



# *Handcuffs and Lies*

By Bronwyn Green

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Resplendence Publishing, LLC

P.O. Box 992

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Handcuffs and Lies

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Edited by Tiffany Mason

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and occurrences are a product of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, places, or occurrences, is purely coincidental.

*To Margaret who loved Michael way back when, and to Manda who loves a man  
in uniform...and out.*

*Thanks to Abbi Bartz, Sarah Arnsman and Lacey Bartz—you're awesome  
cousins and I appreciate all the medical information you provided.*

## ***Table of Contents***

<i>Chapter One</i> .....	7
<i>Chapter Two</i> .....	21
<i>Chapter Three</i> .....	34
<i>Chapter Four</i> .....	46
<i>About the Author</i> .....	55

## *Chapter One*

Tori Spinelli shifted on the unforgiving metal chair. Too warm under the bright June sun, she squinted into the painfully blue sky above the flag draped coffin. She swallowed the scream that clawed the back of her throat trying to escape as a filmstrip of jerky memories flashed through her head. Her brother's teasing smile as he tossed her a beer from the fridge, his grief at their parents' funeral, the arguments they'd had over his desire to join the police academy—each moment as lifeless as his body.

With slow, precise movements, two members of the honor guard removed the flag from Alex's casket and began to fold it—corner to corner as the red and white stripes blurred before her eyes. Officer after uniformed police officer stiffly saluted her brother's remains before removing a pristine white glove and adding it to the growing pile atop the coffin.

Her heart contracted painfully as the last cop brought his hand to his forehead with an almost mechanical motion as he stared at the mahogany box in front of him. From her vantage point in the front row, she could see how tightly he clenched his jaw and how his eyes shone with unshed tears. Removing his glove, he laid it on the polished wooden surface of the casket, his hand resting there as if he gathered strength from it.

Finally, he pulled back and turned to the honor guard member who held the folded flag. With an economy of motion, the flag changed hands and the officer moved to kneel before her. The pain in his eyes rivaled her own. He opened his mouth to speak, but the only thing she heard was a repetitive electronic beep.

Tori sat up straight in the hospital bed and swung her legs over the side as she fumbled for her pager and shut off the alarm. Three fucking years and she still had this dream regular as clockwork. She wiped angrily at the tears that covered her face and returned the pager to her pocket as she headed to the emergency room. Seven hours into the second half of her double

shift and she'd only gotten a forty-five minute nap. She was beat, but she still had three hours to go before she was off for the next two days.

As soon as she rounded the corner by the triage station, Sarah, one of the nurses, handed her a file. "Present for you, Dr. Spinelli. Motorcycle versus guardrail and thorn bush."

"Conscious?"

A string of slurred curses exploded from exam room two.

Sarah rolled her eyes. "Oh yeah."

Tori scanned the intake information as she stepped toward the room. Stable vitals, lacerations, fractured femur and a blood alcohol level twice the legal limit. No surprise there considering the guardrail and thorn bush. Before she could push the door open, the ambulance bay exploded into frantic activity as paramedics rushed a gurney inside.

Shoving the file back at Sarah, she sprinted to meet the paramedics. "What do you have?"

"Seventeen year-old male, BP is one sixty-eight over ninety-two, temperature is one-oh-three point seven, pulse is one thirty-nine and pupils are fixed and dilated. Shallow breath sounds and tachycardia."

"Who called it in?" she asked.

"No clue. He was lying outside The Cell on Division. Couldn't get anyone to tell us anything. I'm guessing ecstasy, though. There were a couple crushed tablets near his body."

As if on cue, the boy's skin flushed a deeper red and his eyes rolled back into his head. His right arm jerked outward, catching her in the abdomen as he began seizing. Flailing around, he caught the IV catheter on the side rail and ripped the needle from his arm. Blood spurted across her pants and lab coat as they wheeled him past the intake desk.

"Exam room three's open," Sarah said, darting in front of them.

Tori nodded at the other woman. "Run a new line. I need a full draw. Run a chem lab, tox screen and liver function."

After the seizure had passed, she helped the paramedics lift the patient to the bed on a three count while the rest of her team scurried to gather the necessary supplies. She disconnected the leads from the ambulance's portable heart monitor and reconnected them to the one in the room. As soon as she'd gotten a steady sinus rhythm, he began gasping. His airway was closing.

She nudged one of the EMTs out the way. "Intubating," she called out. Using the laryngoscope, she cleared the way to slip the endotracheal tube down the patient's throat. This



was the third kid this month who'd presented with a suspected ecstasy overdose, and she'd be damned if she'd tell another set of grieving parents that their child had died pointlessly.

As soon as the tube was in, Sarah was at her side to bag him. Holding the mask over his face, she rhythmically pumped oxygen into his lungs. His temperature seemed to shoot up several degrees in as many seconds.

"Where's that line?" Tori shouted. "I need cooled fluids in here. Now!" Grabbing a pair of scissors off the surgical tray, she sliced through his jeans and shirt, stripping the clothing from his body. "Get the cooling blankets too!"

Bodies raced in and out of the room, a blur of varying shades of blue and white. Someone drew blood while two more people entered the fray loaded with IV bags and blankets. The boy started to seize again as the intern tried to find a new vein to replace the IV.

Tori nodded toward the struggling intern as she took the bag from Sarah. "Take over. I need that line now!" She nodded to the intern. "Hold his arm for her. As soon as the line's in, get me a ventilator."

Tinny beeping filled the room and Tori's heart sank like a rock to her stomach. His heart rate was dropping. Rapidly.

"Crash cart! He's flat-lining." She checked the clock. Nine fifteen.

Sarah turned the IV on full and took Tori's place at the bag. Tori shoved the blankets aside and started chest compressions while the intern charged up the paddles.

"Charged to two-hundred," the intern announced. "Clear."

Tori lifted her hands from the boy's body as the electronic pulse was discharged into his heart. She glanced at the monitor. Nothing. Continuing compressions she waited for the defibrillator to recharge.

"Charging to three hundred," the intern said.

As soon as the charge was restored, Tori removed her hands from the patient. "He's still asystole. I need an amp of epinephrine," she called to Andrew, the nurse adjusting the IV drip.

He hurriedly unlocked the cabinet and grabbed the bottle and drew the medicine into the syringe before administering it into the IV tube. The only sound in the room was the whoosh of air as Sarah bagged the patient and the mournful alarm as they watched the monitor, waiting for a blip—anything to show he was responding.

Nothing.

She restarted compressions. “Again!” she said to the intern, who held the paddles loosely in her hands.

The intern upped the defibrillator to four hundred joules and shocked him again.

Arms aching, Tori lost track of how long they’d worked on him. Finally, Sarah laid a hand on her arm.

“It’s been forty-five minutes. We’re not getting him back.”

The nurse was right. There was no chargeable rhythm and there hadn’t been for a while. Tori looked at the clock. Her stomach clenched and her hands stilled on his chest.

“Are you going to call it?” Sarah asked.

Tori’s arms dropped to her sides. “Time of death...ten-oh-eight PM.” She looked at the boy’s lifeless eyes. A complete waste. “Has his family been notified?”

Andrew nodded. “The paramedics left his info at the desk and Deb took care of it. They were on their way in.”

“Okay. You guys go on. See if the biker’s been taken care of. I’m going to clean him up a little before his parents see him.” It was typically the duty of one of the floor nurses, but she wasn’t quite ready to face his parents.

“You okay, Dr. Spinelli?” Sarah asked.

“Yeah, I just need a minute.”

“If you’re sure.”

Tori nodded and unscrewed the bag from the trach tube as Sarah and the rest of the team quietly left. Tori moved around the room and turned off the monitors and stopped the IV from dripping before turning her attention to wiping up the excess blood. She couldn’t remove his ruined clothing, but she could cover his nearly nude body.

As she adjusted the blankets, her lab coat caught on the remnants of his jeans and a clatter of metal hit the floor. Bending, she scooped up his car keys and a tiny plastic bag. Peering closer, she recognized the three pale green pills. The EMT had been right. Ecstasy. She turned over the bag and saw they were embossed with a four leaf clover.

She knew that symbol—had seen it often enough when her brother was still alive. The ecstasy was compliments of a dealer named Lucky. Rage tightened her grip around the keys until the metal bit into her flesh. Ignoring the pain, she slipped the baggy into her pocket. She was

supposed to file a report and turn the drugs over to a cop. She definitely planned on giving it to a cop. It just wouldn't be the uniformed officers that kept an eye on the hospital. Not this time.

Sarah stuck her head in the door. "His parents are here," she murmured.

Tori set the keys down. Stepping into the hallway, she motioned for the family to follow her into an empty exam room.

Sometimes she really hated her job.

\* \* \* \*

Tori wrapped the towel around her head and closed her eyes as she leaned against a locker.

"Rough night?"

Tori didn't bother opening her eyes as her friend, Lucy Sanchez, entered the locker room. "I'm assuming you already know that, otherwise why would you be here? I know *I* didn't call for a psych consult."

"Sarah was worried about you," her friend murmured.

"I'm fine." She opened her eyes and looked at Lucy. "Like you said, it's just been a rough night."

The other woman frowned. "It would probably help if you didn't take so many back to back doubles."

Tori sighed. "It's true."

"Seriously, woman. You look like hell."

"Wow." Tori rolled her eyes. "That's some bedside manner you've got."

"It's part of my charm," Lucy said with a grin before quickly sobering. "Are you sleeping any better?"

"I'm about to go home and sleep for the next two days."

"Way to avoid the question. You know, we shrinks are trained to notice stuff like that."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah." Unwinding the towel from her head, she shook out her hair and finger combed her short curls. She slipped her arms into a blouse and focused on the buttons as she tried to gather her thoughts. "I'm just tired of these needless deaths. They're just kids, Luce. This one was barely old enough to drive. It's just such a *waste*."

Lucy nodded, pain in her eyes.

Tears burned her throat, but she swallowed past them. “I know Sarah’s worried and I know you’re worried. But I’m okay. I promise. I just need to get the hell out of here for a while.”

“I think that’s a brilliant idea. Go home and get some rest.”

“I will.” Of course, she needed to make a stop first, but Lucy didn’t need to know where she was going. She’d only worry more.

“You’ve got my number. Call me anytime. Day or night. I mean it.” A shrill beep echoed in the tiled room and Lucy grabbed her pager. “Jeez, I wish I could set this thing to vibrate—at least I could enjoy it then.” She sighed. “Must be a full moon. There’s an expectant dad freaking out in the ER.”

Tori grinned. “I still say we need to install a valium salt-lick for maternity.”

Lucy laughed and hugged her. “Now, don’t forget...”

“I promise—I’ll call you if I need to talk, but right now, your public awaits.”

“You could at least sound a little more sympathetic,” Lucy said as she walked out the door.

Tori’s grin faded as soon as she remembered the pills in her pocket. She needed to take care of a few more things before she could keep her promise to Lucy.

She dug her phone out of her purse and dialed a number she vowed she’d never call again. It was well after midnight, but she didn’t have any doubt that he’d still be awake. He’d always been a night owl, like her. Stomach twisting with nerves, she counted the rings, half-hoping he wouldn’t answer.

Relief mixed with frustration as his voicemail kicked in, and she paced the locker room floor as she contemplated whether or not to leave a message. His rough voice washed over her. Closing her eyes, she pushed down every emotion she had regarding this man and focused on her memory of the faces of the grieving parents she’d just spoken with. Finally, the beep sounded.

“Hey, Michael. It’s Tori...I need to talk to you. Please give me a call as soon as you can. It doesn’t matter how late.” She left her number, hoping her voice didn’t sound as ridiculously breathy as she was afraid it did.

Frowning, she hung up. The last thing she needed was for him to think she had a thing for him. Not that it mattered. He’d gotten what he wanted. Since Alex had died, there was nothing between them but bad memories and pain. If she didn’t desperately need his help, she wouldn’t be contacting him now.

