldn't go over the top.

Glancing at Ricky, Bridget realized she needn't have worried. The wary expression was gone and his face had gone slack, his gaze following the trail of her fingers as she caressed the skin immediately above the triangle of hair.

"I can't." He licked his lips, gesturing at the camera without looking away from the movement of her hand. "It's being filmed. My boss would see."

"And a smart guy like you can't find a way around that?" She cupped her breasts. "Create some kind of...technical difficulty?" She could almost see his brain working as he digested that.

"Maybe," he said slowly, licking his lips again. "But I don't have the key to open the cage."

Bridget dropped her hands and stared at him. "What do you mean you can't open the door?" she demanded.

His face flushed. "I don't have the security clearance," he muttered. Bridget wanted to reach through the wall and strangle the bastard. *After all this...* She hesitated, examining his face closely. Something in his expression, a look of indecision, made her wonder if all was lost after all.

"Please, Ricky." She turned the sex kitten voice on again as her hands returned to her breasts. "Isn't there some way you could get in here?"

"Well..." He rubbed the bulge tenting his uniform pants.

*Yes!* Bridget knew it—he did know a way to open her cell. She just had to push him a little more. "You don't understand how hot I get when I change, Ricky," she said, feeling like an actress in a really cheesy porno flick. "Any way you want it and I'll be wet and ready for you. Tell me how you like it, Ricky."

He opened his mouth and shut it, then swallowed hard.

"Do you want your c-cock in my mouth?" she guessed, tripping a little over the word "cock". She didn't think she'd ever said it out loud before. "Me on my knees in front of you while you fuck my mouth until I choke?"

Ricky was actually panting, his mouth open as he sucked in air. Sweat beaded on his cheeks and glued his hair to his forehead in greasy tendrils.

Bridget figured he needed another nudge. "Or maybe you'd rather fuck my pussy. Will you take me up against a wall or on the bed?" She walked over to the narrow cot and lounged on the mattress, trying to hold a seductive pose on her side without falling off. "Will you fuck me like this?" She turned over and pushed up to her hands and knees. Ricky made a gargling sound that Bridget assumed meant yes.

She slid off the bed and walked back toward him, noting how red his face was. "Or maybe," she purred, moving so close to the glass that her nipples barely touched the cool, smooth surface, "you'd shove my face into the pillow and fuck my ass, would you like that?"

His face turned almost purple as his gaze darted to her face. He looked slightly guilty as the hand on his crotch moved faster.

"I wouldn't mind," Bridget lied, her lips so close to the Plexiglas that she fogged the surface with steam. "You could fuck my ass until I scream."

He jerked, doubling over.

*Did he just come?* Bridget wondered, worried that she'd pushed him over the edge. She wanted him to get her *out*, not get himself off. When he straightened, though, she saw that the bulge in his pants was as big as ever.

He opened his mouth and it took a few tries before he managed to get some words out. "There's...ah...there's an automatic release mechanism that's tripped by the fire alarm. So that...whatever's in the cages wouldn't be trapped if there's a fire."

*Jackpot!* Bridget restrained the urge to jump up and down. "That's it then," she said, fighting to keep the triumph out of her voice. "Just start a tiny fire in a garbage can and I'm yours."

Ricky looked doubtful. "How am I supposed to explain that to the firemen when they arrive?"

"Just call it in right after the alarm goes off," Bridget told him, thinking fast. "Say it's a false alarm. That'll give us the rest of your shift. We'll have hours together."

Glancing at his watch, Ricky shook his head. "Forty-five minutes. How'll I explain it to my boss?"

*Oh for God's sake, do I have to plan this whole thing? Isn't it enough that I'm standing here naked in front of your sleazy ass?* Bridget bit back her impatience and forced a sultry smile. "False alarm works for him too. Won't it be worth it to have almost an hour to do whatever you want with me? To have your cock buried in my ass, so tight and hot and," she racked her brain for another adjective and came up empty, "tight?"

He didn't seem to notice her lack of imagination since he was staring at her breasts again.

"You know those letters in *Penthouse*?" she asked, knowing that she had only forty-five minutes before her opportunity for escape walked right out the door.

"Yeah?"

"Instead of being a guy who reads those letters and wishes it was him, you could be one who writes them," she told him. "And this letter would actually be true."

"What do you mean?" He scowled. "They don't make up those letters."

She really, really wanted to smack this guy. Hard. Bridget fought to hide her impatience. "Well yours would definitely be real." She stroked her hands down her sides, turning as she squeezed her ass cheeks. Watching him over her shoulder, Bridget knew the second he capitulated.

