



Faerily Imperfect Series

Faery Surprising

Mia Watts

Faery Surprising

A Faerily Imperfect Story

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Faery Surprising

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To that crazy little thing called love.

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Chapter One

Flora Harper clamped her naked thighs together, successfully holding the throbbing, whirring *Beastmaster* in place. Not the *right* place, but it would get her there. She reached behind and unhooked her bra, flung it across the room, and gasped when her rocking motion nudged the vibrator. Her eyes nearly crossed with pleasure.

“Fuck, yeah.”

This time she rocked on purpose, but to her frustration, the sensation didn’t repeat. She grabbed it, trying to make the damn thing submit. Instead, her palm grazed the panel of buttons at the base, setting off the blinking fluorescent lights and an electrical monkey-crank version of “Pop Goes the Weasel.”

“*I would go pop, if you would go round my bush.*” One of the oddly shaped fingers at the base suddenly hit home, buzzing her clit while the *Beastmaster* pumped its stupid, rotating, gel-formed head inside her.

Look at him go, George. Look at him go, an insane cartoon voice filled out the asinine mental image of stupid cock and clever clit teasing sidekick of porn.

“Stop thinking about cartoons, genius, you’ll never get there.”

If she could just...shut off...her brain...long enough to—to—to— “There it is, baby. There it is.” She caught the sensation, squeezing her eyes shut to hang on to it.

Her ears began to ring and her voice sounded like it was bouncing off bathroom tile. The tinge of male sweat teased her nostrils. That’s what she needed. It almost seemed real, especially when steam touched her cool cheeks.

“Oh *fuck!* I’m going to come!”

“That’s it, honey. Ride your weasel.”

What the fuck? Flora’s eyes flew open.

Ian Tate, Dixon City’s newly acquired quarterback, stood over her with his hands on the

low slung waist of his football uniform. Bare-chested and barefooted, his easy grin and blue eyes were all about seeing the *Beastmaster* chew an orgasm out of her.

Flora yelped, shot to her feet. Her toes curled on wet shower tile. “Not a-fucking-gain!” she bellowed.

Gelatinous George slipped out of her and hit the floor with a thud. Gyrating, neon-flashing, purple cock squirmed toward the drain on dying chords of “the monkey chased the weasel...” as though it too was embarrassed by its naked exposure.

Pop! goes the weeeeazel.

Ian rubbed the back of his neck. “Whew, Bobby Sterling told me this town was friendly.”

Flora crossed an arm over her chest and her hand in front of her apex. “Turn. Around. You fucking pervert.”

He gave her a slow once over before conceding. His chuckle did nothing to reassure her dignity.

“I reckon it’s all a matter of perspective,” he said.

“Did you say *Sterling*?” Her mind raced. What would the new jock have to do with Bobby? He wasn’t in player acquisitions or even the coaching staff. Bobby handled team event bookings.

“The way I see it, I’m minding my own business, gettin’ ready to take a shower,” he continued, ignoring her question.

“Fuck the shower. How do you know Bobby?”

“Honey, I’d say you already fucked the shower.” He chuckled again. “The way I figure it, you provide a very tempting, visual service for the guys who need a different kind of workout after practice.”

Flora screeched, snatching the giant purple gyrating cock off the slick tiles and straight at his head. The weasel popped its batteries and died a slow, tinny death.

“Hey watch it!” He twisted to look at it over his shoulder. “You keep throwing your dick around and someone’s liable to get a concussion.”

The raucous boom of slamming double doors, the clatter of cleats on glazed tile, the thunder of male voices whooping and taunting, tripped apprehension up her naked spine. *Oh, shit, practice is over.*

“Well, well, well. Guess who’s about to get caught with her pants down.” Ian’s smile

broadened, clearly making the same connection.

He stood, leaning his rippling athletic build against the half-wall of the locker room showers with an insolent smile and an amused twinkle lighting his eyes.

His gaze lingered on her pussy. “Here kitty, kitty.”

“Give me a towel,” she begged as the voices grew louder. Any minute now and she’d be seen by the whole team. Her credibility would be shot to hell, but more than that, she’d worked hard to be the professional she’d become.

This would destroy her. Bobby had been after her job forever and without him even lifting a finger, her damn faery curse had delivered her fate to his doorstep. The board of directors would not overlook what appeared to be blatant fraternization with the team.

Ian sighed and pushed up from the wall. “Just remember, you owe me.”

“Anything, just get me out of here without anyone seeing me.” Flora muttered a curse at the prank-loving faeries who were probably watching with amusement. The gift of teleportation could have been fantastically convenient if it functioned properly. But no, it only worked at the worst times—and even then, unpredictably.

She huddled, squatting low to the floor. Ian unlaced his football pants with deliberate tugs. Flora’s eyes bugged. “You’ve got to be kidding. You’ll ruin me!”

“Oh honey, it’ll fit. It *always* fits,” he teased.

“Not that, you moron! My career.” A locker slammed. Flora winced. “Hurry. Please, hurry.”

Ian chuckled, shucked his pants, and handed them to her.

She looked back at him blankly.

“Put ’em on.”

Sweaty, grass-stained football pants weren’t her first choice, but it was all she had for the moment. She snatched them from his fingers, refusing to stare at his only remaining cover, a packed jockstrap.

He bent, picking up the dead dick and shoving the batteries back in. Before she finished lacing up the loose-fitting pants, he pushed the purple cock down one leg. “Authenticity,” he said.

“No one has a cock this big.”

“So you haven’t slept with Bing. Good to know,” Ian teased.

The image of sexy dark-skinned Bing strutting around the field like a warrior filled her mind. *Oh God, she really shouldn't know that.* But then again, maybe she could use him to promote something that would require a bathing suit. Or body soap.

“Put this on, too.”

Pulled from her thoughts with the damp slap of jersey on her breasts, Flora automatically clutched it. It stank with stale body sweat. Ian reached behind the wall for the towel he'd brought and walked it over to her. Flora shimmied into the jersey, feeling the cool material stroke over her nipples and drape there. The hem fell low to her knees and she tucked it in at the front. The weight of the material still held it taut against every curve and highlighted the tips of her breasts.

She knew because she slept in a jersey just like it and used to wear it when she wanted to torment her ex-boyfriend. Show him the goods, without showing him the goods. It had proved quite an effective tool for getting what she wanted.

Standing still as a similar glazed-look came over Ian felt like waving a red flag before a bull. Payback's a bitch.

Ian moved close holding the towel over her head. For a moment she was obscured from the rest of the room, forced to look at Ian and his darkening blue eyes.

Locker doors slammed, their sound ricocheting off the hard tiles to announce her discovery was at hand. She might have whimpered. Trapped and at Ian's leisure, she fought the rise of panic.

“Keep this over your head. Let the ends hang down over your chest. Keep your face down and walk out through coach's door. He's going to be in the media room with the offensive and defensive coordinators. Don't look back. As long as they don't see your face, they won't know who you are.”

He was right. It would be okay if she just kept her head down. And didn't transport into, say, a newsroom. Flora quickly shut down the wayward thought not wishing to tempt faery fate.

“Go,” he whispered.

Flora ducked and bumped him as she moved around.

Ian caught her arm and whispered through the terrycloth. “Remember, you said *anything*. I'm holding you to it.”

Something tugged at her crotch. Ian grabbed her fake cock and squeezed the base. Gelatinous George ground to life beneath the white spandex, rotating along her right thigh,

determined to cream her knee.

Ian laughed, slapped her ass and said, “Go on, now.”

“What the *fuck*?” she heard Bing yelp as he leaped back.

Flora raced away.

“That dude’s dick was alive, man. *Alive!*” Bing swore as she stole through the suggested exit and raced for the empty visiting team’s locker room. Thank God it was only a practice day.

She shoved the door closed and leaned against the wood facing a room identical to the team room but without any of the players. With shaking hands, she clamored for the courtesy phones next to her.

Jabbing in the numbers for her sister, she impatiently paced until Fauna picked up.

“Where are you?” Fauna asked, not bothering to say hello.

“In the secondary locker room. How did you know it was me?” Flora asked her twin.

“You only ever call me when you teleport somewhere and get stuck. You’re also the only one I know who works at the stadium. Caller ID.”

“This one was a beaut.”

“Okay. I’ll be there in about twenty,” her sister said.

“Fauna? Bring clothes and shoes from my apartment. And my purse.”

Silence reigned over the phone line. “I won’t even ask.”

“Thanks,” Flora muttered.