She checked her watch. The city buses had stopped running two hours ago. Since she had to take a taxi home anyway, she might as well have the driver run by the house he worked from. She wasn't supposed to know about it, but Alex had pointed it out to her shortly before he'd died. He'd wanted to move into vice, but she'd talked him out of it. She'd thought he would have been safer working as a uniformed officer. She shook her head at her own stupidity. No cop was truly safe.

\* \* \* \*

"You sure this is where you want to go?" the cab driver asked.

Michael's motorcycle was parked in front of the house. "Yeah."

The guy eyed her in the rearview mirror as he stopped in the middle of the street. "If you say so."

She passed the fare over the seat. "Are you going to be in this area for a bit?"

"In this neighborhood? Hell, no." He paused and scrawled something on a piece of paper. "Here's my number. Call me if you need a ride."

"Thanks." Tori shoved the scrap of paper in her wallet and slid out of the car.

"Be careful out there," the driver cautioned.

She smiled at him and hoped she wasn't about to do something irreparably stupid.

She wiped her clammy hands on her jeans and walked up the rickety front steps to knock on the door. Her knuckled rasped against the peeling paint on the warped screen door. Nerves strung tightly, she jammed her hands in her pockets and waited for someone to answer.

The heavy front door swung open with a whoosh, and she came face to face with the man she'd studiously avoided for three years. His rich brown hair hung loosely to his shoulders, and he looked like hadn't shaved for days. Brilliant hazel eyes stared at her registering surprise quickly followed by anger.

"I—I need to talk to you," she stammered.

The sculpted shape of his lips thinned as they pulled into a tight line. Over his shoulder, she caught sight of three men coming toward the door. Instinctively, she retreated, but Michael's arm snaked out, and he tugged her against the hard planes of his body. Her traitorous nipples responded immediately. Despite the fact she could barely recall their one drunken encounter, her body certainly remembered, and it wanted more.

His eyes, intense and unwavering, bored into hers, and he lowered his head. Her heart sank as she realized he was going to kiss her, and she couldn't convince herself to move away. His mouth brushed against hers. The barest contact held her breath captive in her throat. It was all she could do to hold herself still and not shove her tongue in his mouth. With his chest skimming her breasts, his lips traced the line of her jaw, up to her ear.

"Act like you want me, or we're both dead," he growled softly.

With shaking hands, she reached out and grabbed his hips, pulling him flush against her. Michael fisted his hand in her hair and cupped the back of her head. Streaks of pleasure shot along her spine as his fingernails scraped across her scalp.

His lips descended on hers and his tongue slipped past her shocked defenses. A whimper escaped her as she released her pent-up breath into his mouth. With a quiet groan, he pressed his lips to hers as he turned her and immobilized her against the door. Wrapping her leg around his, she kissed him back, her tongue darting into his mouth. He tasted like coffee, dark and rich, and something else that was entirely masculine and Michael. In spite of her misgivings, desire curled through her body, dampening her panties and pebbling her nipples where they pressed into his chest.

"Hey Mikey, we gonna finish our business, or what? 'Less of course you're sharing."

The audible leer in the other man's voice sent a shiver down her spine.

"Not a word," Michael whispered against her lips. Turning his head toward the other men, he chuckled. It sounded cold. Deadly. "Sorry boys, this one's mine."

"You gonna fuck her, or are we gonna finish this?"

Michael looked at her, his eyes glowing with anger. "Oh yeah—I'm definitely gonna fuck her. Just as soon as we're done here."

Tori's stomach dropped like an out-of-control freight elevator as she stared into his glittering hazel eyes. She should have waited for him to call back. She was *so* over her head.

Michael slid his hand possessively up her ribcage, stopping only when it rested under the swell of her breast. He held her gaze, as if daring her to object.

The three men drew closer. The man who'd spoken to Michael earlier reached out and tugged at one of her short curls. His eyes were small and cruel looking as he appraised her body with a hard stare. "C'mon darlin', lemme show you what a real man is like." He jerked his thumb

toward a tall, lanky guy with watery blue eyes. “Me an’ my boy here can show you a real good time.”

Forcing a smile, Tori hooked her fingers in the front of Michael’s waistband. The backs of her fingers brushed across his tightly muscled stomach and his body heat soaked into her skin. She looked up at him through her lashes. “Sorry guys, Michael promised me the ride of my life.”

His fingers convulsed on her ribcage at her husky words. She knew, even if the others were clueless, that he was ready to throttle her.

Michael chuckled again, that same cold, dead sound. “Let’s get this over with,” he said to the others. With ice in his eyes, he turned back to Tori and pulled her closer, close enough to feel the raging erection pushing against his fly. “Seems I’ve got things to *do*.”

The sensation of his hard cock pressed against her had stolen any words she might have thought to say, and her mouth was so dry she could barely swallow. Try as she might, she couldn’t tear herself from his furious gaze. Anger had brightened the color of his eyes. The dark green ring lining the light brown irises seemed to grow darker while the gold flecks circling the pupils seemed sharper in the low light. He was beyond pissed.

Forcing herself to move, she pushed from his embrace and dropped onto the ugly orange couch, setting her purse on the cushion beside her. The piece of furniture looked like something even Goodwill would turn down. “I’ll just wait here ‘til you guys are done.”

A scruffy looking blond guy looked pointedly at her before turning his attention to Michael. “Why don’t you take care of your girlfriend while I finish up out here.”

Her stomach leapt wildly at the barely veiled threat in his tone. Michael nodded once, grabbed her by the wrist, and pulled her into a room that opened off the main area. With a careless shove, he slammed the door behind them and locked it.

Michael Tanner stared at the woman who’d haunted every fucking dream he’d had for the past three years. Dreams, nightmares, wandering thoughts—his partner’s little sister wouldn’t leave him the fuck alone. Former partner, he corrected himself. The dead didn’t have partners—especially not when their partners had failed them so miserably in life.

He glared at her, unable to believe she’d just managed to interrupt a pivotal drug deal, unable to look away as her pink tongue moistened her lips. Full, perfect lips. Lips that belonged wrapped around his cock. He’d had that mouth on his body, he was sure of it—he just couldn’t

remember a damn thing. All he knew was, the morning after Alex's funeral, he'd woken up wrapped around Tori's supple, naked body, still drunk off his ass. He'd made the only move he could. He'd snuck out of her bed and hoped like hell she didn't remember any of it either when she woke up.

Shaking off the phantom memories of Tori stretched beneath him, he stalked toward her, backing her toward the creaky bed. "What the fuck do you think you're doing here?" he demanded, his voice nothing more than a harsh whisper.

"I—"

He cut her off, placing his hand over her mouth. "Quietly." Carefully, he freed her lips.

"I needed to talk to you," she murmured.

Thank God, Niko, his new partner, had possessed the foresight to suggest he take her to the bedroom. The last thing they needed was a civilian witnessing the deal that was about to go on with two of Lucky's highest ranking associates.

"Jesus, Tori! It couldn't wait until I was off duty? What the hell is so important that you had to break three years worth of silence and avoidance?"

She pressed her lips into a tight line, as if she was holding back a torrent of words. Shoving her hand into the pocket of her jeans, she pulled out a small baggie and held it on the palm of her hand. He immediately recognized the embossed design on the pills. His throat closed at the thought of Tori putting herself into danger getting these. He wanted to pull her into his arms and make her promise that she'd stay away from anything having to do with Lucky.

Instead, he took the pills from her. He didn't mean to caress her palm and fingers as he took it from her. It just happened, along with the jolt of energy that flared where their skin touched.

He glanced at the door as coarse laughter drifted to them from the other room. Fear he hadn't felt in years churned in his gut. Keeping his cover intact was going to be practically impossible with her here. "You know, they expect to hear us going at it," he whispered.

She shook her head. *No way*, she mouthed.

"Are you trying to blow my cover *and* get me killed?" he whispered almost soundlessly.

Her eyes brightened, but she blinked away the sudden tears and held his gaze.



*Fuck.* He never could say the right thing where Tori was concerned. Instead of trying, he pushed her backward. The springs screeched in protest as she landed and the laughter sounded again from the other side of the paper thin walls.

“Move the bed,” he murmured.

“What?”

He sat down next to her at the foot of the bed and began a slow rocking motion, throwing an arm across her waist when she would have scrambled off it. “You started this by showing up tonight,” he whispered fiercely, “now finish it.”

If the two hired thugs in the other room believed Tori was anything other than a quick lay, she was in danger. He’d failed to save Alex’s life, but he sure as hell wasn’t going to do the same thing with his best friend’s sister. He’d made a promise and he’d keep it no matter what.

“I’m *not* sleeping with you.”

“I didn’t ask you to.” He didn’t ask her to, but goddamn it, he wanted to. “Fake it.”

He slowed the rocking motion as she stared at him with her mouth hanging open. “C’mon baby, suck it. That’s right, take me deeper.”

She swallowed hard as a bright pink hue crept up her neck to stain her cheeks.

Michael held up the pills. “Where did you get these?” he hissed.

“Off another dead kid in the ER.”

The pain in her eyes was unmistakable. She hated to lose anyone, but to lose them to the same dealer responsible for her brother’s death was killing her.

“We’ll talk about this after they’re gone.”

“But—”

“For fuck’s sake, moan already.”

She opened her mouth but no sound came out. She looked like a deer in the headlights.

He sighed, then groaned, purposefully holding her gaze. “Goddamn baby, your mouth feels so good.”

Tori’s breath caught in her throat, and he felt it like a fist to the gut. Lips parted and eyes glassy, she looked more than a little aroused. He let his gaze travel over her body. Her chest rapidly rose and fell, and her nipples had pebbled into tight little points. Tight little points he’d give just about anything to taste.

“C’mon, Tori, you’ve gotta give me something.”

Slashes of scarlet highlighted her cheeks, and she closed her eyes. Keeping them shut, she moaned. The sound streaked along his nerve endings, and he wanted to hear her make that sound for real. He wanted to cause it.

“More,” he whispered.

She repeated the noise and his cock hardened instantly. She was going to kill him.

“Mmm baby, you’re so wet for me.”

Her eyes flew open and narrowed. She looked like she wanted to hurl something at him.

Despite the gravity of the situation, he couldn’t stop the wicked grin that spread across his face. He used to love teasing her. Just one more thing that had died with Alex.

Michael pushed the thought away and focused on the present. On keeping Tori safe.

Biting her lower lip, she moaned again, louder this time. It was all he could do not to pin her to the mattress and fuck her properly. He needed to keep his mind on the assholes in the next room, not on what it would feel like to slide between her legs...and actually be able to remember it this time.

After what seemed like an eternity of moaning and gently moving the bed, she glanced at him again. “I want you deeper. *Please*, fuck me harder!” she rasped.

He almost choked. What the fuck was the matter with him? He was used to being undercover, playing a role. This was no different than anything else he’d done in the last two and a half years. Except that he couldn’t quite remember what the end goal was. Tori’s sweet scent distracted him, and all he could think about was getting her naked. This needed to end.

He breathed heavily, panting now, while he shook the bed almost violently. Leaning over her, he let his lips brush across the tender skin of her cheek and ear. “You need to scream now.”

“I don’t do that,” she snapped, her body swaying with the motion he’d initiated.

He leaned closer, holding her captive with his proximity. “What—scream? Or come?”

Her eyes, huge and dilated, locked with his while his lips hovered mere inches from hers. The small taste at the door hadn’t been nearly enough. Blushing wildly, she held his gaze for a moment, and called out. “Harder, Michael... I need it harder.”

God help him, but he wanted to give it to her as hard and fast as she demanded.

Closing her eyes, she broke the connection between them and cried out. “Yes, yes, yes!”