"I'll do it," he agreed. "I have to call from the main desk though. Stay here."

"I'll be here," she cooed as her knees went liquid with relief. "Even if I wanted to leave, I couldn't without going by you, right?"

"Yeah, that's true," he conceded, although he shot a suspicious look at her as he walked slowly toward the door.

Bridget blew him a kiss. "Hurry back," she called after him.

As the lab door swung shut behind him, Bridget forced herself not to break character. Although she was dying to wrap the blanket from the bed around her, she knew he could see her on the monitor connected to the camera in her cage. Holding her position by the wall closest to the door, she waited.

Micah wriggled, trying to straighten his leg as a cramp gripped his hamstring. There wasn't enough room to move an inch, much less extend his leg completely.

"What's wrong?" Hammer demanded in a whisper, gripping Micah's hip to hold him still.

"Cramp," Micah grunted, sucking air between his teeth as Hammer's fingers closed on the seizing muscle, massaging so deeply that it almost hurt worse than the cramp did. Gradually, though, the muscle began to relax and the hand on his leg softened.

"Better?" Hammer asked, his mouth close enough to Micah's ear to send a puff of air into it. Micah wiggled again, although this time it wasn't because of a cramp.

"Be still," Hammer ordered, his fingers digging into Micah's hip. "You're driving me crazy." To illustrate, he pressed his groin against Micah's ass.

His breath catching in his throat, Micah couldn't stop himself from pushing back against the ridge of Hammer's cock. He heard Hammer stifle a groan.

"Really?" Hammer asked. Although his voice was amused, it was rough around the edges. "There's hardly enough room to breathe, much less fuck in here."

"You started it by poking me with that thing," Micah told him in a breathless whisper. "Think of what a great story it'd be." He was punchy from a sleepless night and the stress of the previous day. Grinding back against Hammer's stiff cock, Micah pulled the other man's hand from his hip and pressed it against his own growing erection.

"You're evil," Hammer muttered, nipping at Micah's ear. "You know this is physically impossible right?"

"I know we can't actually fuck," Micah agreed, although his hips didn't stop the small, circular rotations against the bulge of Hammer's cock. Even though their skin was separated by two layers of jeans, it still felt damn good.

"Great." The trace of humor was back in Hammer's voice. "So we're going to do just enough to drive each other crazy?"

"If that's okay with you," Micah said. Some heavy petting was a nice distraction. His brain was buzzing and had been for the past twenty-two hours. He envisioned scenario after scenario, imagining Sam and Bridget in that warehouse, trapped and scared, possibly hurt. Who knew what Carlson was doing to them?

"Okay," Hammer agreed amiably enough, his hand rubbing, moving the denim over Micah's cock.

With a soft groan, Micah closed his eyes. Keeping them open wasn't about to do him much good in the dark anyway.

"Think they're okay?" he asked.

Hammer went still. "Yeah," he finally answered. His hand left Micah's erection, moving to smooth Micah's hair from his face. "Think of how much money and time and effort Carlson's spent on finding them. It wouldn't make sense to hurt them."

"Shit," Micah muttered. "They're probably terrified. Think they're together? What do you think he's doing to them?"

"Stop." He gave Micah's shoulder a shake. "This isn't helping. We're getting to them as fast as we can. Try to concentrate on that."

"Easier said than done," Micah grumbled and then sighed. "You know, when Sam told me what he'd done, I was horrified."

"Yeah, I can imagine." Hammer ran a comforting hand up and down Micah's arm.

Shifting under his touch, Micah continued, "There was a part of me that...shit."

"What?"

The darkness gave Micah the courage to continue. "A part of me was...excited. That she was going to be like me and maybe I could have a normal relationship for once." Hearing it out loud made it seem worse. "How fucked up is that?"

"Understandable," Hammer told him. "One-night stands must get old after a while."

"Yeah," Micah admitted. "I might lose my player status for saying that but it's true. Plus it's hard with Sam. I just can't seem to get this parenting thing down." He squeezed his eyes closed. "And now he's missing..."

"Listen to me," Hammer ordered, giving Micah's shoulder another shake. "Knock it off. I'm sure you're a good dad. We're getting him back. Him *and* Bridget. After that, you won't be able to get rid of us. So enough with the self-pitying shit, okay?"

Micah had to laugh. "You're right. I just can't turn off my brain. Especially when there's not much to do in here."

"We could go back to what we were doing before," Hammer growled suggestively, making Micah smile.