“I’m not going all the way to the apartment, though. You’ll have to wear my workout stuff, and I’ll leave you some money for a cab.”

“Fauna! C’mon! I can’t show up to my office in sweats.”

“Sure you can. Everyone else does. Some even wear those very chic whistles around their necks and *eau de ‘mildew’ toilette* oozing from their shoes. I’m sure *one* day without the diva sex kitten will be fine. Maybe even make you more approachable.”

“Can’t you drive me home?” Flora pleaded.

“I have a job. I’m leaving it to help you keep yours, which means I get to miss my lunch break later. I’ll bring my workout clothes and some money. The rest is up to you. Do you want my help or not?”

“I want your help.”

“I’ll see you in twenty. I’ll knock on the secondary locker room door so you know it’s

me.”

Flora sighed. “Thanks, sis.”

“You owe me.”

Flora hung up and leaned her head back against the wood. “Stand in line. Apparently, I’m keeping a tab.”

George the Beastmaster made another whining circuit by her knee. She jammed her hand into her pants and ripped it out to glare at the blindly flopping dick. “And *you* owe me. Never got that orgasm. You are being replaced.”

It groaned out a gyration and four notes sluggishly began the musical round.

“Shut up.”

Chapter Two

Damn, that woman looked fine. Ian stepped out of Flora's peripheral vision as he watched her pass. Morning light flooded through the posh upper offices, polishing every pressed angle of her short black mini skirt, every inch of her steeply inclined heels. She'd unbuttoned her blouse to mid-breast. Excellent tailoring explained the way the white top hugged her body. But it was the flash of silver resting on the rise of one honey-colored swell which snagged his attention better than a shimmering lure to a wide-mouthed bass.

Ian followed her into her office. So, his naked seductress was Flora Harper. Bobby wanted him to seduce her? Hell, she seduced Ian by breathing.

She paused beside her desk as she picked up a note, tossed it aside, and dropped the plastic bag on the floor by the garbage. She booted her computer and leaned over to scribble on a sticky pad. Flora looked pulled together, in her element.

He caught a glimpse of her full breasts and white lace dipping at the center where the filled cups came together. God, he loved seeing the unconscious display of female skin when she didn't know she had an onlooker. He had a feeling that capturing Flora Harper unaware was a precious commodity.

Flora didn't look like a blackmailing bitch. Bobby must be wrong. He'd clear it up the next time they spoke. Until then, Ian would enjoy the view.

Ian gave a subdued whistle of appreciation.

"You have *great* breasts." He slipped his hands in his pockets to hide the extent of his appreciation. "I've thought about them all night."

Flora righted. A look of practiced boredom flattened her expression. "Of course you have. They're amazing."

"Hm. That right there just took 'em down a notch." Ian shook his head. His spiked brown

hair barely budged.

“Let me guess, breast-rating is part of your latent charm, right? Did they teach you how to sweet talk women in Backwater, Plainsfield?”

“Hell, darlin’, sweet talking is reserved for the ones that make it a challenge. I’ve met you twice, and both times you’ve shown me your favorite assets.” He sauntered to her desk. “I don’t mind, just maybe consider holding out for the next guy. It ruins the fun when you act all desperate.”

Flora gasped in outrage. “I am *not* desperate.”

“That’s good. The way you threw yourself at me yesterday had me concerned.” He smiled, picked up a fancy pen from her desk and rolled it between his fingers.

It pleased him to see her cheeks flush hotly.

“So you called?” he asked, reminding her of the message she’d texted. She’d requested that he report to her first thing in this morning.

She appeared to be biting back words. Lots of angry words.

With a sharp jab to the air, she pointed at the plastic sack by her desk. “Your pants.”

“You did remember to remove your pulsating cock, didn’t you? I’d hate to explain that to the guys on the field. They told me you were a ball-buster. They never said anything about amputated penises.”

“Grow up,” she snapped.

Ian’s smile faded. He’d hoped teasing could find them on common ground, a shared story they could look back on and laugh about over drinks. Apparently not.

He pursed his lips and reached for the bag, checking inside as he took it. “You forgot my jersey.”

Her eyes shifted away. “I spilled bleach on it.”

He didn’t believe her. She seemed to sense it.

“And fingernail polish.” Flora sat and scooted up to her keyboard. “Are you done?”

“Not even close.” Ian circled her desk and came up behind her. Casually, he lifted her hand off the desk surface. He slid his palm against hers, supporting her from beneath and tilting it toward the light. Silky smooth and warm, her palm teased him with the suggestion that she might be as touchable everywhere.

He resisted the urge to lace their fingers together, to tug her closer, and find out if he was

right. He had a point to prove. The glaring lack of polish on her trimmed nails only seemed to stretch out the silence until finally she snatched her hand back.

“I didn’t like the color.”

“You know most people give up the lie when they realize they’ve been caught. I’ll give you points for stubbornness, though.” He sat on the edge of her desk, hoping his smile was as cocky as she seemed to expect.

He could play this game all day. She and her office were so much better smelling than a field teeming with deodorant-challenged men. Besides, she was stunning whether naked or dressed, and letting her drag out the denial only gave him a reason to stay and admire the view.

He was looking into the toffee colored depths of her eyes when they glowed with calculated interest.

Flora’s hand crept to his thigh. “Now, Ian, you won’t go spilling my secret, will you?”

“Hadn’t occurred to me.” Lots of things *had* occurred to him about hands and thighs and naked body parts and lips and perky pink nipples. “No one would believe me, anyway.”

“Aw, that’s sweet.”

If it was so sweet, why did her toothy smile resemble that of a feeding shark?

Her hand left his thigh. Whatever he said that made her remove it, he wished to hell he could take it back. Her delicate fingers danced over the keyboard and she hit enter with a perfunctory clack.

“Did you need me for anything else, or did you just want to tell me how much you enjoyed getting into my pants?” he asked.

Flora leaned back in her chair. He caught the flash of her tawny inner thigh as she crossed one long leg over the other. A few more inches and that snug little skirt would have shown him a much more appealing wedge.

“Ian Tate, you’re flirting with me. Isn’t that cute?” A patronizing smile lifted her wine colored lips. “Deeks has rules about dating within the franchise.”

“Harper! You’ve got Tilden scheduled for a meet and greet the same day I have him for a photo shoot.—Oh hey, Tate, whatcha doing up in the glassworks of the building?”

Ian half turned on his perch. Bobby Sterling invaded the office. His bulldog body was the most subtle thing about him.

After years of shouting plays on the field, his roughened voice still hurled words like they

had to cross vast distances.

Flora stiffened.

Delicacy wasn't Bobby's strong suit. With the way Ian propped on her desk, he'd not only *think* she was fucking the talent, but he'd talk himself into being certain of it before the day ended. The wariness in her eyes told Ian he needed to speak sparingly until he'd worked things out or wind up with a pissed off raven-haired beauty.

He followed her gaze and noticed that she chose to watch the swinging red lanyard and silver whistle as it bumped across Bobby's pregnant gut. The reluctant smile that smoothed her lips made him wonder what she was thinking. Whatever it was, the change in her expression was endearing.

"Hi, Bobby," Ian answered, keeping his eyes trained on her.

"I see you've met the resident beauty queen. Or has she asked you to her office for a private introduction?" Bobby quipped, chuckling at his own joke.

Her nostrils flared slightly, but otherwise her expression held bored caution.

"Leave the nice lady alone," Ian soothed. "I think you're wrong about her."

"Don't let her looks fool you. She's a vulture." Bobby Sterling slapped a fax on her desk, pyramiding his fingers on the paper as though to hold it down. "Move him," he told her.

Flora leaned forward, her chair clicking as she changed positions. She looked down at the fax, then disregarded it. "No."

"Move him. He's scheduled for a fucking photo shoot with Dorian Gray."

"I assume Dorian Gray is important from the emphasis you place on his name?" she asked.

Bobbie nodded. "Yeah, fucking damn important."

"More important than the charity auction for St. Jude's hospital?" she asked. Ian detected the patronizing lilt. Bobby saying yes would make him a dickhead.

"A photo is forever, Harper. Fucking forever. You wouldn't have a charity auction worth shit if I didn't promote the sonofabitch in the first place." Bobby almost whined his retort. He seemed to know he'd lost this one.

"Reschedule," Flora said on a shrug. She turned her attention to the computer. "If Dorian Gray is such a big shot, he'll get to say that he magnanimously moved his schedule around to accommodate children's cancer research. Celebrities eat that up."