Michael groaned loudly, trying to control the surge of lust that had him by the balls. It was a good thing she’d closed her eyes. He wasn’t sure how much longer he would have been

able to mask the raw need coursing through him. He slowed the frantic pace of the squeaking springs, then stopped it altogether.

“Now what?” she whispered, her eyes still closed.

“Now we hope they’re done out there, and I get you the fuck out of here,” he growled.

She flinched slightly at his tone, but he couldn’t let it bother him. He needed to distance himself and keep his head in this case. The bed protested loudly as he stood, pulling her along with him. He could hear Niko’s phone ring from the other room as he swiftly unbuttoned Tori’s shirt.

She slapped at his hands. “What the hell are you doing?” she whispered.

He met her gaze and grimaced. “You don’t have the look of a woman who’s just been thoroughly—”

“Don’t say it,” she warned, trying to pull his hands away.

He ignored her and yanked her shirt out of her jeans and rapidly mis-buttoned it. Threading his fingers through her already tousled curls, he messed them up a bit more before doing the same thing to his own hair.

“Rub your lips,” he ordered, nearly silent.

Glaring at him, she rubbed the palm of her hand vigorously across her mouth.

“Harder.”

“Isn’t that my line?” she sneered before continuing. Removing her hand from her mouth, she pouted for his inspection. “Better?”

“Damn,” he whispered. “Damn, damn, damn.” Unable to help himself, he tunneled his hands through her hair and lowered his mouth, claiming hers almost brutally. Tori struggled for about a tenth of a second before she melted against him and his body rejoiced. His still hard cock pressed against his fly with renewed vigor, seeking her heat.

Her arms wrapped around him and her fingers stroked the nape of his neck. The gentle caress was almost enough to push him over the edge. His lips left hers to trail along her jaw line and down her neck to nip the tender skin. She trembled, her hands convulsing in his hair, so he repeated the action before delving into the sweet warmth of her mouth again.

For a moment, he had the briefest memory of kissing her the night of Alex’s funeral. He’d called a cab to get them home after the bar that night, and, like some kind of misguided gentleman, he’d insisted on walking her to the door. Of course, he’d never been a gentleman. As

soon as they'd reached her front porch, she'd kissed him goodbye, and he'd let her. He didn't push her away like he should have—he'd kissed her back. When their clothes started disappearing in the living room, he'd picked her up and carried her to the bedroom. Every other memory of that evening was gone—until he woke up in her bed. Guilt crashed over him, and he shoved her away now like he should have three years ago.

Clearing his throat, he gave her the once over. "There. Now that looks more believable."

Her mouth dropped open and incredulousness lit her eyes.

He grabbed her by the hand and pulled her toward the door. "C'mon, baby. Time to get the hell out of Dodge."

"I'm not going anywhere with you," she whispered, her anger evident.

"That's where you're wrong."

## *Chapter Two*

Unable to pull her hand from Michael's much larger grasp, she had no choice but to follow him from the bedroom into the grungy dining room. The blond man sat alone at a table, baggies of crack piled around him and a gun resting casually in front of him. Eyes narrowed, he leaned backward with his arms crossed over his chest, glaring at them.

"What the fuck, Mike? We were in the middle of a deal."

Before Michael could answer, Tori spoke. "I'm sorry. It's all my fault—"

"Damn straight it is. Do you have any idea what you could have done? What you might have done?"

Nothing she could say would make any of this all right, but she wanted to try and explain.

However, the other man wasn't finished, yet. "Good fucking luck explaining this to the captain," he said to Michael. Not sparing her a glance, he blew out a disgusted sigh. "Your shift is just about over. Get her out of here."

Michael's grip on her hand slackened, and she pulled away. Shame swamped her like a tidal wave. She'd acted without thinking it through, and she could have cost Michael and his partner their investigation and possibly their lives. Grabbing her purse from the couch, she noticed it was unzipped. A trickle of unease skated down her spine. She always zipped it. Rifling through it, she searched for her wallet. She needed to call that cab driver back here and get as far away as possible from the worst idea she'd ever had.

Her wallet wasn't in there. Panic sank like a stone to settle in the pit of her stomach. She lifted the couch cushions and looked underneath. It wasn't there either.

"What's wrong?" Michael asked.

"My wallet's missing."

"Are you sure you had it when you came in?"

“Yeah, I paid the cabby, and I know I put it back in my purse and zipped it. When I picked up my purse just now, it was unzipped.”

Michael exchanged a look with the other man. “Did you turn your back on them at all?”

The blond man frowned. “When I answered the phone.” He turned to Tori. “Is anything else missing?”

“It doesn’t look like it.”

Tori glanced at Michael. He was angrier than she’d ever seen him.

“C’m on.”

“I’ll find my own way home.” She knew she was being stubborn and petulant, but at this point she didn’t care. She wanted to get away from Michael and the jumbled emotions and raw need he left in his wake. Hopefully distance would quell both the confusion and desire roaring through her body.

“Absolutely not. We’re not finished.”

She snorted. “The hell we’re not. Look, this was an awful mistake, and I’m sorry. It won’t happen again. Trust me.” She flipped open her cell phone and started for the door.

Michael grabbed a leather jacket from the back of a chair and slipped it on as he blocked the door. Plucking her phone from her fingers, he glanced at the blond man. “Call dispatch and have them run some extra patrols past nine thirty-two Myrtle, northwest.”

She was surprised he remembered her address. Surprise gave way to fear. Two criminals not only had her wallet, but they also knew where she lived.

The other man was already dialing the phone when Michael grabbed her hand and tugged her onto the porch and down the steps. “We need to talk.”

“There’s nothing to say.”

“Really? How about the fact that you risked your job and criminal prosecution to bring me something you should have turned over to your supervisor? That’s something that needs discussing.”

She fought the urge to roll her eyes. The thing that pissed her off the most was that he was absolutely right. Once again, she’d acted impulsively and look where it had gotten her.

“I’ll take you back to the hospital, and you can file a report.” His tone softened as he gazed at her under the halo of the street lamp. “Explain that you were upset when you left, and

you forgot. We'll talk about the rest later. Now, get on the bike. You can use the smaller helmet on the back."

"You're insane if you think I'm getting on a motorcycle."

"Probably, but that doesn't change the fact that you *are* getting on it. We've got a lot to do and a limited time to do it."

Stiffly, she crossed the sidewalk and lifted a helmet off the back of the seat. Fumbling with it, she nearly dropped it. He took it from her trembling hands and placed it on her head, gently tucking her wayward curls inside. The caress of his callused fingertips brushing over her cheeks and temples sent shivers through her body. His lips tightened into a frown as he buckled the strap under her chin.

"I want to go on record as saying, I hate these things," she muttered quietly.

The corner of his mouth kicked up in a crooked grin that she had the sudden urge to taste.

"Duly noted." He tied a black bandana over his hair before putting his own helmet on and nonchalantly climbing on the bike. "Get on, baby. We're out of here."

With nervous butterflies bombarding her stomach, she hauled herself up behind him and wrapped her arms around his waist like a vise grip. She hated these damn things. She'd seen far too many riders show up in the ER, and most of them left via rehab facilities or the morgue.

"Ease up a little, Tori. I need to be able to breathe to drive this thing."

She loosened her hold a scant amount, but as soon as he started the engine, she scooted forward and plastered her chest and face to his back, pressing her legs against his. He revved the motor, and she tightened her grip, her muscles trembling with the effort of holding onto him. She couldn't remember the one time he'd been buried inside her, but she'd never forget this. The bike's engine rumbled through her body, heightening her need for him.

"Hang on," he growled and he pulled away from the curb.

Her stomach lurched as they moved into the flow of post-midnight traffic. She closed her eyes as they picked up speed and headed toward the expressway on-ramp. This night couldn't be over fast enough.

After she filled out the appropriate forms, she turned in the drugs to her supervisor while Michael sat in one of the waiting room chairs, his long legs stretched out in front of him. It was tempting to sneak out the back, but she'd brought this little slice of hell on herself, and she'd see it through.

The ride to her apartment was as nerve wracking as the trip to the hospital. Wrapped around Michael with the thrum of the engine vibrating through her body, her panties grew damp. It was ridiculous to think she still wanted him. Hadn't the fear and the embarrassment of the last couple hours proved he was nothing but a bad idea? Apparently not, because she was still reliving the sensation of his lips on hers as he pulled into her driveway.

Disgusted with herself, she removed the helmet and handed it to him. "Thanks for the ride," she muttered as she hurried up the stairs.

Within seconds, he was next to her, pushing his way inside as soon as she'd unlocked the door. "You're welcome. Now, pack your bag."

"Beg your pardon?"

"Pack your bag. There's no way I'm letting you stay here now that those guys have your address."

Her mouth dropped open. "You're not *letting* me...?" She shook her head. "I can take care of myself. Just go."

"God damn it Tori, I'm trying to protect you."

She whirled on him. "So shoving your tongue down my throat is your idea of police protection?" She knew why he'd done it, but she was too upset by the entire situation to be swayed by logic.

Ignoring her outburst, he grabbed her backpack from its spot by the door and walked to her bedroom. Yanking open her dresser drawers, he grabbed a handful of underwear. Her stomach fluttered at the sight of the silky bits of lace clenched in his fist. Hesitating for the briefest of moments, he shoved the panties in the knapsack before grabbing a couple of bras and adding them to the bag.

"Look, you've already asked for extra patrols, I'll be fine."

Rifling through another drawer, he pulled out several knit shirts and a pair of flannel pajama pants. Snagging a couple of books and her MP3 player from her bedside table, he put everything into the bag.

"Get whatever information you need so you can contact your bank and your credit card companies."

"Michael, stop! I'll be fine."



Stalking toward her, he held her motionless with his gaze. "It only takes a few minutes to break into a house and not much longer than that to rape someone. You want to end up as a patient in your own emergency room? That's if they let you live...which is highly unlikely."

She knew he was trying to scare her. And it was working.

He was so close his body heat radiated toward her in waves, and all she wanted to do was reach out and run her hands over his broad chest.

Anger and pain clashed in his eyes as he held her gaze. "I can't leave you here alone. I promised Alex I'd take care of you."

Like a deflating balloon, her breath left her. "When?"

"What?"

"When did you promise him that?"

He looked away. "Right before he died."

She couldn't move if her life depended on it. She hadn't thought the hollow feeling in her chest could get any worse, but now it was filled with a knot of pain so tight it hurt to breathe.

"You promised him you'd take care of me," she finally choked out. She shoved at him, needing some distance. "Did that promise involve fucking me and leaving me to wake up alone the morning after we buried him?"

His eyes closed momentarily as if praying for patience, his regret impossible to miss. Stepping around her, he headed for the bathroom. "Get the rest of your shit together. We're leaving."

She followed him into the bathroom to find him shoveling toiletries into the backpack.

"There's no way I'm going with you."

Dropping the bag, he spun and planted his hands on either side of her head, effectively pinning her against the bathroom door. "You have a choice. You can either leave town until this investigation is finished, or you can come home with me. Be very aware, if you decide to stay in town, you'll be at work, or you'll be with me."

"I don't have any money. Those jerks took everything."

His hard gaze held hers. "Then I guess you're stuck with me."

Michael could barely tear his eyes from Tori's lips. They were glossy and parted, and it was all he could do to keep from pushing her against the door and tasting her again.

She opened her mouth, but he shook his head. He needed to get the hell out of her house and away from the press of memories. He might not remember much of the night he'd spent with her, but he remembered enough.

"Don't. Say. Anything." He pushed off the door, picked up the backpack and slung it over his shoulder. Grabbing her hand, he pulled her out of the house. "Let's go."

What should have been a fifteen minute drive took over an hour. He was exhausted, but he wanted to make sure they hadn't been followed. The last thing he needed was for Lucky's guys to find out where he really lived. He'd promised Alex he'd keep Tori safe, and he couldn't do that if they knew where to find her.