"Sure," Micah agreed. "Why n—"

Hammer clamped his hand over Micah's mouth, cutting off his words. Straining his ears and cursing his human hearing, which was so much worse than his canine hearing, Micah heard the muffled tap of shoes on concrete. There was a click and then their dark hiding place listed slightly to the left. There was a *whump* as a door closed, followed by a grinding whir of a small motor. After a few moments, a car engine turned over.

Micah felt his heartbeat accelerate as they began to move.

The seconds ticked by endlessly. Doubts began to creep into Bridget's mind. What if he decided it wasn't worth it? What if he couldn't get the fire started? What if the alarm didn't go off? Her teeth worried her lower lip as she fretted.

The alarm blared and she jumped, letting out a small shriek. Recovering quickly, she reached over to grab the blanket, doubling it over and wrapping it around her beneath her arms so that she could move unencumbered.

The door to her cage slid open and she stared at it for an open-mouthed second, amazed that her plan actually worked. Her brain clicked in again and she flew through the opening.

"Sam," she called quietly and he jerked, turning toward her. It looked like the alarm had woken him up already. "Come with me. Hurry." She tried to keep her voice calm but she was shaking.

His eyes went wide. "Ms. Grace?"

She forced a smile, resisting the urge to look over her shoulder to see if Ricky had returned. "Yes, sweetie. Now hurry!" Crouching at his open cage door, Bridget held out her arms to him and he flew toward her, hurling himself against her. She grunted at the impact that almost knocked her over but managed to stay on her feet.

"Listen to me, Sam," she told him in an urgent whisper. "We need to go now. Do exactly as I say, okay?"

He nodded without looking up, the top of his head bumping against her chin.

"Good." She untangled his arms from around her and stood up, tucking her improvised dress in where Sam's hug had loosened it. Taking his hand, she turned toward Night's cage—and froze.

Night had already left his opened cell and was standing three feet away from them.

*No wonder he smelled different,* Bridget thought, swallowing hard, her hand tightening around Sam's. *He's a freaking wolf!*



Her breathing quickened until it came in pants, hard and fast. She stared at his yellow eyes, trying to think. What was she supposed to do if she encountered a wolf? Make herself look bigger? Curl into a ball? Back away slowly? It didn't really matter, since all her body was capable of doing was standing right where she was, frozen in place.

Giving her a look, Night turned away and padded toward the door. Bridget blinked. Had that look actually been *scornful*? Letting out her breath in a shaky huff, she hurried after him, towing Sam behind her.

*Could he be a person?* she wondered. *If people can turn into dogs, why not wolves too?*

She reached the door and turned the knob, easing it open just a crack. Jamming a wad of blanket into the space to keep the door open a few inches, she bent to whisper in Sam's ear.

"Ready to change?"

At his nod, she slipped back into dog form. Sam wiggled out of his pajamas and changed as well. She nuzzled the top of his head. Night appeared even bigger and more menacing to her in this form but he wasn't even looking at them. All of his attention was concentrated on the cracked-open door.

The blanket had fallen away from her as she'd changed, the wad continuing to hold the door open. Shoving her muzzle into the space, she peeked through. There was a short hallway that opened into another room. Although she couldn't see the desk holding the security cameras or Ricky, Bridget could hear him talking.

"...just a short or something," he was saying. "I've been through the building and there's no smoke or fire or anything."

She nudged the door open, using her body as a doorstep to hold it wide enough to allow Sam and then Night to slip through. Bridget allowed it to close on the blanket, preventing the soft click of the latch from giving away their escape.

At the end of the short hallway, Night flattened his belly against the floor and peered around the corner. Pulling his head back, he looked at Bridget and gestured toward the room in a way that she took as an "all clear".

*He's definitely human then,* she thought, turning toward Sam. Using her muzzle, she nudged him back into the corner between the doorjamb and the wall, as far away from Ricky as she could get him without shoving him back into the lab. Giving him a steady stare and hoping he understood it to mean "stay", Bridget turned back to discover that Night had already slipped into the other room.

She copied him, lowering her body to the ground and peeking around the corner. From this angle, the U-shaped desk appeared huge. Night was crouched low, using the desk for cover. He slipped around the corner to the far side of the desk and disappeared from view.

"Yes sir," Ricky was saying, his back turned away from her. Bridget knew she still had to be cautious. If he even turned his head, he could manage to glimpse her in his peripheral vision. They were so close — she couldn't wreck their escape now.