Bobby grunted. He stood, leaving the fax. "Take Tate with you instead of Tilden. Give him exposure."

"I'll go," Ian said, easily. "I like kids."

Flora eyed him suspiciously. "You have kids?"

"No."

"Nieces? Nephews?" she asked.

"No."

"You spend a lot of free time with kids, do you?" she asked.

Ian shifted uncomfortably. "Well..."

"I see. You like the bedroom sport scimmages for making kids, so long as the seed doesn't take. Sorry, Tate, that doesn't qualify you."

"He doesn't need to qualify. He's a new player and it will show goodwill to the community," Bobby argued.

Flora sighed. "I'm not getting either of you out of my office anytime soon, am I?"

"No," Bobby and Ian said simultaneously, then bumped each other's fists.

"First you want me to pull Tilden. Now you want me to add Tate," she said.

"Tate doesn't have a photo shoot," Bobby argued.

"There's a reason for that. Tate hasn't earned local trust. He played for the Gimlets, our rival team. Tilden is a hero around here. The representatives from St. Jude's need the kind of turnout he'd bring."

"I have fans," Tate said. He didn't like the defensiveness of his words, but the way her eyes flicked over him, licked across his lips, was worth it.

"C'mon, Harper. Do me a solid and I'll return the favor sometime," Bobby promised.

She looked at Bobby. "No."

"Tate needs to get seen."

Ian could almost see her thinking. Flora Harper certainly wasn't a pushover. Ian not only crowded her space on one side, but Bobby's dogged presence and scowling face wasn't easy for most men to stare down. But was she a blackmailer?

Flora calmly checked her watch. Her phone rang mutedly four times before likely being transferred to voice mail. She didn't flinch and barely blinked.

Ian folded his arms over his chest. There was something innately sexy about Flora's

confidence. She didn't have to flaunt it, although the cut of her clothes certainly delineated every one of her luscious curves to perfection. For a moment, he imagined her sitting in that chair, naked but for her high heels.

His cock hardened.

"I have a win-win suggestion for you," she said to Bobby, finally.

Bobby's shoulders tightened. Ian could tell her considering silence had shaken the older man's nerve a little. His expression no longer held certainty, but seemed more submissive to whatever she would finally concede.

"I'll take Tate and Tilden to the charity event. Tate will get seen with Tilden and a positive association will be derived from their joint and amicable partnership for St. Jude's. And you can get Dorian Gray to write off the missed appointment as a charitable donation for the benefit of St. Jude's and reschedule him in the process. Everyone looks good. Take it or leave it." She folded her hands over her keyboard, her expression stony.

Ian grinned, feeling his chest expand with pride.

Bobby frowned. "Include Tate in every public appearance throughout pre-season and it's a deal."

Her eyes narrowed. "What are you up to, Sterling?"

"Goddamn it! I'm fucking doing your job for you, Harper. I just fucking gave you one of our guys for limitless use and agreed to let you keep Tilden. Fucking mastermind that one for me and see what motive I might have. I'm the damn promotional guy! I'm *promoting* them!"

"And giving you additional access to the team for the fundraisers. I can practically smell the new locker room. Can't you?" Ian teased, reminding her of the last time they'd met.

"Community welfare, first," she told Ian. Her gaze met Bobby's. "I'll take Tate. You keep Tilden free for Saturday. Tate is mine throughout pre-season and while he's getting adjusted to the new fan base, you free up a first-string for each meet until I decide he's good on his own."

"Fucking chess player," Bobby muttered. "Fine. Fucking fine. First-string, first born, first anything else?" he spat.

"Oh. Sterling, you charmer. You're too old for a first-born," she tossed back. "Stop your barking and get out of my office. I have a meeting in ten."

Bobby's face reddened and his eyes bulged, still he managed to keep his tongue in check.

He left the office looking angrier than when he arrived. Ian waited for his steps to fade before he blew out a pent up breath.

“Wow. I’ve never seen anyone face that man down like you just did. That was amazing.”

Flora’s brows raised and she dipped a look at his lap. “Oh, honey, I’m way out of your league. Why don’t you run along and go tackle something you have a chance at catching.”

Chapter Three

Sweat stung his eye. Ian blinked, cleared his vision. The sound of his labored breathing echoed within the confines of his helmet, and despite the wide upper curve, his peripheral vision kept him from seeing his teammates.

They were there. He trusted it. He knew it.

Focusing on the defensive team, Ian crouched along the line of scrimmage. He leaned in, hands at the ready.

“Forty-two, hut, hut!” he shouted.

Filsguard snapped the ball neatly and Ian jogged backward into the pocket, assuming the offense were doing their job. Ball at his chest, Ian looked for the opening. Johnson hooked to the right. Bing went long, his legs stretching, eating up the field with Holland close on his back.

Ian cocked his arm, ready to throw. Out of nowhere, grubby fingers grabbed the black bars of his faceguard and jerked him roughly to the side. Ian’s head followed. A steamroller barreled into his side and took him to the ground.

His head was still ringing when Valstet crawled off him, helped him up, and smacked Ian’s ass in a stinging camaraderie.

“Facemask, Schwartz. How many times do I have to tell you? If you’re going to risk a fucking penalty, don’t get fucking caught with obvious shit like that!” Coach Wilks blew his whistle, again. “Ten yards, first down.”

The defense grumbled. One of them yelled at coach for a five yarder.

“*Fifteen* and first. Any more complaints? Want to make it twenty?” Coach demanded. “This is *my* field.”

From the seats, a flash of dark red caught Ian’s attention. Damn. A man couldn’t concentrate with Flora Harper watching. Not in that slip of a something. If he pulled the tail of the ribbon on her hip, it looked like her whole dress would fall open. All that golden, smooth

skin spread out on deep red—

“Tate! Get your ass back on the line! Coach ain’t gonna be chattin’ for long with Sterling,” Bing warned.

“Sorry. That woman can make me forget anything,” Ian joked with a glance at Bing.

Bing looked toward the seats and gave Ian a strange look. “What woman?”

“Harper,” he answered, nodding to where he’d seen her last. She’d disappeared. “Hnh. She was there a minute ago.”

“Yeah, man, sure she was.” Bing’s white teeth flashed against his dark skin. He shoved the tooth guard into his mouth and took off for the line of scrimmage.

Ian jogged with him, shooting looks toward the empty stands. She’d have had to sprint in her heels to reach either exit. Somehow he couldn’t see her doing that. Where had she gone?

Coach blew the whistle. Ian crouched in position. He’d think about it later, when he had time to imagine her body wrapped in a red, ribbon-tied dress. Right now he had several tons of muscle itching to put him on the bottom of a pile.

“Hut! Hut!”

* * * *

Flora teetered as the floor changed under her feet from stadium concrete to cheep flooring. The elevator doors dinged open. She clutched her handheld computer and walked shakily toward her office. At least she’d transported back to an empty elevator.

Thinking about the meeting she’d just finished with Mr. Deeks, team manager, and the scheduling of his players had unavoidably meant she was thinking about Ian Tate. His schedule was wide open for the Gladiators Make a Difference program. It was either great news or terrible news. It meant Tate shadowing her on the job would happen simply by emailing him an appointment time and location. He’d have to show up.

Sterling had gotten to Baxter already. He’d made sure the whole thing was official. Binding, in fact.

Flora cringed. The document-happy manager had drawn up the agreement. Flora had acknowledged that she would utilize Tate as frequently as possible in order to increase his likability in a market hostile to his former team.

So she’d signed. Right underneath Ian Tate’s stretched signature.

Sterling sure had snapped up the deal. The speed at which he worked almost made her

suspect that he'd gained the upper hand in her scheme when she was pretty sure she had. Still, first-string support throughout the pre-season and Tilden at the meet and greet in two days was a coup.

Sterling could chuckle about his win all he wanted. She had exactly what she needed to show the board: an amazing compilation of charity work and fundraising opportunities. She could expect a healthy bonus.

Flora wiggled the mouse to wake up her screen, and pulled up her calendar. Several new alerts blinked at her for attention, but her mind returned to puzzle out Sterling's potential for a hidden agenda.

Using Tate didn't pan out badly for Sterling, either. The new guy would get great promo by working with her.

Flora shook her head, distractedly. What did he have to gain from it? Why did Sterling care about the success of one player over the others? Time had shown that the acquisition of a single player didn't hurt the overall game attendance, so long as the team stayed in the forefront of the fans' minds.

Tate was an aging quarterback. In football years, thirty-six was at the tail end of his career. So why fuss over him? They still had Bristol as the primary quarterback. Tate should have been an afterthought.