He sighed. He could have paid for a hotel for her. He could have slapped her into protective custody, whether she wanted it or not. He could have done a lot of things, but instead, he'd chosen the stupidest one of them all. He'd chosen to bring her home where she could be a constant threat to his common sense and sanity. *Good thinking, Mike. Real good thinking.*

Pulling into his garage, he shut off the engine and closed the door behind them. He didn't miss how quickly she scrambled off the bike—away from him. Unbuckling her helmet, she handed it to him and retrieved her knapsack from the saddlebag he'd stowed it in.

"All right, you're in charge. What's next?"

He unlocked the door to the kitchen and went inside. What was next was that he was going to lie awake all night with a hard-on that refused to go away while the source of that hard-on pouted in his guest room. He was pretty sure that's what would be happening next.

Not bothering to turn on the lights, he locked the door behind them and tossed his coat on the back of a chair. Hoping to at least dull the need that thrummed through his veins, he pulled a couple of beers out of the fridge and handed one to Tori.

She took it with a grateful almost-smile and nearly drained it. "So...how long am I going to be stuck here?"

He watched her lick a stray drop of beer from her full lower lip, grateful that his T-shirt was long enough to cover his hardening cock. "Look, Tori, it's not like this is my idea of good time." *Liar.* "As soon as we can get this case wrapped up and the guys in jail, you're free to go back to your life. But for now, it's my job to take care of you."

"Your job, huh." She leveled a glare at him. "Good to know where we stand."

“What do you want me to say? That I’m glad you showed up to fuck my investigation? That I’m thrilled that I had to fake sex with you instead missing what might have been my only chance to arrange a meeting with Lucky? Yeah, you’re part of the job now, babe. Get used to it.”

“This isn’t going to work.” She set her bottle down and dug her phone out of her purse.

“What are you doing?”

“Calling a friend to see if I can stay with her ’til this is over.”

“You want to put her at risk, too?” He snatched the phone from her hand. “Get it through your head. These people don’t care who they hurt.”

“Then I’ll figure something else out.” She grabbed her backpack and tried to push past him.

“The hell you will!” He gripped her shoulders and pushed her against the refrigerator. He’d had enough of fighting with her. They’d barely managed a handful of civil words since she’d barged into his investigation.

She shoved ineffectually at his chest, and he almost groaned at the sensation of her small, strong hands, wishing they were on his bare skin. “Let go of me!”

“Knock it off, or I swear to God, I’ll cuff you to my bed.”

Heat flared in her eyes, and this time he couldn’t hold back his groan. For the rest of his life, he’d imagine Tori naked and cuffed to his headboard, waiting for him, her lips parted like they were right now.

Her eyes widened as they scanned his face, hovering over his mouth.

*Fuck, fuck, fuck.* He shouldn’t kiss her, but he couldn’t come up with a single reason to stop himself. Except for Alex. Michael had promised him he’d protect his sister. And yet he couldn’t seem to protect her from himself. Hadn’t he already hurt her enough?

Taking a steadying breath, he released her shoulders and straightened. He needed to do the right thing by her. For tonight that meant shuttling her off to the guest room and tomorrow finding a better way to protect her. He couldn’t save Alex, but he could sure as hell make sure nothing happened to Tori.

He tried to tell her where the guest room was, but he couldn’t form the words.

She stared at him, anger and desire clouding her eyes. He had half a memory of her looking at him the same way before she’d kissed him that night. He could no more move away from her now than he could then.

Unable to stop himself, he drove his hands into her short curls, loving the silky slide against his skin. What he wouldn't give to feel them slipping over his stomach as she took his cock deep in her mouth. His balls pulled tight at the thought.

Splaying his fingers, he cradled the back of her head as he angled her for his kiss. Midnight swallowed the blue of her eyes as she stared at him, and he was lost. Her lips parted on a gasp, and he delved into her mouth, no pretence of gentleness. The bitterness of the beer and the sweet warmth of Tori exploded on his tongue as he tasted her.

For the briefest of moments, she froze in his arms, but as his tongue stroked hers, she grabbed his waist and pulled him flush against her body. His cock pressed against his fly, seeking her warmth before their hips actually collided, and it was all he could do not to grind against her like a desperate teenage boy. But damn he wanted inside her.

Any semblance of rational thought vanished as she responded, kissing him back, nipping at his lower lip before darting her tongue into his mouth. With grasping fingers, she pulled at his shirt, trying to tear it from his body. He released her long enough to let her yank the fabric over his head and drop it to the floor while he pulled his gun from his waistband and set it on the counter.

She trailed her hands over his back, urging him closer, stroking his heated skin and sending tremors of need coursing through him. Christ, he couldn't remember wanting another woman the way he wanted Tori. He'd always wanted her—from the second Alex had introduced them. And despite the fact he hadn't had any real contact with her since he'd snuck out of her bedroom three years ago, he'd never stopped wanting her.

Tori brushed her lips across his chest before sinking her teeth into his pectoral muscle. His cock jerked in his pants and this time when he had the urge to grind into her, he didn't hold back. Her breathy whimper feathered against his skin as he crushed her to him. The tight peaks of her nipples pressed into his chest. His mouth watered—he needed to taste them, needed to feel them harden against his tongue.

With clumsy fingers, he pulled at her buttons. What had been relatively easy to unbutton before now bordered on impossible.

"Just rip it already," she muttered.

Her voice, tight with need, scraped over his skin, and he swallowed hard, his throat thick. Fisting his hand in the front of her shirt, he yanked, tearing the fragile material and exposing her

lace covered breasts. The sound of rending fabric echoed in the quiet room. His breath caught at the sight of the rose colored tips pebbling against the sheer white material. Lowering his head, he sucked a peak into his mouth, nipping at it with his teeth, dampening both the fabric and her nipple. The tender flesh crinkled further against his tongue. He sucked harder, wanting to wring out every sweet response from her.

She silently tangled her fingers in his hair, pressing him closer.

He stroked his hand across the satin skin of her stomach, loving the way her muscles trembled and jumped beneath his touch. Reaching behind her, he unfastened her bra and quickly pulled it and the remnants of her shirt from her body and dropped them onto the floor. Diffused light from the street lamp shone through the kitchen window, illuminating her skin, giving her an almost otherworldly glow.

As he captured her other nipple, she reached out and slid her hand along the length of his aching cock. She squirmed in his arms. Her mouth trailed over his shoulder. Each kiss tormented and soothed. Every touch of her lips wound him tighter. Every caress of her fingers took him that much further from the past and everything he wanted to forget—at least for a little while.

Slipping from his grasp, she sank to her knees and fumbled with his fly. His cock was so fucking hard he doubted she'd be able to unzip his jeans. She took her time, rubbing her lips over his stomach while she unfastened the denim. Hooking her fingers in his underwear, she forcefully tugged them down his legs. His cock sprang free, brushing against the satin-soft skin of her cheek.

Wrapping her hand around him, she stroked him from root to tip, bringing the already damp head to her lips. His breath caught in his throat. Something about this situation was wrong, but as she stared at him, her eyes heavy with desire and her mouth hovering above his cock, he couldn't remember what it was.

Instead of the tentative swipe of her tongue he'd expected, she engulfed the entire head in the searing heat of her mouth. Barely able to keep his balance as she took him deeper, he braced his hands on the fridge, straining to remain still. His muscles screamed as he fought not to thrust all the way down her throat.

Using her hands and mouth, she devoured him, drawing hard on his cock while she teasingly traced the veins and ridges with her fingertips. She ran her tongue over his balls,

tugging lightly as he fisted his hand in her hair. Had anything ever felt as good as her mouth? He couldn't remember a single thing that came close.

"Tori," he groaned.

Holding his gaze, she took him into her mouth again, and he watched as his cock disappeared and reappeared, glistening in the low light. Gently, she scraped his shaft with her nails. He sucked in a deep breath through clenched teeth and Tori laughed at his reaction. The sound prickled his awareness. When was the last time he'd heard her laugh? As the answer hit him, so did everything that was wrong with this situation. Fuck. He was taking advantage of her just as surely as he had the night of the funeral.

"Stop," he choked out as she took him deeper than he'd thought possible.

Frowning, she sat back on her heels and looked up at him. "Why?"

He pulled her to her feet. He couldn't think with his cock bobbing level with her sweetly swollen lips. "We need to talk."

Tori shook her head. "I'm pretty sure that's the last thing either of us needs right now." If they talked, he'd push her away, and she refused to give him that opportunity. She wasn't deluding herself that this was the beginning of a relationship. If anything, it was the beginning of the end. She was his job, and as soon as the job was done, he'd be done with her. But first, she wanted to know what it was like to have Michael inside her—and remember it this time.

Ignoring his concerned expression, she brought her hands to the waistband of her jeans.

"I think..."

His voice trailed off as she pushed the button through the hole and lowered the zipper. Shoving off her jeans, she let them drop to the floor with the rest of their clothes. His hand drifted to his cock, and he slowly stroked it, watching her through hooded eyes. Her pussy clenched at the expression of raw lust on his face. If her panties hadn't been wet before, that look would have done it.

She let her fingers skim over his to circle the head of his cock. "Can I finish, now?"

A guttural noise tore from his throat, and he stalked forward, backing her into the fridge. The cool enamel chilled her back, contrasting sharply with his fevered skin against her chest. He slid his hand inside her panties and palmed her ass before sliding further and slipping his fingers through her folds.

“Christ, you’ve soaked these,” he groaned, grazing her ear with his lips.

The sensation of his callused fingers stroking sensitized flesh had her squirming against him. “Please tell me you have a condom.”

He nodded, his movements jerky. “Wallet.”

Bending, she pulled his wallet from his discarded jeans and flipped through it until she found what she was looking for. She tore it open and sheathed him before he lifted her and pinned her back to the refrigerator.

“Underwear.”

Holding her motionless, he slid the crotch over, exposing her to his heated gaze. “So beautiful,” he whispered as he fitted his cock against her and paused.

“Please Michael. I need you inside me.”

As if her words knocked something loose, he shook his head. “This is a terrible idea.

Resting her forehead against his, she sighed. “I know.”

He pulled back, forcing her to meet his gaze. “One of us needs to be the voice of reason, and I can’t do it on my own.”

She smoothed his hair from his eyes and wished he’d never stop looking at her like he was right now.

“Tell me to stop,” he murmured brokenly.

No. Unease swirled through her middle. He couldn’t stop now. She needed him. This was about more than wanting something to remember. This was about wanting Michael. She knew without a doubt that once the threat to her was gone, he’d be out of her life so fast her head would spin. She wanted this time with him. It was all she’d get.

“I can’t,” she breathed.

Before he could formulate a response, she wrapped her legs around his waist and shifted, engulfing the head of his cock. Closing her eyes, she whispered, “More.”

The seemingly tenuous rein he’d had on his self-control vanished. Gripping her hips, he thrust completely into her willing body. His head fell back on a groan, exposing his corded neck to her lips and teeth. He stayed completely still—whether he was warring with himself about fucking her or simply giving her time to adjust to the invasion, she didn’t know. But there was no way she’d give him a chance to change his mind.

Using his shoulders for leverage, she slid herself up the length of his cock, before slamming herself down again.

He felt huge inside her. It might have been the angle, but after having her lips wrapped around that impossibly silky width, she was pretty sure it was just him. Under the guiding motion of his hands, she met him stroke for shuddering stroke.

Lowering his head, he drew hard on her nipples, sucking and biting while he pounded into her. Tingles of awareness raced over her skin as he continued to shaft her mercilessly. Her internal muscles rippled around him, pulling him deeper.

“You feel so good,” he breathed against her skin. “The way your pussy grips me,” he groaned. “So tight...I’m not gonna last.”