Staying low, Bridget eased around the corner and darted toward the desk, grateful for the commercial-style carpet that muffled any sound her toenails might have made. Following Night's example, she flattened her body against the desk, using it to hide her from Ricky's view. Flanking the outline of the faux-mahogany side, she moved silently toward Ricky, who was still talking on the phone.

"No sir," he said. "They're fine. Last I checked, they were still sleeping."

She heard the tapping of his fingers as he listened to whoever was on the other side of the call. Bridget tried to listen but the sound was muffled, probably because the phone was clamped so tightly against Ricky's ear. She could smell the lust on him, the lust and anxiety.

"I don't know how they slept through the alarm," he muttered. "They just—fuck!" He broke off, the scent of his lust fading and the anxiety shifting to straight-up fear. Bridget risked poking her face around the corner of the desk to get a glimpse of Ricky. The guard was standing motionless, facing the camera monitors, phone dangling from his hand and his mouth open. Bridget followed his fixed stare to see the black and white views of three cages—their three *empty* cages.

"Shit! Shit! Shit!" he hissed out, turning toward her as if to bolt into the lab. When he saw Bridget he scrambled backward, fumbling for the gun on his belt. Behind Ricky, Night leapt over the opposite side of the desk onto the security guard's back, knocking him to the floor.

Bridget changed, reaching for the gun at Ricky's belt almost before her paws turned back into hands. Her fingers closed around the grip of the gun, yanking it free with such force that she flew backward. The gun went off with a spitting sound and she sucked back a shriek, terrified that she'd shot someone.

Night was staring at her with a look of utter exasperation. His legs wobbled and he toppled to his side. Bridget rushed toward him, reaching for the dart that had penetrated his fur and lodged in his chest.

"Sorry!" she gasped, pulling the dart free of his skin and tossing it aside. A hand closed around her ankle and tugged, yanking her off her feet. Twisting around, she pointed the gun at Ricky and fired, actually aiming this time. His fingers loosened almost instantly and he went limp, still beneath the unconscious body of Night.

"Great," she sighed, looking at the black wolf. How was she supposed to get him out now?

Deciding to deal with things one at a time, Bridget lifted the phone receiver from where it dangled on its cord. The person on the other end was talking, asking what was going on. She pushed down the button on the phone to hang up. When she put the receiver to her ear, there was just silence. Her breath caught—had someone cut the phone line?

She immediately felt stupid as she realized that she had to push one of the buttons to get an outside line.

When the dial tone buzzed in her ear, Bridget dialed 9-1-1.

"Nine-one-one, what is your emergency?"

"Please help!" Bridget told the woman. "Bart Carlson is keeping me captive in a warehouse!" Without waiting for the operator to respond, Bridget placed the receiver on the desk, hoping the police could trace the call. She stared at the phone for a moment, wondering if she should find another phone so she could call Hammer or Micah. She knew she had to get out, quickly, before Carlson's guys started arriving. If she and Sam and Night were tossed back in their cages and hidden away in the lab, it would be easy for Carlson and his men to put off the cops, to explain the call away as a prank.

Filled with a renewed sense of urgency, she began unbuttoning the security guard's shirt. Undressing an unconscious man, albeit a scrawny one, wasn't as easy as she'd expected and several times Bridget heard the pop of stitches as she yanked at the sleeve. Getting it off the second arm was much easier and she finally pulled the garment free of Ricky.

Pulling the shirt on, she buttoned it up and checked the length, quickly deciding that it was long enough to be decent. It hit mid-thigh, which was longer than a miniskirt—not that she owned any miniskirts. Bridget left the pants on Ricky, giving a half-hysterical laugh at how disappointed he'd be that she didn't strip his pants off.

"Sam," she called softly. "All clear!"

He ran out of the hallway where he'd been hiding and barreled toward her, crashing into her legs and huddling there. Bridget crouched down to hug him.

"Any ideas on how we could move Night?" she asked Sam, not really expecting any suggestions. "I accidentally knocked him out for a while."

He wriggled free of her grip and ran back toward the lab. "Sam?" she questioned the tail vanishing around the corner.

He reappeared, pulling the blanket behind him.

"Oh smart boy!" she enthused, taking the blanket from him. Spreading it next to the unconscious pair, she pulled and pushed at the wolf's dead weight, dragging him off Ricky until most of Night rested on the blanket, with only his front paws and tail hanging off.

Bridget grabbed the end of the blanket and pulled, dragging Night a few feet. After catching her breath, she hauled him across the floor again, stopping a pathetic six feet past the first rest stop before she had to take another break. Before, she'd been grateful for the carpet that muffled any clicking from their toenails. Now she cursed it, wishing for some nice, slippery marble flooring or even some smooth linoleum.