She accepted an appointment for the following week and sent a confirmation email to her mother's party invitation the following Sunday. She'd promised to show up. Both her sisters had too.

Her eyes settled on Tate's publicity shot, obviously dropped off while she'd stepped away. Why Tate?

Then again, there was the team animosity. Sterling had to look out for potential threats to their publicity. Picking up a quarterback from the Gimlets would qualify.

Flora sat at her desk. Leaning over it only made her feet and back ache. She had nowhere to be for a while, either, so she might as well settle in. Dragging open a drawer, she reached inside for a hair clip. Catching her hair at the nape, she twisted it up and clipped it against her head. Cooler office air touched her nape and she sighed.

The day turned to dusk as she worked. She barely noticed when the stadium lights dropped from bright to security level. She had a few more offers to work through and then she

could call it a night.

“Goodnight, Ms. Harper,” someone called as he passed her office.

“Goodnight,” she answered automatically.

Co-workers came and went. The elevator dinged. Flora kept working, rearranging events and researching requests for support. Silence lengthened the minutes until she began composing her last email.

“Do you have any idea how sexy you look right now?”

Tate’s voice washed over her like warm sunshine. Her fingers froze over her keyboard in much the same manner as her brain froze on the thought she had meant to type.

He slipped into her inner sanctuary. She was certain that if she looked up, he’d be smiling at her in a way that would charm every womanly cell in her body.

“I’m busy, Tate,” she said, keeping her eyes on her screen.

“I saw you in the stadium this afternoon. Taking a break, or looking for inspiration?”

“Neither.” Actually, she’d been riding down the elevator from the top level of office suites and thinking about the impressive rise in his pants.

Then, wouldn’t you know it, she popped out. It had been quick, transporting a second time within seconds of her first. She didn’t have *flashbacks* often, but the double risk of exposure kept her on edge. As if disappearing weren’t bad enough, but popping up in another area far away and then popping back *in* again was a hazard she’d rather not have.

“You disappeared,” he said, softly.

Flora’s breath caught. He’d seen that?

“I looked away for a second and, by the time I looked back, you were gone. Must’ve been in a hurry.”

Relief flooded her, released the captive breath. “Mm-hm.”

What was the name of the organization I wanted to reference? She stared at the blinking cursor. He needed to leave. She’d never get home at this rate.

“So where’d you disappear to?” he asked.

“The elevator,” she muttered. “Mr. Tate, is there something I can help you with? I’m trying to end my work day.”

“Nope. Just saw the light in your office from the field and thought I’d catch you before you go.”

Flora mustered a guarded smile. “Do I need catching, Mr. Tate?”

“Somebody ought to be lucky enough to catch you, Ms. Harper.”

“And that someone is you?”

“Might as well be.”

“Do I strike you as the kind of woman who needs a man to catch her?” she asked.

“I’d certainly like to be there when you decide to let go,” he murmured huskily.

She couldn’t help but smile in earnest. Discretely, she crossed her legs beneath her desk and lowered her hands to her lap. The look he gave her oozed sexual promise and knowledge. Her body recognized it and wanted it.

The *Beastmaster* had been an unsuccessful attempt, and since then, she couldn’t touch herself without remembering the way Ian’s gaze had lingered on her pussy. That one memory made her come too quickly every time.

Her feminine flesh tickled as moisture seeped into her panties.

“Letting go would get me fired. As good as you seem to think you are, it isn’t worth my job,” she said.

“Fraternization within the franchise,” he said.

“Exactly.”

“Then why don’t I wait until you’re done here and at least walk you to your car?”

Flora stood and moved around her desk. She reached for his biceps and steered him toward the door at a slow, congenial rate. “Mr. Tate, I realize that you’re a big strong man and therefore it’s a foreign concept to you that a woman can take care of herself. However, I’ll give you two guesses about what suspicions might be drawn from a late night walk to my car.”

“You’re making a big deal out of nothing.”

Her jaw tightened and she felt an answering throb to her temples. “*You* are making nothing out of my urgent desire to keep my job.” They reached the threshold. “Goodnight.”

“There’s no one here, Flora. Who would see?”

His soft words encouraged her to look up at him and meet his gentle blue gaze. He’d showered before coming to her office. His brown hair had only half dried. The top strands still clung together in short damp spikes, but he was clean. His laundry fresh clothes and faint soap scent seemed so far removed from the cloying taint of football politics.

“The parking lot and the elevators have cameras,” she answered.

“Is that the only reason you keep shooting me down?”

“Technically, Mr. Tate, you’ve already gotten me naked. Count it a success and sniff elsewhere.”

She could have sworn he’d been further away. Without seeming to move, he stood immediately in front of her. He braced a hand on the door frame as he gently slid his fingers up and down her bare arm. She should let go of his biceps. Would it show weakness to back away? She decided it did, choosing to stay her ground.

“How about here?” he asked. Lowering his head, he nuzzled the side of her exposed neck. “Or here?” he asked, trailing upward behind her ear.

His stroking hand moved around her waist and drew her against his hard chest. She tried to remember what she normally did when a man got physical with her and she wanted to extract herself. Unfortunately, her body and head were at war about the proper course of action. Other than wrapping her legs around him and begging him to ride her hard and fast, she couldn’t think at all.

Ian’s lips brushed her ear. Shivers tripped over themselves to raise goose bumps and set tingles loose in her pussy. Her abdomen squeezed deep inside. Pressing her aching nipples to his hard, warm pecs drove her to slide her hand over the muscular contours of his shoulder. She delved her fingers into his hair. It was softer than the spiky style led her to believe.

“Definitely here,” he murmured, caressing her cheek with his.

Finally his lips touched the corner of hers. If she turned her head—if, *nothin’*. Why wait? Flora took the kiss he teased her with, devoured it. He tasted fresh and the fullness of his silken lips lit her need.

She was used to hard kisses and hurried gropes from business men whose time was money. She’d kissed players before, too, before she worked for the franchise. They’d been all hands and plunging tongues. This was different.

Ian kissed her like he was savoring ripe fruit. His tongue flickered against hers and his mouth stayed pliant. She could have handled rough and ready, pushing him away when she’d had her fill. Ian’s laid-back complexity made a paradox which knocked the starch from her knees and buried every ounce of her reserve.

His hand dipped to cup her ass. Turning with her, he shifted from doorway to office and pinned her against the wall with his hips. His cock rose full and firm between them. Flora tucked

her hips, seeking more intimate contact.

Ask him to go down, her brain begged. God, that amazing mouth of curious tongue and supple lips on her there would be heaven. Her pussy ached. Her breasts felt full, tight. *Touch me*.

Then he retreated. "I believe you asked me to leave."

If she could have spoken, she might have denied it. Told him she hadn't meant it for the first time in her life. She did manage to part her lips in preparation for the words.

"Goodnight, Flora." He sweetly kissed her with lingering tenderness. "I'll see you tomorrow," he said, leaving her where she stood.

A few seconds ticked by.

"Oh, God," she said, choking on the words. "I'm. So. Stupid. Why don't I just hand in my resignation? Could I have been any more desperate?"

Chapter Four

Ian whistled as he headed toward his truck. Midnight blue, extended cab, elevated chassis with over-sized tires, black windows, and black grill—if a vehicle could give him a hard-on, it would be this one with her bass amped. He loved cruising the freeway with the windows down.

With Flora in the front seat, he could just imagine the rush of air playfully flashing the swell of one beautiful breast, her hair flying in wild disarray, and the rumble of the road inching her sexy little mini higher and higher up her thighs with each mile.

Was it wrong that he wanted to fuck her in the front seat?

He reached the truck and stroked his hand along its gleaming side, around the back edge, and over the gate. He paused, caught up in the image.

If he cranked the bass higher until it vibrated the windows, would it cream her pussy for him? Would she gasp and moan? Rest her head on the leather seats while the wind coming through the cab windows fondled her body, ripped her finely pressed blouse from its buttons? Maybe she'd plant those high heels on his dash board, knees parted, skirt creeping toward her hips as she gripped the edge of the seat, begging him to pull over and take her.

He'd seen that pussy. Now he wanted to see that pussy spread and wet. When he did, he was going to savor every dragged out second of flavor, no matter how hard she dug her nails into his shoulders. No, he wouldn't actually fuck her until he heard her scream, his face pressed to that gorgeous cunt.

Ian grinned. Then he'd either start over again or let her pull him up her body until he sank into her, balls deep. "Fuck, yeah," he murmured to himself.