His harshly whispered words released a torrent of moisture as she shuddered around his cock.

“God, baby, you’re so wet.”

He reached between them and brushed his fingers across her swollen flesh, stroking the spot where they were joined. It felt so unbelievably good to have his hand on her as she rode his granite-hard shaft. He slid his finger into her underwear and circled her clit as he fucked her harder.

Her head lolled back and she slumped against the fridge as the coiling release tightened in her middle. His body strained. He pushed into her, his muscles taut and gleaming in the faint light shining through the window. Too dark to see the color of his eyes, she could still see the emotion—desperation and need—all aimed at her.

“I need to feel you come,” he rasped, pinching her clit between his thumb and forefinger.

The release that had been threatening washed over her, and she clenched around his cock. Closing her eyes, she sank her teeth into her lower lip as he powered through her spasming tissues while she trembled in his arms. Finally, he slammed home one last time, stiffening as he whispered her name over and over.

Collapsing against her, he rested his head against her shoulder and chuckled.

“What?” she demanded.

He lifted his head and grinned at her. “You weren’t kidding.”

“About what?”



He dropped a gentle kiss on her lips. “You don’t scream when you come,” he murmured against her mouth. “We’re gonna have to fix that next time.”

His grin broadened. It was the first real smile she’d seen from him since she’d shown up on his doorstep, and the sight of it kicked her in the chest. He was an even bigger threat than Lucky’s thugs.

Michael kissed her neck, nipping at the sensitive skin. A shiver wended through her, and she wrapped her arms more tightly around him.

“You know...it seems kind of silly to make up the guest room,” he murmured against her damp skin. “Since my bed’s more comfortable.”

Her stomach fluttered with renewed desire. How could she want him again? As he trailed kisses along her jaw line, she realized the more appropriate question was: how could she not?

“Take me to bed,” she whispered.

## *Chapter Three*

Tori woke with a start in the grayish-pink pre-dawn light. The warmth of a hard, muscled body pressed against her back, and a thick, equally hard cock nudged at her ass. Michael's arm was wrapped around her, his hand possessively cupping her breast.

She tried to shift, but she was stuck, her arm pulled at an odd angle. What the hell? She yanked her arm and heard the unmistakable clank of metal. The bastard had cuffed her to the bed! She slammed her elbow into his gut, smiling in grim satisfaction when she heard his muffled *oomph*.

"Wake up!" When he shifted, she rolled onto her back to glare at him and rattled the handcuffs again. "Seriously—what the fuck, Michael?"

He propped himself up on his elbow and blinked at her, a sleepy smile playing over his lips. With his fingertip, he traced a line over her collarbone and between her breasts. "Sorry baby, but I didn't trust you not to sneak off in the middle of the night, and I didn't trust myself to wake up if you did."

"Uncuff. Me. Now."

Instead of answering, he inched the sheet down, slowly baring her breasts.

"Michael," she warned.

"Fun hater."

He slid up her body, his heavy cock pressed against her side, and she tried not to squirm, betraying her need. She was pissed. The last thing she needed was to be distracted by her desire for him.

Michael released the cuff attached to the headboard and looped it around a spindle. Grabbing her other arm, he quickly attached the open cuff to her wrist.

Rage and something darker throbbed through her blood. "You're not funny," she snapped as she drew back her leg to kick him.

“Ah-ah-ah. Not nice, Tori.” He caught her leg, pinning it to the bed. His eyes shimmered with desire, becoming more green than hazel, and his lips curved in a wicked smile.

“Fuck you.”

Without warning, he straddled her body, effectively immobilizing her. “What’s that expression? Great minds think alike?”

Her stomach dropped like she was riding a roller coaster, and she shook her head.

“See, here’s the thing. I don’t really think you want me to let you go.”

He glanced at her nipples, which had knotted into nearly painful peaks. Licking his finger, he dragged the tip around her pebbled flesh, sending tremors of want through her body. She fought to remain impassive, glaring at him.

“Do you remember when I threatened to cuff you to my bed last night?”

When she refused to answer, he pinched both nipples, twisting and tugging on them.

“Yes,” she ground out.

“I saw that look in your eyes,” he continued. “The idea had you creaming your panties, didn’t it? I bet if I touched you right now, your cunt would be even wetter than it was last night.”

She wouldn’t admit it, but he was right. The idea of being at Michael’s mercy had excited her more than she ever would have thought possible. The reality was even more arousing.

Tori squeezed her legs together, but he just laughed and shifted down her body, forcing them apart. He parted her folds with a blunt finger, running it over her damp flesh. “Just like I thought.”

Lifting his finger to his mouth, he sucked her juices from the tip and her pussy clenched emptily at the sight.

“Need more,” he murmured. He settled between her legs, draping her thighs over his shoulders. Holding her gaze, he ran his thumbs along her cleft before spreading her lips.

She trembled under his intense scrutiny as he lowered his face and dragged his tongue through her folds. Her hips shot off the bed, but he splayed a hand over her stomach and pushed her down.

“Easy, baby,” he murmured against her flesh, the vibrations of his words setting off tiny tremors within her. “We’ve got a long way to go this morning.”

“What do you mean?” she panted.

He briefly circled her clit with his tongue. “I mean, last night was over too quickly. You’re going to come until you scream.”

“I told you, I don’t do that.”

“You will,” he promised darkly. He sucked her clit between his lips, flicking the tip of his tongue across it over and over.

She needed him to fuck her, now. Using, his back for leverage, she braced her feet against him and lifted her hips to his face. If her hands were free, she’d hold his head between her legs until he gave her the release she needed. As it was, he pushed her hips to the bed and held her there.

Raising his head, he gazed at her. “Is it so hard to just relax and accept pleasure?”

She turned her face away, unable to bear the questions in his gaze.

“Close your eyes,” he commanded. The dark edge was back in his voice and her stomach fluttered in anticipation. “Quit thinking and just feel.”

He nuzzled the insides of her thighs, his stubbled cheeks and chin abrading her tender flesh, but she didn’t care. It felt too good. Her eyes drifted shut as he circled her clit with his fingertip, before tracing a path down to her channel.

Michael slipped a finger inside her, shuddering at how tightly she clasped him. He couldn’t wait to bury his cock inside her again, but first he wanted to drive her as crazy as she’d driven him. The night before had been amazing, but he’d wanted to take his time with her. Instead, he’d nailed her in his kitchen, up against the fridge for fuck’s sake.

This time it would be different—he’d make sure of it.

Adding another finger to the one slowly pistoning in and out of her pussy, he watched her reaction, watched her fight against the restraints, writhing and pumping her hips, meeting every gentle thrusts. He didn’t think he could get any harder, but the sight of her chained to his bed was almost more than he could stand. The way her skin flushed pink as she strained toward release had him leaking pre-come onto the sheets.

He licked and suckled at her slick flesh, loving the sweet taste of her juices. “I could do this all day long,” he murmured against her.

“Just uncuff me,” she groaned as her hands tightened into fists. Trembling under the onslaught of his mouth and fingers, she squirmed against him.

“Later.”

Wetting a finger with her cream, he stroked lower, coating the puckered ring of muscles with her essence.

“Michael!”

He grinned at the screech in her voice. “I’m right here.”

“I can *feel* where you are. What the hell do you think you’re doing?”

“Trust me.”

“Right. I—”

Gathering more lubrication, he gently, but firmly pressed inside her, and her word ended on a shriek that quickly morphed into a needy moan as he pushed forward through the untried tissues.

“Oh...God...” Her words were a harsh whisper that stroked his cock almost as effectively as her hand.

Thrusting in and out of her writhing body, he lowered his face and dragged his tongue through her folds. He lapped greedily at her sensitized skin, wanting to make her come harder than she ever had before. Wanting to make her come so hard she cried out. He glanced up the length of her taut, struggling body. Her lips were pressed together and her eyes were squeezed shut.

Shoving harder, he continued to fill her snug passages with his plunging fingers as her body began to shake. She was so close. He caught her clit between his teeth and flicked his tongue across it, pushing her over the edge. Her body stiffened and her internal muscles pulsed around him as her juices poured over his tongue. He sucked at her swollen nub, pushing her further while she continued to climax. Her release tore a strangled cry from her lips. It was the most beautiful thing he’d ever heard.

Michael kissed the insides of her silky thighs and smoothed his hand over her belly as her breathing eventually slowed. He couldn’t stay still for long. Prowling up the length of her body, he straddled her, waiting for her to open her beautiful blue eyes.

“You screamed.” He couldn’t keep the grin off his face.

Her brow furrowed as she scowled at him. “I did not.”

“You screamed,” he reiterated. “My name.”

“Whatev—”

He cut off the rest of her sentence with a kiss, letting her taste herself on his lips. When he lifted his head, she was breathless and her nipples were knotted against his chest.

“You’d damn well better have a condom,” she panted.

He reached into the nightstand drawer and sighed in relief as he felt the edge of a foil packet. Tearing it open, he sheathed himself and settled between Tori’s legs. His cock had pulled up tight to his stomach, and all he wanted to do was ram himself home.

Bracing her feet on the mattress, she canted her hips toward him. “Fuck me,” she whispered.

His eyes closed at the sound of her need. Who was he to deny her? Nudging her opening with the head of his cock, he drove into her. His breath hissed through his clenched teeth at the snug fit of her tight channel. God, she felt good around him.

Propped on his elbows, he leaned down, sucking on her nipples as he slammed into her, shafting her harder with every stroke. Apparently, she’d figured out how much he liked to hear her voice. She murmured in his ear, telling him she wanted him deeper and harder. Begging him to fuck her faster.

His balls pulled up tight at the husky sound of need in her voice. A tingling started at the base of his spine, and he knew he wouldn’t last much longer. He captured Tori’s mouth and trailed his fingers over her chained arms, loving the way she kissed him back, straining against him. Tracing the metal around her wrists, he brushed his fingers over her palms before lacing their fingers together.

Lifting his mouth from hers, he stared into her face while she clutched his hands. Eyes dilated, she held his gaze until she spasmed, clamping down on his cock so hard he could barely move. He thrust one last time. The tingle at the base of his spine wrapped around his groin and exploded through his cock as his release shot through him.

As if from a huge distance, he heard music playing. Tori shifted beneath him, her skin slick against his. “Crap, that’s my phone,” she mumbled. “Can you grab it for me?”

Reluctantly, he left the warmth of her body and retrieved the phone from the counter where he’d left it when he’d taken it away from her last night. Grabbing it, he flipped it open and headed back to the bedroom. “Tori Spinelli’s phone.”

After a long pause, a woman on the other end asked for Tori. Sitting next to her on the bed, he held the phone to her ear while she glared at him and gestured toward her cuffed hands with her head.

Michael freed one of her wrists, and she grabbed the phone and switched ears. “Hey Luce, what’s up?”

“Dr Blahnik’s wife went into early labor last night and the ER is short staffed. They want to know if you can cover for him.”

“Then why didn’t scheduling call me?”

Lucy paused and cleared her throat. “Because after last night, they wanted me to assess you—see how you’re doing, and if you’re up to coming in today.”

“I’m fine. I can be there in an hour or so.”

“You haven’t even been away from this place for a whole shift,” her friend protested. “At least tell me you got laid.”

“I’ll be there in an hour,” she said.

“Oh, come on! Who is he?”

“Bye Luce.”

Tori shut the phone and waited for Michael to open the other cuff.

He nuzzled her neck. “I’d rather keep you chained to my bed.”

She closed her eyes. The real world was calling, and it required her to be showered, dressed, and not imagining herself in love with someone who saw her as nothing more than a job. He lied for a living, and nothing that had transpired last night was going to change that. They’d both been frustrated, angry and had needed to blow off steam. Things needed to go back to normal now, and the sooner she convinced herself of that, the better.