Getting a fresh grip on the edge of the blanket, she leaned into the pull, walking backward as she hauled Night across the floor. Sam tried to help, grabbing a mouthful of blanket and pulling with her. He growled fiercely as he did it, which Bridget would have found hilariously cute if she hadn't been frantically trying to move a two-hundred-pound wolf through a crazy scientist's security center.

Ignoring her shaking muscles, she adjusted her grip and pulled again, managing to drag Night to the door. She told Sam to stay as she walked the few remaining feet to the door and pushed the release bar, half-expecting to hear the blare of an alarm. Instead there was wonderful silence as she gazed out at what looked like an abandoned warehouse.

Flipping the doorstop down to hold the door open, she looked around, marveling at how Carlson had built a building inside a building, hiding the lab from anyone who might peer into one of the filthy, high-set windows. The exterior of the lab was nondescript and windowless. No one would ever guess the high-tech laboratory existed. She blew out a relieved breath when she saw the smooth concrete floor leading to the warehouse's exit. It might be dirty and littered with scraps of wood and wire, but at least it'd be easier to pull Night across than the carpet had been.

Walking back to Sam and Night, she braced herself for a long pull to the exterior doors.

"I should have known that sex-obsessed imbecile couldn't be trusted with a woman around," an even voice said behind them.

Bridget's head jerked around. Carlson was standing just a few feet away, a gun aimed at her chest.

## Chapter Thirteen

"I'm sorry—who are you?" Bridget asked politely as her mind raced. *Need a plan, need a plan, need a plan!*

Carlson smiled but his expression had no humor in it. "Aren't you clever, Bridget Grace. Are you trying to pretend that we didn't chat last night?"

"Last night?" She furrowed her brow. "Were you at the Blue Donkey too? I didn't see you there."

He shook his head, his empty smile falling away. "Do you think I'm stupid?" he demanded. "I'm not. So why don't you and the little puppy there get back in your cages." Glancing down at Night, he sighed. "I'm afraid I'm going to have to wait for True's replacement before we can get this beast back in his cage."

Bridget opened her mouth but before she could say anything, Hammer appeared in the doorway behind Carlson. Looping an arm around the smaller man's neck, Hammer aimed his gun at Carlson's temple.

"My gun has bullets, not darts, so why don't you put yours down?" Hammer suggested gently.

Carlson's shocked face was delightful to see. Bridget grinned at Hammer.

"Nice timing—" she began, only to be cut off by a jab to the belly.

*Carlson shot me, the bastard!* she thought indignantly, right before the world went dark.

She woke up in an unfamiliar bedroom. It was an unpleasant sensation, although Bridget was reassured by the fact that it wasn't a Plexiglas cell. It was a pretty plush room, actually, with a huge bed that she'd burrowed into, creating a cocoon beneath the covers.

"You're awake," a familiar voice rumbled, speeding up her heartbeat at the same time it made her smile. "'Bout time."

She sat up, pushing her hair out of her face. "What can I say?" she said to Hammer, who sat down on the edge of the bed. "Whatever Carlson shot into me was powerful stuff. Or maybe I just can't hold my sedative."

At the mention of Carlson, Hammer went stiff. Bridget had never seen him so furious. His eyes were almost glowing with rage.

"Stupid asshole shot you when I had a gun to his head," he growled. "Fucking moron. He deserved a bullet."

Bridget stared at him. "You didn't..."

"No." Hammer looked disgusted. "Would've enjoyed it, but I resisted." A small smile touched his lips. "I did get to punch him in the face though. Only once—he was out at the first punch."

"What happened?" she asked. "And what time is it?"

"Almost ten," he told her.

She glanced at a window shaded by vertical blinds. "Why's it so dark?"

"It's ten at night, dummy," a mock-exasperated voice from the doorway answered.

Bridget grinned. "Hey, Micah."

"Hey yourself." He crossed the room and climbed onto the bed next to her. "You're in so much trouble," he told her, tossing an arm around her shoulders and hugging her to his side. "What the fuck were you thinking, getting caught on purpose like that?"

"Yeah, Bridget," Hammer echoed, his tone even more stern. "What *were* you thinking?"

She shrugged, examining her comforter-covered knees. "I just didn't want Sam to be alone," she explained and then looked up at the reminder. "Sam! Is he okay?"