His cock was ready and his nuts had tightened. God, he might fucking shoot if he kept thinking like this. They'd done nothing more than kiss. But, *damn*, what a kiss.

Shrugging off the daydream, Ian patted the side of his truck and rounded the other end of the tailgate for the driver's side.

“I was beginning to wonder if you were going to take her from behind,” Bobby chuckled.

Ian started, not expecting anyone to be waiting for him and certainly not expecting anyone to have seen that kiss. “Fuck off. I kissed her. I didn’t reach under her skirt to test the waters,” he grumbled.

“Is that some kind of sick metaphor for sticking your dick in her tailpipe?”

“*Jesus*, Bobby! I think she might take it personally if I plug her ass before I ask her out.”

Bobby’s brow furrowed as though he thought Ian had suddenly spoken in Dutch.

“Flora?” His understanding dawned with a gut wrenching laugh.

“Who the fuck did you think I was talking about?” Ian asked.

“Your truck,” Bobby wheezed, wiping tears from his eyes. “You stroke that baby with the look of love on you and a hunt dog in your pants. Fucking Flora would be a thousand times more normal. Hell, I’d fuck her if she’d let me.”

The thought of Bobby fucking Flora was vomit-inducing.

“Don’t touch her,” Ian warned.

“The truck, or the woman?” Bobby asked, setting his iron belly to shake with another round of laughter.

“Either one. Why are you waiting at my truck?”

Bobby came off the laugh with a sound of amused pleasure. “Oh, God, that’s rich. So you kissed Flora? This will be easier than I thought.”

“No, it won’t be. I’m not doing it,” Ian said. He reached into his pocket for his keys and flipped them through his fingers until he found the one he wanted. It kept him from looking at Bobby.

“Oh, no you don’t. You aren’t backing out on me. I got your ass on the team when no one else would have you. I fucking hid the medical reports about your recent concussion and knee injury. You may have lost your representation, but I swung that by calling you a *free-agent*. The media ate that shit up.”

“I know and I owe you.”

“That’s right. You owe me. What would your mom say if she knew you were squelching on a deal with family?” Bobby asked.

“Don’t bring my mom into this.” Damn it. Bobby went straight for the jugular every time.

“I’ll bring my *sister* in any way I choose. She asked me to take care of you. I’ve done

that, haven't I?" Bobby stated the question. They both knew Bobby had come through for Ian more times than he could count.

"It's dishonest."

"Not if you *like* Flora. Just spend time with her. Kiss her some more. Maybe have sex when it's convenient. All you have to do is tell me about it and get me a good camera angle."

"I gotta know why," Ian said. He did owe Bobby, but Ian had never *played* someone before. He'd known from the beginning that Bobby wanted him to seduce Flora Harper. He hadn't known Flora was the woman from the locker room.

"She's blackmailing someone pretty high up. How do you think she got to be head of Public Relations in two years when I've been trying for twelve? She fucked Deeks, got info on him, and took the job, that's how. She's a bitch-whore," Bobby spat.

The title *bitch-whore* Bobby used for Flora didn't fit the person Ian had met. His skepticism must have shown on his face.

"You think I'm lying? She sluts around with the team like a fucking cock-tease. You watch. When she tries to lead you around by the nose, you'll see what I mean. You kissed her, but you're fresh meat. Once you're under her fucking spell, she don't need to impress you." Bobby snapped his fingers, emphasizing the quick speed in which Ian would get dumped.

"I don't know, Bobby. There are other ways to catch her for blackmail."

"Deeks tried other ways. Deeks said that, if she's screwing a member of the team, he could fire her and ruin her credibility. Then if she tries to use what she's got against him, it won't hold water in the media circuit."

"Deeks said that?" Ian asked.

Bobby nodded. "Yeah, Deeks said that. Deeks also said she shows up in weird places that aren't in her schedule book. She pretends it's nothing, but we think she's spilling team statistics and plays. If you can find out where she's going and why, I bet Deeks would find a way to reward you."

"Her job would be up for grabs," Ian noted, watching his uncle carefully.

"It would be mine—a bonus for helping him out. It's already been promised."

"I wondered how you fit into this."

"Let her come on to you and let me catch her in a sexually compromising position. The rest, like figuring out where she's sneaking off to, is gravy," Bobby reasoned. "You're not only

fulfilling an obligation to your uncle, but you're getting the owner of the team out of some pretty sticky shit. He gave you the contract to play. You gonna disappoint him *and* me?"

Ian blew out a breath. Lately it seemed like all he did was hold it as he faced down one problem or other. Being near Flora, he'd felt the most normal he had in ages. He thought he could like her. He *knew* he could fuck her and enjoy it. If Bobby was right, she'd use Ian and dump him. He had to admit, Flora did have a cool edge to her.

"All I'm asking is that you try to seduce her. How hard is it to follow a beautiful woman and accept when she tries to get in your pants? It's like free head from a movie star."

Ian winced. "You're not helping your case. I don't see her like that."

"I know her better than you. You just got here last week. What the fuck do you know about franchise politics?"

"Nothing," he conceded. "All right. I'll do it."

Bobby grabbed him in a bear hug, smacked his back. "There's my boy. You do your part, I'll get you some field play, and Deeks will be off the hook." He pulled back and gave Ian an earnest look. "Just remember, if the clothes come off, or she hits her knees to suck dick, you snap the cell phone shot. It's gotta have her face showing. If you can get one of your cock in her cunt, take it."

Ian didn't like the way Bobby talked about her. He wanted Flora, not a cheap screw. Had she already begun deceiving him?

"If she doesn't deserve this shit, I'll find out and bury Deeks. Then I'm coming for you."

"Relax. It's all been checked out." As Bobby walked away, he looked back at the truck. "It's a fine truck, Ian. I'd fuck the exhaust, too" He howled at his joke. The sound swelled inside the cement car park.

Ian hit the button on his key fob and slid behind the wheel. Glancing at the empty passenger seat, the image of a compliant, begging Flora hardened into an ice princess with a sneering smile. *That* Flora was polished and calculating, cold and selfish. Which one had he met in the locker room and later in her office? Had it been the Flora who genuinely turned him on, or a bastardization of attraction—lust, intent on cold seduction?

Fuck if he knew.

* * * *

Flora shut the apartment door behind her, reaching back to throw both bolts as she rested

her against the cool surface. Safe. Home, her sanctuary, spread out before her in sterile contemporary furnishings of chrome and white, with red and black accents. She removed her heels and walked toward the kitchen for a glass of water, then returned to the main area. Large cut squares of white marble with pale gray veining iced her soles. All encompassing, it stretched the wide expanse interrupted only by an enormous central white-plush carpet, which cushioned her aching feet as she reached it..

Soaring thirty feet from floor to ceiling, the far wall consisted of polarized glass panels in solid sheets which spanned the entire length of her apartment. She touched a remote by the couch. A soft whir accompanied the shift in glass opacity and suddenly she overlooked the city's twinkling lights. Thank God for one-way windows.

Ice bumped her lip as she took a sip. Aside from the soft clink, the apartment stayed as silent as a tomb. She wouldn't have known the city bustled if she didn't see the winking of stoplights and two-toned colors of traffic headed in different directions. She closed her eyes, sighing, willing the same cold peace to still her racing thoughts.

"You are trouble, Ian Tate."

The memory of his kiss momentarily stalled the glass on its upward climb to her lips. Not willing to dwell on it too long, she quickly looked for anything she might have left out. Flora grabbed up her Jimmy Chos, dialed the lights and window down with the remote, and strolled toward her bedroom.

Ian's jersey hung on a bathroom hook and Flora quickly shucked her clothes, letting the cool mesh slide over her warmer skin. Goose bumps pulled her flesh and perked her nipples to insistent points. The hemline fell almost to her knees and the shoulder seaming drooped above her elbows.

Flora turned a circle. She liked the way the bathroom lighting skimmed over the royal blue. She loved even more the way Tate's mesh jersey snagged on her nipples, dropped heavily against her bare pussy, when she rolled in it all night long. God, just thinking about it made her horny.

She eyed the cupboard where she kept her vibrators. The *Beastmaster* hadn't ended well. Maybe the sex party her mom was throwing on Sunday night would turn out to be a good thing instead of too much information about her parents' sex lives.

A new toy instead of a new boy. Not as satisfying. Not by a long shot if the size of his

erection were any indication.