\* \* \* \*

Tori finished dressing and stepped out of the bathroom. Michael stood in the hallway and put his finger to his lips, his expression fierce. Nodding her understanding, she stood, silently waiting for him to finish his phone call.

“Sure,” he said. “Four o’clock. I’ll be there.”

His expression changed as he paced away from her.

“She’s not my girlfriend,” he laughed coldly. “More like a piece of ass. An exceptionally fine piece of ass, but a piece of ass all the same.”

A cold band tightened around her heart, and it hurt to breathe, but she ignored the desolate feeling. She knew he didn’t mean anything by it. He was just doing his job. Besides, it wasn’t like they had a relationship. What they’d shared the night before was no more real than the things he said to whomever he was talking to.

“I don’t want to include her in my business dealings. Besides, she’s already at work.”

Michael reached the end of the hall and turned around, shoving his hand through his hair, frustration evident on his face, but his voice was still pleasant. “Okay. See you then.”

After he disconnected, he shoved the phone in his pocket and rubbed his hand over his face before finally meeting her gaze. “You know I didn’t mean that, right?”

“Yeah, I know. You’re just doing your job.” It hurt to admit, but hopefully the more she repeated it to herself the easier it would be to believe.

He tried to pull her into his arms, but she sidestepped him and forced a smile. “I should really get to work. I can call a cab if you need to be somewhere.”

He studied her intensely, his eyes more gold than hazel in this light. “I’ll drop you off. Until this is over, we’ve got appearances to keep up.”

“Right.” She grabbed her backpack, but he took it from her and put it in his room.

“There’s no way this’ll be over tonight. You might as well plan on staying here indefinitely.”

She nodded. Why didn’t she just cut out her own heart while she was at it, too?

When Michael pulled up in front of the emergency room a little while later, she scrambled off the motorcycle, quickly unbuckled her helmet and secured it to the back of the bike.

“Call me when your shift ends, and I’ll come pick you up,” he said, catching her hand and tugging her back to him when she would have turned away. He quirked a crooked smile at her. “No goodbye kiss?”

She forced another smile. “Right...appearances.” He opened his mouth to respond, but she cupped his face and gave him a quick kiss. Before she could back away, he snaked an arm around her waist and pulled her close. Her breath caught in her throat as he stared at her, eyes



filled with emotion she couldn't identify. She could ask him, she supposed, but it wasn't like she'd actually get the truth out of him.

"Kiss me again," he murmured. "A real kiss this time."

Threading her fingers through his hair, she leaned down and brushed her lips across his, opening as he deepened the kiss. He swept into her mouth, groaning as she melted against him.

Finally, she drew back. "I'll see you later," she said, not quite meeting his gaze. It was going to be a long damn day.

Several hours later, she sat at the break table nursing a screaming headache and a mountain of paperwork. Sighing, she opened another chart, and a steaming latte accompanied by a cheese Danish materialized in front of her.

"These fat-filled treats can be yours, if you answer the following questions correctly," Lucy said.

Tori propped her chin up on her hand and looked at her friend.

"Well?" Lucy snapped, clearly exasperated.

"Well, what?"

"Don't give me that crap, Tori. Who's the guy?"

She sighed. "His name is Michael."

"And?"

"And what?" Yeah, Lucy was her best friend, but how in the hell was she supposed to explain the nightmare that had become her life?

Lucy picked up the pastry and took a bite.

"Hey," Tori said. "I thought that was for me."

Lucy grinned, unrepentant. "You're not answering my questions satisfactorily. I had to resort to harsher methods of interrogation."

"Privacy-Nazi," Tori muttered, trying to decide exactly what to tell Lucy without revealing Michael's secret. Even the tiniest slip in front of the wrong person could be deadly. "It's complicated," she started, trying to ignore the arousal that raced through her body at the memory of Michael cuffing her to the bed and fucking her mercilessly.

"It doesn't seem all that complicated. Judging from the fact that he answered your phone at the butt-crack of dawn and the make out session in the ambulance bay, it seems like sex, sex, and more sex."

A new nurse looked sidelong at them as she poured a cup of coffee.

“This is how rumors get started,” Tori whispered.

Lucy shrugged, apparently unconcerned.

Tori waited until the nurse left the room and looked at her friend. “Don’t freak out on me, but for the time being, you can only reach me by cell phone.”

“Did you move in with him?” Lucy all but shouted.

“Lower your voice,” Tori hissed, taking the Danish from Lucy’s hand. “I’m staying with him for a while,” she clarified between mouthfuls.

Lucy’s mouth dropped open and she stayed quiet for what must have been a record, twenty seconds, before she finally managed to make her vocal cords cooperate.

“You’re insane. That’s a clinical assessment, by the way. How long have you known this guy?”

“About seven years, but I haven’t seen him in...awhile.”

Lucy frowned slightly and Tori saw the exact moment the light dawned.

She leaned forward. “Is this *the* Michael? The one who—”

Tori nodded.

“You should know, if he hurts you again, I’ll kill him myself.”

“Can’t get hurt if my heart’s not involved,” she said taking a sip of the latte, knowing full well it was too late for that. Her heart was painfully involved, but she wasn’t going to admit that to Lucy. Hell, she could barely admit it to herself.

“Did you just hear yourself? You...Tori Spinelli...talking about having an emotionless fling.”

The incredulous look on Lucy’s face might have been funny if Tori hadn’t had the sinking feeling she was right.

“Dr. Spinelli?”

Tori glanced toward the door where one of the day nurses had peered in.

“Yes?”

“You have a couple of visitors in the waiting room. They said it was personal.”

She sighed, hoping it wasn’t the parents of the dead kid from last night. “Duty calls.” Taking another bite of the pastry, she handed the rest to Lucy and grabbed the latte on the way out. She smiled at the other woman. “Thanks for worrying about me, Luce, but I’ll be okay.”

“I’m serious,” Lucy called after her. “If he hurts you, I’ll kill him. With a shovel.”

Tori smiled. “Love you, too.”

Her smile faded as soon as she saw her visitors. The two guys that had been brokering the drug deal the night before with Michael were standing in the waiting room. Waiting for her. Her steps faltered as she dodged an orderly carrying a stack of files. She considered turning around and pretending that she hadn’t seen them, but she refused to do anything that might endanger Michael.

Forcing a calm she didn’t feel, she approached the two men. “What can I help you with?”

“Our boss would like to meet with you,” the skinny one muttered.

The blood drained from her face, but she nodded. “He can come in at any time. I’ll be on until at least nine o’clock tonight.”

“He’d like to talk to you now,” the other one said.

Playing dumb, she looked around the room. “Is he here?” she asked. “I can get him set up with triage, and—”

One of the men grabbed her elbow and squeezed painfully. “You need to come with us.”

“I’m in the middle of a shift. I can’t just walk out.”

The man holding her increased the pressure on her arm, and nodded toward his friend. “Yeah, you can—unless you want Jimmy there to shoot that pretty little girl in the head.”

Tori’s stomach twisted as she turned her attention to the other man. He stood behind a row of molded plastic chairs where a young mother sat with a clearly feverish child, holding a gun under his jacket. It was pointed at the back of the little girl’s head.

Tori tried to swallow past the sudden lump in her throat. She’d taken an oath to save lives, but she never thought she’d be trading hers in the process. But it wasn’t like she had a choice. She couldn’t let these guys hurt innocent people when she could prevent it.

“Okay,” she choked out. “I’ll go.” She turned toward the exit. Maybe she could make a break for it in the parking lot.

“Just so you know. Jimmy’s gonna wait in here until we’re safely in the car. If you run, call out or try to get anyone’s attention in any way, he’ll shoot her.”

Tori’s heart pounded wildly and for a moment, she couldn’t quite catch her breath.

“Nod, if you understand me.”

Her head bobbed woodenly on her neck.

“Good. Now walk to the exit. Calmly.”

She spared a glance for the mother and her daughter, then turned toward the wide sliding glass doors at the far end of the waiting room. The man kept his bruising grip on her arm as she walked into the too bright sunlight, leaving the safety of the hospital behind.

The man led her to a white SUV that pulled up just outside the drop off zone, and shoved her into the backseat, climbing in after her. Pulling a gun from the waistband of his jeans, he held it on her while he punched in a number.

“We’re clear.”

In under a minute, Jimmy climbed in on the other side of her and the driver pulled away from the curb for what might very well be the last car ride of her life.

\* \* \* \*

With knots in his gut, Michael drove to the meeting place. If he could get what he needed on Lucky today, this whole thing could be over. Years of trying to get enough evidence to put the dealer away were coming together. He might never see jail time for Alex’s murder, but he’d racked up plenty of other crimes he needed to atone for.

Michael’s hands tightened on the handlebar grips as he realized this could be the beginning of the end with Tori, too. He didn’t want it to be over with her. He didn’t want her in danger from Lucky or his crew, but he wasn’t ready to let her walk out of his life again, either.

He’d come to that conclusion while he’d sat in the coffee shop across the street from the emergency room entrance. Worried that Lucky’s guys might be waiting to try something if she left the hospital for lunch, he’d kept watch. He hadn’t left his post until Niko came to relieve him.

His phone vibrated against his hip. Pulling over on a side street, he checked the caller ID. Niko. Tearing off his helmet, he answered the call.

“Mike, they’ve got her.”

Fear clawed at his throat. “What happened?”

“A white SUV pulled up and Trevor exited the building with her. Jimmy followed shortly and the driver took off immediately. They must have entered through the front—I never saw them go in. I called in the plate, and I’m following. Heading south on Division.”

Terror like he’d never known shot through him. “I’ll meet you.”

“Mike, stop and think.”

Right, like that was fucking going to happen when Tori's life was at risk.

"Listen. They're probably bringing her to Lucky. I'll let you know if they head anywhere other than the meeting place. In the meanwhile, I'm calling for backup. With any luck, we'll take them all at once."

Michael closed his eyes and tried to focus. If they sent a unit after Jimmy and Trevor now, they could panic and shoot her. After all, their motto was 'a corpse is better than a witness.'

"Meet with Lucky as planned," Niko continued. "If you don't, they'll know something's up."

His partner didn't have to finish the thought. Michael knew what was at stake.

"You're right," he sighed. "Just keep her in your sights. I can't...lose her."

"We'll get her back," Niko promised, his tone grim. "I'll see you soon."

"I'll be there."

Disconnecting, Michael raced to the address he'd be given and prayed for the first time since Alex laid dying in his arms.

He reached his destination in time to see a white SUV pull into a closed body shop. Looking around, he saw Niko parked down the street. Not much in the way of backup but it would have to do. He wasn't leaving Tori alone with them for another minute.

## *Chapter Four*

Jimmy dragged Tori from the vehicle and pushed her into the surprisingly large office area of what looked like a body shop. A short middle aged man in an expensive suit rose from behind an expansive desk that seemed at odds with the surroundings. He looked like a real estate agent. This was Lucky? This was the man responsible for killing her brother?

“Dr. Spinelli, I’m glad you could make it.”

“I wasn’t aware my visit was optional.”

He frowned.

*Don’t piss off the drug lord*, she admonished herself.

“I’m sorry if my associates were...overzealous. They simply knew how anxious I was to make your acquaintance and extend my business proposition.”

She glanced at the men in question. Jimmy and the other guy flanked the outside of the door while the driver blocked the doorway.

“I understand. I have to admit though, you’re not what I expected.” Maybe if she could get him talking, she could figure a way out of this.

Lucky laughed. “No, I suppose I don’t fit the stereotype, do I? I got my start in real estate, but the market’s a wreck, and I do need to make a living.” He glanced at a monitor bolted to the ceiling in the corner of the room. “Perfect timing. Your boyfriend just arrived.”

Fear and elation crashed through her body like a wave. Hope that she might make it through this alive, and terror that Michael wouldn’t, swamped her.