"He's fine," Micah assured her. "He's sleeping. Joey got here a few hours after we did. He's with Sam now." He laughed. "He's sitting in Sammy's room, staring at him, like the kid's going to disappear if Joey looks away."

"You can laugh," Hammer told him, moving so he was sitting on Bridget's other side, "but isn't that the same thing we've been doing?"

"Yeah," Micah admitted with a shrug. "I've been switching back and forth between rooms though. You two both scared the shit out of me." He hugged Bridget again, harder, and gave her a little shake.

"I'm sorry," she said, looking back and forth between the men. "So what happened after I was darted?"

"Well," Micah began, "Hammer was so pissed Carlson shot you that he punched the asshole in the face. Carlson passed out even before Hammer's fist connected, I think."

Hammer snorted a laugh. "Then Micah was pissed at me because he didn't get a punch in."

"Did the cops come?" Bridget asked. "I called them."

"We heard the sirens but we weren't sticking around to answer questions," Hammer said. "After erasing a few key files on their hard drive, we grabbed Sam and the two sleeping beauties and took off."

"Oh!" Bridget straightened. "How's Night? *Where's* Night?"

"Why?" Micah asked. "You like him or something?"

She snorted. "Yeah, it was fun having a full-size wolf within pouncing distance." Bridget rolled her eyes. "Besides, if I could read his expression right, he thinks I'm an idiot."

"He woke up a few hours ago and took off shortly after," Hammer informed her. "He's fine."

"Did he change?" she asked.

Micah shook his head. "Just waited for me to open the back door and took off for the woods. Not a real social guy."

"A lone wolf," Hammer agreed, nodding solemnly, although the corner of his mouth twitched.

Bridget laughed and swatted him. "Enough with the lame jokes! Tell me what happened. I assume the 'key files' you erased were the ones showing me changing?"

"Hammer erased anything with you in it at all," Micah told her.

"What about Sam's footage? Or Night's?"

"Left it," Hammer said. "Figured the police would find it interesting."

Bridget cocked her head to the side, considering the idea. "They'll see a little boy held in a cage. Think the cops will believe Carlson doesn't know where Sam is now?"

Micah grinned wickedly. "They'll at least ask him several times. Plus they'll search his house, check his bank records and all that good stuff, which means trouble for everyone on Carlson's payroll."

"I hope they lock up the creepy emergency room doctor," Bridget said with a shiver.

"If they don't, maybe an anonymous someone could tip the cops off." Micah smiled.

"So how'd you guys get in?" Bridget wondered.

It was Hammer's turn to grin. "We hitched a ride in Carlson's car."

"He let you in his car?" Bridget asked, confused.

"Mrs. Carlson was kind enough to let us into their garage. After that, we just hopped into the trunk of his car and waited," Micah explained. "The security guard called as he was heading toward the warehouse, so Carlson was rattled. After he parked in the garage inside the building, Carlson headed in your direction. We just followed. Gotta love those luxury car trunks and their interior-release levers. It's like they know these rich dudes are going to end up in their trunks eventually."

"After we got the three of you out," Hammer got the story back on track, "we helped ourselves to Carlson's keys and took his car back to his house."

Micah grinned. "You should've seen the look on Mrs. C's face when she got a glimpse of you guys. She'll be calling their family lawyer all right, but to get a divorce, not to help that bastard."

Bridget gave a weak smile. Her head was spinning.

"So then Micah ran for my car, which was parked a block away, and we got you three loaded up," Hammer continued, ignoring the other man's interruption. "Micah has the most secluded home, so we came here and waited for you to wake up."

"He called the principal," Micah said, tipping his head toward Hammer. "Said he found you wandering around in a fever, naked and without any I.D., so he took you home and nursed you back to health." He laughed. "Hammer told her his religion didn't allow him to send you to the hospital."

Hammer gave a shrug and lifted his hands innocently. "Worked, didn't it?"

"Guess so," Micah conceded. "She seemed to believe you. He told her it was just this morning that you were coherent enough to tell him who you were and where you worked. The principal says that she hopes you feel better and can't wait to see you back in the classroom when you've recovered completely. She's going to let the other teachers know so they'll quit worrying. Hammer called the cops too and told them you're found. They want to talk to you about your disappearance when you're up for it."

"Wow." She didn't know what else to say.

"Pretty much," Hammer agreed, taking her hand. "So now should we talk about how you endangered your life by walking up to that warehouse?"

Yawning, Bridget shook her head. "I'd rather not. Besides, it worked out, didn't it?"