Flora finished her evening routine. Her white linen-aid California king sized bed welcomed her between the freshly pressed and tucked jasmine-scented sheets. Egyptian cotton, as smooth as silk, and downy pillows called her into sleep with muted sighs on the whisper of night-cloaked shadows.

Drowsy warmth infused her limbs. She rolled, feeling the sheet tug against her ankle even as her memory foam mattress cradled her left side. Hair fell backward off her cheek, the weight of it shifting other hairs and giving her the sensation of fingers softly moving over them in a single downward stroke.

They were back in her office, kissing. This time he didn't leave. This time he begged her to let him stay.

"I have to have you," he begged, falling to his knees before her. His hands already ran up under her dress, over the top of her thigh-high stockings. He wadded his fingers in her dream-underwear, the bulky, baby-flounces of lace which horizontally lined her ass and ballooned around her hips. "I love bloomers!" he exclaimed.

"I know. I read it in your publicity spread."

Ian buried his face in her crotch and moaned, the vibrations making her moist with need. "I'm a fister. I'm very good at fisting," he said, pressing his fist against her pussy and rotating his wrist back and forth. Clouds of white cotton fluffed around his knuckles.

"You're doing it wrong," she told him.

"Trust me," he insisted.

She didn't understand. Her bloomers were still on but he looked so intent on pleasing her, on this skill of his creating some delicious impact that she moaned appreciatively. Maybe he'd take the bloomers off, eventually?

She didn't see him reach higher, exposing her hip, but she felt his bare hand. It dragged up her side, over her belly, slid under the arm she'd folded across her chest and between her breasts. Now she lay on her side—bloomers gone and his inquisitive hand retracing itself, then dipping around to her spine, over her ass, sliding fingers against her heated flesh, and teasing the base of her now weeping pussy where her puffy sex smoothed to a pout.

Flora moaned in earnest.

Errant fingers barely pressed on her. She wanted him inside and she wiggled her hips to

persuade entry. His other hand caressed her bottom, smoothing rough palm over spa-pampered skin. She shivered, loving the contrast.

The wall behind her warmed, began to murmur encouragement. She didn't think how it could be possible when her dream had taken her from office to bed. It didn't matter so long as Ian finished what he started.

"Ian," she mumbled in her sleep, coming half awake at the sound of her own voice.

His fingers left her. They wedged gently between her thighs and lifted her upper leg higher and back to prop on his, then caressingly upward over her outer thigh while his other hand moved to her bare apex. He cupped her, letting the heat from his hand over her sex torment her further.

Hot breath, moist lips captured the rim of her ear, flicked once into the whorls and pulled her lobe firmly into succulent pleasure. From her thigh, fingers trailed up her hip, over her waist and under the jersey bunched beneath her breasts to skim her tightly puckered nipples. They ached and she prayed to all that was holy that she didn't wake from this dream without coming.

Flora arched her back and her ass nudged solid, firm, cock—a furnace of flesh cradled against her ass. Still his hand cupped, his fingers teased, his lips tormented moving now from lobe to neck.

"I don't know what brought you here, but I'm not complaining," he said. The words warmed her skin, completely unlike his whining plea earlier in her dream.

He lifted her arm over her head, helping her fingers wrap around the bed spindles.

The cool wood, solid in surface, jarred her from her sleep. She blinked into blackness at the smell of generic industrial detergent and warm man. Her body throbbed behind his hot hand. It was Ian. She didn't know how she knew, she just did. His mouth on her neck, his hand covering her breast and catching her nipple between his knuckles, it all washed her with unignorable need. With slight pressure, he pinched them, rolled them, made her pussy clench in answer, and moisture to slick her sex.

Ian's fingers danced over her pussy. Flora's palm twisted on the spindle as she held back a cry of desperation. She should go, now, before anything happened which couldn't be undone.

The wide tip of one of Ian's fingers curled into her body, parting the seam of her pussy. Each side of his trimmed nails lightly scraped and she couldn't help the way her hips moved so that his finger penetrated deep enough to flutter over her clitoris. Her belly tightened as breath

shuddered from her body.

Flora wanted him to take her hard, fast, immediately. She didn't want to feel every flicker of tender exploration. She wanted him to fuck her so she could move on already. Maybe even pretend she allowed it in desperate passion and sleep-induced stupidity instead of the crazy-lava lust fire he built in her.

A second finger parted her, stroking like the first, and again her hips betrayed her, thrusting up to meet his touch.

"Shh, honey, we've got all night."

"Fuck me. Stop taunting me and fuck me," she countered.

"No condom." He sounded taken aback, exasperated.

"You're torturing me, right?" she asked, her voice cracking.

"Not yet, baby. When you're ready to slow down for some serious lovin', then we'll torture every inch of your naked body. Since you're looking for a quick orgasm, I suggest you hold that bed frame a lot tighter."

His hips flexed against her ass as his arms tightened around her, until she felt like he held her in a hot-blooded steel cage. Ian's large hand devoured her smaller breast and commanded obedience from her nipples until they were puffy, distended, and sore in ways that had her grinding backwards against his cock just as furiously as she chased his fingers.

He pinned her, his cock at her back, his fingers plunging deep inside her while his thumb flattened on her clit. With each buck of his hips, her clit pounded against his thumb mercilessly while his fingers invaded her body and roped her mind with fraying cords to that one demanding succubus of orgasm.

Flora's slick palms rubbed rhythmically in squeaking protest on the spindles. Still trapped on her side, he fucked her with forceful enthusiasm, sliding between her ass cheeks with the benefit of sweat and pre-cum.

Her pussy stung, throbbed, wept. His fingers hooked inside her to find the place even the damn *Beastmaster* hadn't been able to locate. Ian squeezed her nipple with the same punishing metronome of rocking pleasure until finally, finally Flora was drop kicked over the end zone, her own hoarse yell drowning out the clank of wood headboard on plaster wall as orgasm folded in on itself deep in her belly and exploded outward.

Sparks streaked through her vision. Ian stiffened behind her. His subtle flexes, muffled

shout, and delivery of hot musky cum on her lower back provided the final impetus as her pussy milked his fingers in selfish possession.

Ian's breath puffed thickly at her ear. Her fingers dropped their talisman spindles as exhaustion claimed her into sleep.

Chapter Five

Ian cautiously reached for the tissue by the bed and cleaned Flora's back before he cleaned himself. He'd wanted to savor her. Her skin had been as satiny as he'd imagined, and her scent a thousand times more hauntingly seductive in full arousal. Next time, he'd taste her. They could slow down and enjoy it more. He'd watched her body transition from languid desire to sharply tuned arousal, and ultimately, to the breaking and shivering of her body as it crested and shattered with fulfillment.

He tucked her closer against his chest, feeling the familiar texture of football jersey. Ian smiled and reached for the phone by the box of tissues. Dragging it to his hip, he found the zero and dialed it for the front desk.

"This is room 1104. Please have someone bring up some condoms."

He didn't wait for the answer. They'd deliver. Placing the phone back, careful not to jostle Flora while she slept, he then eased back against the pillows. Once the condoms got here, he'd wake her up the right way, he thought smiling.

Ian gave the concierge five minutes before he slipped from the bed and crossed to the door of the suite. His hand hovered over the closed security latch. He traced it thoughtfully. A quiet tapping took him from his thoughts as he unhinged the latch and opened the door just far enough to reach out and quickly jot his signature on the tab for payment and tip.

"Thanks," he said, taking the elaborately decorated gift bag. He shot the man a questioning glance.

"Discretion."

Ian nodded, thanked him again, and shut the door, re-latching it as he pivoted and walked quickly back to the bedroom. Reaching in, he blindly grabbed a handful of individually wrapped condoms and put them within arm length of the bed. One, he reserved.

His cock already raged hard and ready. Anticipation tightened his gut and quickened his

breath. Flora Harper was a woman he could fuck indefinitely. He pushed aside the niggle of guilt which questioned his motives. Ian wanted her. It was plain and simple. Bobby might have an agenda, and Ian had agreed to help him, but this night was all about Ian and Flora finishing what they had started.

The attraction was real. Business or pleasure didn't separate in his mind. Bobby wanted him to watch her. Hell, he'd watch her all right. He'd watch her fuck him. He'd watch her writhe when he took her with his mouth. He'd watch her cold-shouldered resolve weaken before the onslaught of ecstasy and he'd bring her there. He wouldn't quit watching her until she had been satisfied and she wanted nothing more than to satisfy him in return.

His balls drew up at the thought of her pleading for his cum. And he'd fuck her slow. She wouldn't have a say in the matter this time.