The driver of the SUV left the office and went into the main area of the shop. Shoving her fisted hands into the pockets of her lab coat, she prayed that the other man wouldn’t hurt Michael.

Lucky laid a gun in the middle of the pristine blotter on his desk. “Dr. Spinelli, why don’t you take this seat over here.” He indicated a chair next to him.

When she hesitated, he glanced at the weapon. Ice washed through her veins. Circling the massive piece of furniture, she sat as Michael walked through the doorway. The driver patted him down and took his gun.

“You can have that back later,” Lucky said.

Michael nodded. His eyes barely flickered over her. Instead, his focus was on the well dressed man next to her.

“Mike, so good to finally meet you. Take a seat,” he said, gesturing to a chair in front of the desk. “I’ve just been getting to know your girlfriend.”

Michael sat back in the chair and smiled. “Hey baby.”

She blinked and forced out a choked greeting. He really was good at his job, because if he cared at all, he sure as hell wasn’t showing it.

“So, here are my thoughts,” Lucky began. “I want to expand distribution into Riverside, and I need someone with more people skills than Trevor and Jimmy. From what I’ve seen out of you, Mike, I think I’d like to have you give it a try. It would mean a bigger cut, of course.”

Michael leaned forward slightly, appearing interested. “I’d still want to keep control of my client base here.”

“Absolutely,” the other man agreed.

“What about Tori?” Michael asked.

“I’ve got a job opportunity for her, too.” He turned to her and patted her arm. “It seems I’m in need of a staff physician. Occasionally, my staff members receive on the job injuries that would raise red flags at the hospital.”

Tori nodded. “Gunshot wounds and knifings do tend to bring out the police.”

“Exactly, my dear. I knew you’d understand. And you do have the ability to write prescriptions, yes?”

“Yes.”

“Excellent.” He smiled like a benevolent father. “I want only the best for my people. Now, what’s your current salary? I want you to feel this career change is worth your while.”

Before she could answer, Jimmy dropped to one knee outside the door and fired his gun. Trevor quickly followed suit.

Michael vaulted the desk and grabbed Lucky's gun at the same time he lunged for it. Michael was faster. He pressed the barrel to the other man's temple. "Give me a goddamn reason."

Lucky sat stiffly in his chair, his hands at his side.

"Get behind the filing cabinet," Michael barked at her. "And stay down."

Glass shattered and wood splintered as the gunfire in the shop grew more intense. From under the desk, she saw Jimmy crawl through the doorway. Covered in blood, he aimed his gun at Michael. At the same time, Lucky reached toward his ankle.

Panic flooded her system. "Ankle holster," she yelled.

Michael pressed the gun more firmly against Lucky's head. "Hands on the desk," he snapped.

Without waiting to see if the criminal complied, she yanked the small pistol from the ankle holster and stood, aiming it at the bleeding man. "Do it and I'll kill you myself," she snarled.

Michael watched in furious awe as Tori held Jimmy at bay. "Toss me your gun," she demanded.

Jimmy shoved the gun across the floor toward her, and she kicked it further away.

"Lace your hands behind your neck and leave them that way," Michael ordered.

The injured man did as he was told, wincing as he lifted his arms.

"If you're lucky, maybe I'll be the one who patches you up," Tori said sweetly.

The firefight stopped as quickly as it started, and the only sounds remaining were the moans and heavy breathing of the injured.

The Special Response Team inundated the room, led by Niko, who was bleeding from a shoulder wound. Tori put her gun on the desk and laced her hands behind her neck.

Niko tossed Michael a pair of handcuffs and crossed the room to Tori. "It's okay, Dr. Spinelli. You're clear."

She lowered her hands and began inspecting his wound.

Niko grimaced. "It's okay, doc. It's a through and through."

"I'm going to assess the rest of the injured. I trust you have ambulances on their way?"

Niko nodded. "Yes, ma'am."



Michael watched as she dropped to her knees and checked the extent of Jimmy's injuries. She was amazing. When he'd seen her sitting next to Lucky, he'd nearly died. But she'd more than held her own. He couldn't wait for this day to be over. He needed to hold her. No...he needed more than that. And so did she. She needed to know how he really felt. Unfortunately, some things needed to be taken care of first.

Shoving Lucky against the wall, he cuffed him and patted him down. He handed Niko the other man's gun on his way through and nodded toward his shoulder. "Get that looked at."

"I will. Just as soon as the job's over."

Michael frowned at him as he handed Lucky over to the SRT captain. "The job's over, now." He squatted down by Tori, and brushed a stray curl from her eye. His heart clenched at her guarded expression and the exhaustion etched on her face. "You okay?" he asked.

She nodded. "Job's over. I'm great."

Oh fuck. He knew exactly what she was thinking. How many times had he said she was a job to him? Frustration and worry collided in his chest. "Tori, wait, that's not—"

"Where's the doc?" someone hollered. "We're losing this one."

A mask of professional distance slid over her face and he felt her slipping away. Ice smothered the heat between them.

"Your job's done," she said. "Mine isn't."

Tori did chest compressions, trying to restart Trevor's heart while her own was breaking. She got a rhythm back as the paramedics arrived and turned over the patient to them so she could check the rest of the injured. There weren't many. The man who'd driven her to the meet with Lucky was dead and Niko was the only cop wounded.

"Look," she said to him. "I left the hospital short staffed—"

"You were kidnapped!"

"Yeah, well...bad day all around," she muttered, glancing at where Michael stood staring at her and barely paying attention to the uniformed cop talking to him. "Anyway, I'll make you a deal. You ride with me to the hospital, and I'll patch you up and give you my statement there."

Niko's brow furrowed. "Wouldn't you rather do that...downtown?"

"Nope."

\* \* \* \*

“Go. Home.”

Tori looked at Lucy, who glared at her, hands on her hips.

“I could say the same thing to you, who’s working a double.”

“I wasn’t freaking kidnapped a few hours ago!”

Tori sighed and rubbed her hand over her face. “I promise, I’ll fall apart later. But I’d rather do it when I’m calm enough to actually sleep after the sobbing.”

Concern filled her friend’s eyes. “I can give you a sedative,” she offered.

“No. That’s the last thing I need.”

Lucy hugged her tightly. “A little while longer, then you let me, or someone…” she jerked her head toward the triage desk, “take you home. Okay?”

Tori followed her gaze. Michael watched her intently. Her belly fluttered in nervous excitement, but she pushed away the cruel reminder of what they’d shared.

She turned back to Lucy. “I’ll let you know when I’m ready to go.”

He moved to stand behind her as Lucy walked away. “Tori, we need to talk.”

“Can’t. Working.”

He grabbed her arm, but she shook him off and headed into an occupied exam room. Every time she looked, he was in the waiting room…waiting.

For hours, she ignored him until finally he gave up and left.

Tears welled behind her eyelids, but she blinked them back. She’d finally gotten what she’d wanted, and now she was crying? She was an idiot. Maybe everything was finally hitting her. It was time to call Lucy and get out of here for a while. She tracked down the shift lead and got her attention.

“I’m going to take off now.”

The woman shook her head. “I’ve got a GSW coming in, and I need you to take the chest pains in exam four. You can take off after that.”

“Okay, got it.” Grabbing the chart from the door, she entered the room. She stopped dead. Michael sat on the examining table, filling the room with his presence. Her breath caught at the sight of him.

He gripped the edge of the gurney, the pressure whitening his knuckles. His hair hung loose around his face, and she had to shove her hand in her lab coat pocket to keep from running

her fingers through it. Shadowed with exhaustion, his brilliant hazel eyes drew her forward, but she stopped halfway across the room.

“I don’t have time for this,” she bit out. “I’m working.”

A sudden movement in the corner caught her eye, and she turned to see Niko. She hadn’t noticed him earlier. She’d been too intent on memorizing Michael’s face. A face she’d planned to never see again.

“He started having chest pains after he left here,” Niko said. “So I brought him back.”

She trembled at the thought of Michael in danger and the chart fell from her numb fingers. “I can’t do this. Let me call someone else.”

Niko shook his head. “He’s already been waiting forever.”

The insinuation was clear—Michael could end up in worse shape if she didn’t get over herself and do her damn job. Ironical that it would come back to that.

Forcing her feet to move forward, she snatched the chart from the floor and set it on the bed next to him before adjusting her stethoscope.

“Take off your shirt, please,” she said digging deep for her sense of professionalism.

Holding her gaze, Michael pulled off his T-shirt, revealing his beautifully sculpted chest and shoulders.

She stepped closer, laid the diaphragm on his chest and listened to his rapidly pounding heartbeat. It was impossible not to breathe in the intoxicating scent of his skin, but somehow she managed to keep herself from stroking him. Pushing away the memory of him pinning her to the bed, she listened more closely. His breathing seemed labored.

“I need to get your blood pressure.” Shoving her emotions aside, she wrapped the cuff around his arm and took the reading. After she recorded it, she reached for his wrist. Her own heart raced wildly as she took his pulse, her fingers clammy against his warm skin.

“It’s in the normal range,” she said.

Calling for a nurse, she ordered an EKG and a full battery of blood tests. She turned back to Michael and prepared to take his history. Her eyes traveled across his body before finding their way to his face. She looked away from the sorrow lurking there.

“How long have you been having these pains?”

“Since this afternoon, right after we took down Lucky.”

Her head snapped up. “And you’re just asking to be seen now? What kind of moron are you?”

“Nice bedside manner you’ve got there, Dr. Spinelli.” A seductive smile curved his lips, amplifying her indignation.

“Don’t you realize how serious this might be?” she snapped. “How severe is the pain?”

His smile faded and he held her captive with his gaze. “It feels like my heart is splitting in half.”

Her pen tapped against the paper as cold dread gripped her. Possibilities marched through her head—blood clot, aneurysm, angina pectoris, coronary occlusion, thrombosis, myocardial ischemia or infarction. The inventory continued and her fear grew. Relying on her training, she went through a mental checklist.

“Are you experiencing any pain in your arms?”

“They’re kind of achy.”

“How do you feel right now?”

“Like my heart might explode.”

Worry quickened her movements as she put her stethoscope on again. Stepping between his legs, she listened to his heartbeat. Niko slipped from the room, saying that he had to make a call, but Tori barely noticed him. Without warning, Michael locked his legs around hers, drawing her closer.

“What the hell are you doing?”

His arms tightened around her, drawing her against his chest. “I’m so sorry, baby.”

“Apologize later when I’m sure you’re not dying,” she snapped as she tried to extricate herself from his embrace, but he refused to let her go. “Michael, please. This is serious. We have to figure out what’s wrong with you.”

“My arms ached because I needed to hold you,” he began. “And my chest hurt because my heart was breaking without you.”

Understanding pelted Tori like cold rain. She stiffened. “You’re not sick?” she ground out, her hands fisting against him.

“You want me to be?” His eyes twinkled with suppressed amusement.

She shoved at his chest, angry at his manipulation and deception. He caught both of her hands in his, bringing them briefly to his lips.

“Look, I know you’re pissed but what chance did you give me? This is the only way I could think of to keep you from turning your back on me.”

She stared at him. Beneath her anger was relief so sharp, she nearly cried from it.

“I can’t believe you lied to me.” She tried to tug her hands free, but he held onto her like a drowning man.

“It wasn’t a complete lie. Living without you will kill me,” he whispered, his voice thick with emotion. “Come home with me. Please.”

The simple plea extinguished her anger, and she closed her eyes against the sudden flood of tears.

He cupped her cheek. “Look at me, Tori.”

Taking a breath, she opened her eyes, heedless of the tears that lingered.

“Back at Lucky’s, when I told Niko the job was over, I wasn’t talking about you.” He swallowed thickly. “You could never be a job.”

She opened her mouth to speak, but he laid his fingers across her lips. “I’ve been thinking about the morning after Alex’s funeral.”