Both men growled. She looked back and forth between two pissed-off faces and gulped. Why had she thought this threesome thing would be a good idea? Even as her heartbeat increased speed, though, Bridget knew her stomach was fluttering as much from desire as from nerves – more, in fact.

Micah looked at Hammer. "What should we do with her?" Bridget squirmed between them, all sleepiness forgotten. While she'd been sleeping, someone had taken off Ricky's uniform shirt and dressed her in an oversized t-shirt. Her nipples stiffened, rubbing against the soft cotton, and even that thin layer of fabric seemed intrusive. Pushing up to her knees, she drew the shirt over her head and tossed it away.

Hands immediately found her ass, kneading and shaping her flesh. Bridget groaned, arching into their touch. It felt as if she'd been away from her two men for much longer than a day and she'd missed them terribly.

The need to touch, to taste, overwhelmed her and she turned so she could undo the button and zip of Hammer's jeans. He lifted his hips and, catching the waistband of his boxer briefs as well, she skimmed everything off his legs and over his bare feet. Hammer yanked his t-shirt over his head and Bridget just sat and looked at him for a few seconds, loving the sight of him, every rock-hard inch.

She turned to strip Micah but he was way ahead of her, standing next to the bed and kicking away the puddle of clothes at his feet. He knelt on the mattress, completely naked, and Bridget ogled him as well. How she'd ended up so attached to two men, she had no idea. All she knew was that she wanted both of them inside her forever.

She and Micah looked over at Hammer, waiting for direction. Bridget saw his eyes light with desire and she knew he loved this. It was a good thing, since she loved his bossiness and, judging by Micah's huge erection, he didn't mind it either.



Taking his time, Hammer reached over and dug around in the top drawer of the nightstand. He pulled out a couple of condoms and tossed one over to Micah, followed by a bottle of lube. Bridget whimpered as moisture dampened her thighs, just the sight of those simple preparations heating her blood.

"Suck me," Hammer finally ordered and she eagerly obeyed, kneeling between his spread thighs and lowering her chest until she could take his stiff shaft between her lips. He tasted so good she moaned, her mouth vibrating around his cock. Sucking at the head, Bridget curled her fingers around his balls, tugging and massaging his sac as she worked his cock more deeply into her mouth.

She felt his hands tangle in her hair, not directing her movements but just resting there, as if to let her know he could take charge at any moment. Bridget writhed at the thought, wanting that, craving the helplessness she'd feel as he held her with those strong hands and fucked her face.

Moaning again, she swallowed more of him until the blunt head bumped the back of her throat. Pulling back, she released his balls to grip his cock and lowered her head again, pressing her tongue against the underside of his erection. Bridget moved her head up and down and up again, tightening her lips beneath the head before he could pop out completely. She lapped at the head, digging into his slit with her tongue, and then dropped down, relaxing her throat so she could take all of him.

Her fingers, wrapped around the base of his cock, were slick from her saliva. She released her grip, moving to tease his balls for a few seconds and then trailing back even farther. She circled his puckered hole and then found the center, pushing the tip of her finger inside. The slick digit entered easily, sliding into the tight grip of his body.

With all her attention on Hammer's cock and gripping anus, Bridget barely heard Micah's desperate, "Please!"

"Fuck her," Hammer ground out, his fingers tightening in her hair.

Micah's hands gripped her hips as he nudged her knees farther apart. She could feel the tip of his cock at the entrance to her pussy and Bridget arched her back, asking for his penetration.

"No," Hammer said and Bridget cried out in protest, the cock filling her mouth and muffling her complaint. "Fuck her ass."

A shiver ran across Bridget's skin at the words and she flushed hot. She was just as eager for Micah's cock to fill her ass as her pussy and she thrust her hips back, desperate for him to hurry. The cool dribble of lube onto her ass made her body jerk and then melt as his fingers slid through it, drawing it toward her tight hole.

Her mouth moved faster, taking more and more of Hammer's length as she matched the motion of her head with the finger buried in his ass. When Micah circled her anus she moaned, her head stilling as all her attention focused on the delicate probing of his finger into her back passage.

Hammer took over, moving her head on his cock. She relaxed and let him control the motion, relieved that he'd taken charge. He plunged into her mouth, driving in

farther than she'd taken him, moving faster than she'd gone. There was a moment of initial panic when she didn't think she could take him so deeply without choking but the fear was quickly over, replaced by exhilaration. The loss of control melted her insides, combining with the pleasure radiating from where her ass was penetrated by Micah's finger.