With a wicked smile, he took his jeans off the back of the chair and pulled the leather belt from the loops. Flora lay on her back. Ian took her hands over her head to the spindles. She'd liked that last time, so he did it again, loosely keeping her wrists in place with belt leather woven through the spindles.

She mumbled in her sleep and tugged at the leather. Ian drew back the sheets, pleased to see his jersey had twisted around her waist and left her sweet pussy open to his view. He climbed into bed beside her and caressed her exposed belly.

"Flora, sweetheart, wake up."

He untwisted his jersey and lifted the hem to under her chin. He could barely make out the pale swells in the darkness. Ian rolled, clicked the lap to its lowest light setting.

"That's better," he murmured, dragging his fingertips up her sternum then brushing them back and forth down one swell and up the other. He sighed happily as he sank down to taste one raspberry tip.

It pebbled against his tongue. It had to be sore after the treatment she'd demanded. Ian kissed it, flicked the tip with his tongue, pressed it between his lips as he playfully enjoyed her.

Flora wiggled.

"You're bound to the headboard," he told her conversationally. Not wanting her to wake up afraid, he thought it better to let her know.

She gasped, tugged enough that her breast jiggled delightfully against his lips.

"You smell good. You feel good. Christ you even taste good," he said.

“What am I doing here?” she asked sharply.

“Getting laid. I have to say, I didn’t expect you to appear in my bed at two a.m., but I’m glad you did.”

“Appear?” Flora stiffened.

“Sneak in, surprise me, show up, whatever.” He glanced up. Flora visibly relaxed and Ian cupped her breast, holding it as he sucked deeply on her nipple.

“I don’t sleep with players,” she gasped.

He came off her nipple with a dull pop. “You were definitely sleeping. You were also definitely snoring just a little—it’s kinda cute, actually—and you also know how to use a bed when you aren’t sleeping,” he said smiling. “You like it a little rough, but I can work with that.”

Ian released her breast. Flattening his hand between her swells, he dragged it down, twisting his wrist until his fingers touched the top of her pubis.

“It was a mistake,” she said flatly.

“I’d believe that a little easier if you weren’t already spreading your legs for me to touch you.”

“I’m sore.”

“I’ll be gentle,” he countered. “I thought we’d dial it down a bit this time, enjoy it.”

“Maybe I don’t like it slow. Maybe I just want your cock inside me.”

Ian didn’t believe it. She looked nervous, but not scared. Already her legs had fallen open, and though he hadn’t made a move toward her pussy, he could feel the unconscious tilts of her pelvis as she tried to maneuver his hand in that direction.

“Shocking language,” he said, giving her mound a gentle slap.

Flora’s eyes widened. She bit her bottom lip.

He caught the nuances easily. Ian cocked his brows. “You liked that.”

She shook her head.

“Yes, you did.” He brought his face close to hers, watched her eyes dilate and her teeth release its delectable catch. Ian gave her pussy another soft slap, “Naughty girl, Flora, sneaking in to a man’s bedroom while he’s sleeping.”

Air rushed through her lips. Her cheeks flushed hotly. “Again,” she whispered.

Flora fought the plea. What the hell? She *liked* being in control. She hated the idea of any

man using sex as a weapon, yet here she was, asking for him to slap her pussy—and it felt damn good!

He didn't smack it hard enough to hurt her, just hard enough to jiggle her tender clitoris. The deliciously rough treatment he'd given her before made the bud that much more sensitive to each sudden jolt on the surrounding flesh.

Ian seemed to understand what she needed and he forcefully tapped her, gave her a firm rub, and swatted her again.

She cried out as her body clenched and her channel shivered near orgasm. "More."

"Say please."

"More, please."

A couple more swats and she convulsed. God, how humiliating! She had to be the easiest lay in the universe, as well as the stupidest. Then his lips touched hers, soothed her abused bottom lip from where she'd bitten it. His fingers tickled across her pussy, petting her sweetly as though he thought there were nothing strange about slapping a woman's mound and bringing her off.

She didn't understand it, how could *he*?

"Well done," he murmured.

His word soothed her embarrassment and still she wanted to give him a stinging retort for his patronizing words—would have if he had actually sounded patronizing delivering them. Instead he sounded pleased, impressed, awed, and the fuck of it was it completely turned her on.

The heaven of his lips left hers and she dared to look at him. His gaze boldly, longingly caressed her body as he shifted positions and eased between her legs.

"Yes," she said, relieved he'd finally pound her into oblivion. She wanted to forget her little tour on the deviant side of twisted. Preferably with an impressive cock buried deep inside and doing things her *Beastmaster* couldn't.

But he didn't lower himself to her. He scooted down her body, wiggling his eyebrows and sending her a crooked grin.

"You aren't," she said. Oh fuck, he was. He wanted to go down on her? She never came when guys did that. It was awkward for everyone. She'd feel like she should moan. He'd get a tongue sprain and be annoyed with her for not screaming with pleasure after two minutes of slobbering...

Ian found his place between her legs and inhaled sharply. “I love the smell of wet pussy in the morning.”

As though to prove the hour, the alarm went off. A lull of soft rock music distracted her enough to pay that instant of attention to the radio alarm clock, forgetting to discourage Ian.

Wet and ticklish, he painted the seam of her pussy with one long swipe of his tongue. For the second time, she found her heart skipping in surprise.

“Oh, fuck.” Of course he’d be good at that, too. At least if she didn’t come she’d have fun going along for the ride.

“Eventually,” he agreed.

Ian pushed her thighs out to the side, using his wide athletic shoulders to keep her legs open. She could have raised them away, but her spread body with him at the center excited her.

“Mm, pretty.”

He blew cool air over her, then tucked his hands under her ass to lift her hips.

This isn’t going to work, she thought.

Full facial contact stole her ability to think. He nuzzled her, licked her, ate at her. No tentative licks and suckles. No half-hearted I’ll-do-you-then-you-do-me attempts. Ian feasted on her.

Flora freed one hand and clung to the leather anyway, not wanting him to know she could stop him but had chosen not to.

His lips found her throbbing clit and closed on it as his whiskered cheeks rested, teasing points all along her inner labia. The tiny hairs tormented her pouting folds—rough male reminders on her slick feminine folds that he alone controlled her state of mind.

She’d never been out of control before, never allowed it. But with him, like this, she simply held on and rode out the storm, taking it and loving every minute of his possession.

Her body shook. Her gasps caught, held, shuddered and caught again as he drew every nerve tighter and tighter. Her consciousness turned in on itself. Far beyond the normal glaze when she tried to mentally reach for pleasure, this time every thought swirled to one single vortex of sensation, a black recess of writhing ecstasy.

Flora screamed, hearing the sound of her voice almost outside herself. Panting, she came slowly back down with the subtle licks and praising murmurs muttered against her cunt. Her channel shivered in aftershocks of delight.

Ian flattened his tongue on her clit, massaging it and catching his teeth at the top of her parted pussy. She stared down the length of her body at him in amazement. He chuckled, the sound vibrating on beard-stung flesh in such a way that her body squeezed.

“I knew you’d taste good,” he murmured, breaking away from his oral play-thing to rise up and pull her nipple deep into his mouth, burying his face against her there too. His beard scraped, different but still pleasurable. He was slick with her juices and seemed to enjoy rubbing his chin on her.

“I like the stubble,” she said, feeling stupidly out of her element. She sounded like her twin, shy and filled with awe, not at all like herself.

Ian popped off her breast, rubbed his chin on the bud he’d just held in his mouth. Flora arched into it with a soft cry.

“I never figured you for a pain junkie.”

“I’m not. I just can’t seem—I just want more—” *Shit!* She really had to quit channeling her sexually insecure sister.

Ian moved higher, scrubbing his face into her neck and jaw. Flora giggled and squirmed to get away from the ticklish play, yet fisted her free hand in his hair to hold him close.

“Oh God, I’m going to smell like pussy,” Flora laughed.

Ian smiled down on her, his thumb stroking her jaw where stubble had left a slight burn. “*Shaved* pussy.”

She swatted his shoulder.

“Stay right here. I’ll take care of that.” He hopped up, handed her a condom, which she took. He whistled tunelessly as he walked toward the bathroom.

She’d caught the barest glimpse of bobbing cock as he’d turned. Now clenching and unclenching ass captivated her attention as her eyes searched between his thighs for a shadow of his sack. Her mouth practically watered for the chance to taste him.

“Do you need me to hand you the phone?” he called from the connecting room.