She stiffened in his arms, not sure she wanted to go there tonight. “Michael...”

He rested his forehead against hers. “The one thing I remember clearly about that morning was waking up with the feeling that I was where I was supposed to be—with you. I laid there thinking about losing Alex, and how I wouldn’t survive losing you, too. So I panicked and ran.”

Lifting his head, he stared into her eyes. “I’m not running anymore. Please give me another chance.”

Hope flickered in his eyes as he watched her. The same hope wavered in her heart.

“I love you,” he breathed. “And I think you love me, too.”

Her heart lurched at the tenderness emanating from his eyes.

“I do.”

Happiness and a sense of peace she’d never thought she’d feel again enveloped her, and she melted into him. He let out a long, slow breath as he pulled her closer, and she realized how much his admission had cost him. His heartbeat pounded against her own, and she wanted nothing more than to feel it without the burden of clothes between them.

Lifting her head, she met him halfway as he took her mouth, sending waves of need washing over her. She cupped his face with her hands, delving into his mouth, savoring his desperate groan of surrender.

Breaking the kiss, he raised his head, his eyes dark with arousal. “Tell me you’re coming home with me. If not, you should know I’m ready to take you right here. And I’ve got the cuffs with me.”

She laughed. “I’m coming already.”

A wicked grin curved his lips. “Soon. And often,” he promised, his voice husky with desire. “In fact, you should plan on screaming my name. A lot.”

Lost between arousal and laughter, she kissed him again, willing to believe in the truth of their future together. “Bring. It. On.”

## ***About the Author***

Bronwyn Green lives in Michigan with her wonderful husband, two amazing sons and four somewhat-psychotic cats. When not tormenting her characters, she can usually be found helping with reading and writing projects in her sons' classrooms as well as providing child care and tutoring for several daycare children. Besides writing, she also enjoys reading, knitting, sewing, cross stitching, pottery, drawing—basically anything that helps her avoid cleaning and cooking.

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## *Handcuffs and Lace*

### **Resplendence Publishing's Erotic Romance Line of Law Enforcement Themed Stories**

#### ***Ticket Me More* by Tia Fanning**

Hailed by the bridal flower world as an artistic genius, Meli works long nights making bouquets for women lucky enough to find love, while she herself lives a life of solitude. She yearns to share her heart and body with someone other than Bob, her *Battery Operated Boyfriend*, but acute shyness keeps her from engaging the “living” world.

However, Meli's quiet and predictable existence takes an unexpected turn when she is pulled over and ticketed by the most gorgeous cop she has ever encountered—Officer Michael Johnson. Though he doesn't seem to notice her as anything more than a traffic violation, Meli makes plans to overcome her timid nature and seize the police officer's attention...using any speed necessary.

#### ***Cuff Me Lacy* by Demi Alex**

Three months is way too long to wait for some simple, low-down, straight forward sex. It's not like Officer Chrissie Hansen is asking for prince charming to offer her the love of a lifetime. All she wants is a good orgasm that she doesn't have to work for alone.

At least with “The Bull” she knows what to expect. But when Patrick MacClick returns to her life and tempts her with new options, she discovers that lace can imprison a heart better than handcuffs can.

#### ***Search Me Baby, One More Time* by Melinda Barron**

Wren Thornberry's life isn't going according to plan. She let her father talk her out of marrying Bryan Stockard, the man she loves, and moved halfway around the world. Now she's back home in Texas, babysitting her grandmother while grandma and her boy-toy work through their list of sexual exploits, making themselves the talk of the town.

But what Wren doesn't know is that things in her hometown are about to heat up even more, and it will have nothing to do with her grandmother. It seems that Bryan Stockard is still around, he wants to get back into Wren's life—by any means necessary, and now he has just the tools to do it: A police uniform, handcuffs, and the authority to make Wren *assume the position*.

### ***What the Cuff?* By Celia Kyle**

God really should have reconsidered making werewolves. That, or Lyssa needed to get better taste in men and stay away from those with wandering eyes—and other things. Drunk as a wolf, she stumbles to her best friend's house to sleep off her whiskey induced haze and wakes to...*cuffs*?

Caleb sees his chance and takes it. His buddies on the force ribbed him but good for buying silver plated cuffs. But with a werewolf in his bed, the woman he's yearned for since they were teens, he wasn't taking any chances. Lyssa was his. She just didn't know it yet.

### ***Going Commando* by Catherine Chernow**

Bounty hunter Shyra Lawrence listens to her favorite radio station one morning where the DJ's are discussing "going commando" —*a.k.a* wearing no undies. Captivated by their conversation, she decides to shed her panties in favor of the freedom that wearing no underwear brings.

Enthusiastic, Shyra sends an email to her best friend, Donna, detailing the delights of panty-freedom, but unbeknownst to Shyra, she's hit the send key...to the wrong email addy!

When Derek Grayson opens his emails that morning, he discovers that his #1 employee and top bounty hunter has sent him an erotic, enticing message about going commando. Derek has always been polite, professional, and so damned attracted to Shyra that it's almost painful. Working day in and day out with voluptuous woman has sent Derek's hormones into overdrive on more than one occasion.

Now, Shyra's shed her panties and Derek's got all he can do to contain his lust when she announces that she's... GOING COMMANDO.

***Are you hot for teacher?***  
**The decadent new *Hot for Teacher* Series is at Resplendence Publishing**

***Two Plus One* by Brynn Paulin**

College math teacher, Briony Swift, lives life on the straight and narrow. After all, one plus one always equals two. But when two of her adult male students visit her office one afternoon, she soon discovers that one plus two might be a new and better equation to explore...

***Body of Art* by Bronwyn Green**

Art professor Seth Granger has two problems—an absentee life drawing models and a case of unrequited lust. Luckily his troubles have the same answer—his colleague, Dr. Callie Sullivan.

The trick will be getting her out of her clothes and into his studio...and hopefully into his bed. However, she's intent on keeping her mind on her art and ignoring him. Now he just needs to convince her she should be his body of art.

***Sense and Sensuality* by Cara Hart**

Eleanor McLaren leads a subdued life. She hates parties, avoids social interactions, and she cannot talk to men. But within the shell of her timidity lies the heart of a siren. Afraid of her own boldness, she hides her desires. Especially from the man who stars in her dreams of passionate encounters and works in her department.

Eddie Harrington has never lacked for partners in his pleasure games. But for some reason, Eleanor is the one woman he can't get out of his head. She is definitely not the type he usually pursues. Then he sees her at a bar, looking like his wildest fantasy. And one night with her is not going to be enough. The man who never commits just might have met his match-until a mistake from his past forces her to choose between trusting him or walking away.

***Sex Ed* by Mia Watts**

Mina Lasky has a pesky crush on Biology professor, Derek Link. They've worked in tandem in the same University facility long enough that even the sound of his voice makes her hot. It's time to put the fantasy to an end. Mina signs up to be his guinea pig in a female sexuality lab for those

on the doctorate track. She hopes to work Derek out of her system while enjoying some much needed sexual stimulation.

Dr. Derek Link has been itching to get his hands on the quiet, sexy Chemistry professor. He can't believe his luck when she signs up to be his lab. But one night isn't enough and Mina won't admit they can have something a lot more long term.

And when one of the students recognizes Mina, her heart isn't the only thing on the line. With her career in the hands of a blackmailer, and her heart begging to trust Derek, she's beginning to think the lab was a very bad idea.

## ***Also Available from Resplendence Publishing***

### ***Taken With the Enemy* by Tia Fanning**

My captor tells me that I'm not a prisoner of war, but how else can I see myself? I was abducted and brought to an unknown location in the middle of the desert. I'm sequestered behind a locked door and bars cover my windows. I even have an armed guard who takes me for walks.

But he, the nameless captor responsible for my care, claims otherwise. He tells me that he's not my enemy, that if he was, I'd already be dead. He promises to release me when the time is right. He says I'm safer now—with him—than I was before.

Despite his reassurances, I do not feel safe. Though he has treated me kindly, given me every comfort a prisoner could ever want or need, I have to find a way to leave—and soon. I don't understand how it's possible, but my captor knows me. He knows my past, he knows my secrets, knows just what to say to move me... and what to say to break me.

I have been taken by the enemy... and I must find a way to escape before I'm *taken with* him.

### ***Sinful Temptations* by Cassidy McKay**

Jennifer Amante calls a phone sex line on a dare from her childhood friend, and encounters "Naughty Nick", the self-made man who runs Sinful Temptations. Tempted out of her normal repressive shell, Jenn lets loose, safe in the knowledge she'll never encounter Naughty Nick. Yet, when the handsome, successful Nicholas Germaine walks into her office wanting to buy a house, she redirects her fantasies on the phone to include the man she lusts after but denies herself in person.

Nick is determined to have Jennifer as his own—no matter her silly rule to never date clients. Now he just has to find a way to reveal who he really is and what he does, without scaring her. As passion tempts them both beyond their previous boundaries, Nick and Jenn must confront the deceit, jealousy, and death that stalks them.

Can they survive their *Sinful Temptations*?

### ***In For a Penny* by Carol Lynne**

What's the old saying...you can never go home again? Raven Black resigned himself to never returning after being ordered from the only real home he'd ever known. Now, seven years later, Raven is back to face the man who sent him away.

Zane Conner is not only Raven's foster brother but the only man Raven ever loved. Despite his mixed feelings about the situation, Raven can't deny Zane when the older man asks for his help in saving the Lazy C Bar Ranch. A boy found dead on the ranch clinches Raven's decision.

Why did the young boy look so much like he had at that age—the same age he'd been when his own father had beaten him and left him for dead?

### ***Rough Edges* by Jannifer Hoffman**

When Julia Morgan M.D. miscarries twin girls, she divorces her husband, believing he is to blame. He forces her out of her position at the hospital and threatens her credibility as a doctor if she attempts to practice medicine. Without mentioning her medical degree, Julia accepts a position as nanny on a Colorado ranch 900 miles away.

Dirk Travis is in trouble. His wife has gone missing, and his housekeeper is threatening to quit. He is in desperate need of a reliable person to look after his four-year-old twins. Even though Julia appears to be the answer to his prayers he can't help but think she's a bit too perfect.

Both insist their relationship will be business only. While those plans start to go awry, other things begin to happen. People are getting killed and Dirk is the prime suspect, but that doesn't stop the heat index from rising between Dirk and Julia, even as she appears to be the next target.

### ***Brilliant Disguise* by JL Wilson**

*An undercover FBI agent in a tiny Iowa town finds you can't hide anything from a woman who's determined to find out the truth...*

Nick Baxter, an undercover FBI agent, thinks his brilliant disguise will fool the hicks in New Providence, Iowa. They won't suspect he's there investigating widow Shannon Delgardie, under suspicion of treason. What Nick doesn't know is that everybody in town is conspiring to protect her and investigate him in return.

Shannon needs help. The men her late husband blackmailed are closing in and the FBI might be involved. When Nick approaches her, can she trust him? With the aid of computer hackers and hair stylists, she uncovers the truth, finding a love she never expected in a tiny Iowa town.

### ***Nowhere to Run* by JL Wilson**

M.C. 'Mac' Shefflington thought she'd finally escaped Tom Donaldson and her terrible past. But just as she's starting to relax at her new home in Minnesota, the hang-up calls start again. Then someone tailgates her several times on the way to work, in exactly the same way that Tom used to, and Mac knows he's come back into her life.

Retired Sheriff Harry Mortonson is willing to help Mac because he hopes it might alleviate the guilt he feels about his own past, and the woman he didn't help years ago. But when he gets involved with Mac, he gets far more than he bargained for.

In the end, it's up to Mac to lure Tom into a trap on one of Minnesota's frozen lakes for one final confrontation. If she succeeds, she'll save Harry and their chance for a new life together. But if she fails, Mac will have to live her past—again.

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