Micah's hand twisted and plunged as he pressed another finger into her, stretching her rear entrance to the point where pleasure met pain and merged into something even better. Her own finger was still buried in Hammer's ass but she couldn't concentrate on moving it. Hammer gripped her head, pulling her down as his hips thrust upward, fucking her face with a restrained violence that drove her toward orgasm.

As Micah worked his cock between her ass cheeks, pushing the broad head into her body, Hammer pulled free of her mouth. Bridget whimpered in protest and reached for him again but he held her back easily. Her focus changed as Micah worked his cock deep into her ass, plunging in to the hilt as the air left him in a rough groan.

Bridget went still, allowing her body to adjust to the thick intruder stretching her ass. With a gentle stroke to her hair, Hammer released her head and knelt to roll on a condom. Wrapping his arms around her, Micah eased Bridget upright until he sat on his heels and she straddled his lap, her ass impaled on his cock.

With a satisfied nod, Hammer leaned to kiss Bridget and then Micah. "Good," Hammer said, his voice as rough as gravel. "Play with her nipples."

Micah hurried to follow the order, his fingers pinching and pulling, almost hurting in the way that Bridget loved. Lowering his head, Hammer caught her mouth with his, the kiss as wonderfully rough as the fingers playing with her breasts.

"Higher," Hammer grunted against her lips and Micah rose to his knees, driving his cock farther into her body, making her cry out with pleasure against Hammer's mouth. Tipping his head forward, Micah gripped her shoulder with his teeth, closing them just hard enough to pinch. Bridget panted as an oncoming orgasm threatened, hovering just out of reach.

The tip of Hammer's cock nudged between her pussy lips and drove relentlessly into her tight channel. Bridget moaned, stretched and filled beyond what seemed possible. With an ecstatic cry, she ground down on both cocks, her muscles tightening around them as she came.

The men picked up a rhythm, lifting and lowering her as they thrust, driving her into a second orgasm before the first one had even released her from its grip. Her body milked the two cocks spearing her as she gasped for air, helpless with pleasure as they plunged inside her again and again. A scream built in her, bubbling up until she had to release it. She shoved her face against Hammer's chest to muffle the sound. Both men came within seconds of each other, their bodies rigid, squeezing her between them until Bridget lost the little breath she had left.

They toppled to their sides, pulling free of Bridget's body as they fell. She was still caught between them, a slick male chest in front and behind, and she was just fine with that.

*Just fine*, she thought, smiling as she slid into sleep.

Someone was nudging her.

"Again?" she grumbled without opening her eyes. "Fine, just don't wake me up." Between Micah and Hammer, literally, she hadn't gotten more than an hour of sleep all night. Of course, she'd slept the entire previous day but there'd been serious drugs involved.

"Ms. Grace?"

*Sam!* Her eyes flew open and she snatched the covers to her neck. "Sam?"

He was sitting cross-legged on the bed next to her, as close as he could get without touching. His eyes were huge and she couldn't tell if he was about to smile or cry.

"Hey, sweetie," she said, holding out an arm while she used the other one to keep herself covered. "How are you?"

He launched his small body at her, locking his arms around her neck in a strangling hug. She rubbed his back, so happy to have him home and safe that she didn't even mind not being able to breathe...for a while, at least.

"You're here," he said, not easing his grip.

"I am," she croaked.

"Are you staying?"

"Well..." she hesitated, not sure what the future held.

"Yes," Hammer said from the doorway.

Bridget and Sam looked over at him.

"We both are," he told them.

"We are?" Bridget asked, quirking an eyebrow at him.

"Yes." Although his voice was implacable, his eyes asked a question.

She grinned at him. "Good."

"Very good," Micah said as he walked in. "Now who wants breakfast?"

Hammer picked up Sam and swung him onto his shoulders. Laughing, Sam clutched at Hammer's smooth head, scrambling for a handhold. Bridget eyed the three males and shook her head, joining in the laughter.

Very good, indeed.

## About the Author

Katie Allen grew up in the Midwest with a horde of sisters (five) and one beleaguered brother. After an enjoyable four years working on her creative writing/art degree, and two not-so-pleasant years struggling toward her MBA, Katie somehow ended up as a mechanical engineer in Denver, Colorado. When her job disappeared during the recession, it was the kick in the rear she needed to head back to Minnesota and jump into writing full-time.

When she's not writing (many books are necessary to pay for her unfortunate equine addiction), Katie rides horses, reads (of course), does gymnastics and looks for new (and occasionally insane) ways to research her books (cop school, anyone?).

The author welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and e-mail address on her [author bio page](#) at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

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