“Why would I need that?” she asked. She craned her neck, smiled when Ian’s cock head entered her view in the small wedge of bathroom she could see.

“It’s after nine. Won’t somebody need to know you’re coming in late?”

“After nine?” Jerking to see the alarm clock, music still playing in the background, Flora felt the pit of her stomach drop. “Oh shit! Bobby scheduled a publicity meeting.”

The room shifted, taking on blue hues and warping the straight walls to a 4-D effect. A transportation hemmed in.

“No, no, no, not now!” she begged.

Unseeing, unfeeling, inanimate of life, her faery gift visually buckled the floor and Flora shot through the rippling air with nothing more than the belt still binding one wrist and Ian’s jersey tucked under her chin.

And then she was standing on cold tile floors in the elevator bay. The jersey dropped abruptly around her thighs and Flora’s bare toes curled under as the buzz of office noise hit her square in the chest. Beside her the bank of silver doors dinged. Flora hurriedly unbound her wrist and tightened Ian’s belt around her waist.

Her pussy clenched with empty need and yet Flora had no remaining doubt that she was definitely screwed.

Chapter Six

Flora didn't wait for the elevator door to open. She ran. Her bare feet slapped like child's tread on the frigid tiles and she drew up short to look both ways before dashing across the empty waiting room toward her office.

The buzz of voices grew louder and she ducked behind a partition to scope out the obstacles in her path.

"Sterling, what would you say is the driving unifier of the Gladiators," someone shouted.

"We're a team. We play as a team. We practice as a team. We behave like a team."

Bobby's distinct rasp fired back.

"How are they taking the addition of a Gimlet to the *team*?" Another person called over the top of the hum. The wall lit with a reflection of cameras flashing.

Only Bobby would hold a media blitz in the hallway outside his office. Conveniently for him, it blocked her from the safety of hers.

"Ms. Harper? Ms. Harper, is that you?"

Flora cringed, then pretended to search for something on the tile before standing. "Hi, Monica. I can't find my favorite pen. It's silver with onyx accents. Have you seen it?" She blinked expectantly at the receptionist who took in her outfit with unveiled curiosity.

"No." The woman made a sniffing sound, testing the air and gave Flora a peculiar look.

Flora harrumphed, ignoring the look on the attendant's face. She plopped her hands on her hips as she shot a forlorn look toward the ground. "Damn. I loved that pen. I could have sworn I dropped it here."

"Maybe they're where ever you left your shoes?"

"In my office? I looked there already." Flora smiled, straightened her hemline. "Well, if you see it..."

"You bet."

Flora bravely turned toward the hallway. She took a stabilizing breath.

“Um, Ms. Harper?”

“Yes, Monica?” She turned to face the smirking receptionist.

“You might want to go to the lady’s room.” Was Monica blushing?

Flora raised her chin, daring Monica to comment on anything remotely resembling the fact that Flora looked and smelled like sex. Monica missed it completely.

“I think you have *hand cream* on the back of your—uh, dress.”

Hand cream? Memories of Ian fucking the crevice of her ass and shooting onto her back—where the jersey had been bunched up. *Oh, hell.*

A man carrying a camera bag glanced at Flora and stumbled. “Hey, baby. Lookin’ good!” he said as he passed.

“Monica, I think I made a critical error in my wardrobe this morning.” If one camera guy was leaving the media swarm, others would be following. Getting caught in Ian Tate’s jersey with his cum all over her back wouldn’t be in the acceptable practices handbook. She just hoped Monica bought the story she was about to get fed.

“No kidding. You look like you just got laid by our new quarterback.”

“I knew I should have worn the black designer jeans,” Flora muttered, passing off her choice of attire with increasing hope. “Good thing I keep extra clothes in my office.”

“Yeah, but getting there is a little hopeless.”

“Monica, is it worth dinner at Luccio’s with Bing and Filsguard to hide me?”

The receptionist’s smile grew soft and dreamy. “How about dinner at Luccio’s with Coach Haler?”

Fifty year-old, salt and pepper at the temples, softening physique, Coach was definitely do-able. Apparently Monica thought so, too.

Flora smiled, brightly. “Done!” She dodged around the reception desk and ducked out of sight. Five minutes later, the media had buzzed past her hiding place and excitedly shuttled from elevator bay to cars until nothing but the quiet chirp of Monica’s phone filled the empty space.

“They’re gone,” Monica whispered.

“Sterling, too?”

Monica half stood and leaned over the desk to look down the hall. “Yep. He’s got his office door shut.”

Flora breathed a sigh of relief. “Thanks, Monica. I’m going to my office right now and calling Coach.”

The receptionist flushed and shoed her away. Flora dashed down the corridor to her office and wasted no time shutting herself in.

And that’s when she remembered. “Shit! I don’t have a change of clothes here.” She’d used them the time before her locker room appearance. It’s what had necessitated her call to Fauna. Flora had shoes—scads of them, but she couldn’t wear shoes in place of clothing all day.

“Fauna is going to kill me,” she said aloud, trudging over to her phone for the inevitable call. But first she had to set up Monica with Coach Haler.

* * * *

Ian slammed his foot on the brakes, squealing into the parking space closest to the entrance. His cock was an idiot. Though it had finally dropped to only semi erect, his balls throbbed painfully, no doubt having taken on a blue hue.

What the fuck was she playing at?

Seemed Bobby had been right all along. Flora Harper did nothing but tease. It made trying to get her into a compromising position much less of a problem to Ian’s conscience.

Ian muscled through the throng of reporters and opted for the stairs. He ignored the shouted questions and snapped pictures. With the silver doors spitting out more and more of them, he had no interest in sticking around to find out why or play nicey-nice.

He reached the reception desk just as Flora’s door clicked behind her. Oh, she was so going to pay for her little exit. He didn’t know how the hell she’d entered or exited his hotel room, with the flip bolt still in place, or how she’d managed to get to the office so fast, but he knew she’d be there. For him, it was a matter of yanking on his jeans as he walked out of the hotel suite and jogged over the scant distance to the stadium offices.

Had she wanted to get away from him so bad that appearing in public in his jersey, barefoot, and clearly well-fucked didn’t matter to her? From what Bobby said, she was more cautious than that. She teased but never got caught in a position compromising enough. Well, if the reporters had seen her, she’d have been on the wrong side of the camera for sure. He doubted they’d have left at all, preferring to camp outside her office until they got their story.

“Mr. Tate?” the receptionist called. “Mr. Tate! You can’t go in there right now.”

He ignored her, fixing Flora’s door as his target. He didn’t bother knocking either. She

hadn't bothered saying goodbye. He didn't owe her anything except perhaps a good, hard fuck.

Ian slammed the door behind him, flipped the bolt. Behind her desk, Flora stood with a phone at her ear and rapidly widening eyes.

"Ian, you can't be in here." Panic colored her voice.

"Why not? You're in here."

Her tight little nipples pebbled behind the glistening jersey fabric. She slapped the phone down and set her breasts to jiggling. Though she'd tied his leather belt around her slim waist causing the fabric to blouse, it also drew the hem of the shirt up high on her thighs. The inside of one had whisker burn.

Ian's annoyance shifted to lust.

His gaze trailed back up her body, lingering on the way the light reflected off her covered hips and the slightest rise over her mound. No one who looked at her would make the mistake of believing she wore any kind of bra or panties. She was barely clothed sex and her choice garment was *his* football jersey. He couldn't have made a more forceful claim on her if he'd tried.

"It's my office. I work here."

She gripped the side of her desk as he drew closer, his gaze tripping up to her distended nipples and the sheen of fabric which fluttered across her chest on every rushed intake of air. Flora was turned on. Knowing it turned him on.

Her hair, normally styled in artful abandon, appeared tossed, unbrushed in her haste to leave him. Evidence of his whiskered ardor marked her delicate neck and slim jaw with redness, and her lips still had the puffiness of thorough kissing. She licked them and he barely restrained his appreciative groan.

"Considering your normal discretion—I'm assuming you weren't lying to me about never fraternizing with a player—I'm surprised you'd come to the office looking like my personal sex kitten complete with tagging," he said, gesturing to his jersey.

She bristled. "I have a job to do. Whether it's inconvenient timing or not, I have to do my job or the franchise loses money and you lose your job."

"Stopping at home first didn't occur to you?"

"It didn't seem to occur to you either since you showed up right after me."

Ian skirted her desk. "I don't know where you live. I do know where you work and the fact that you're considered something of an ice queen. Though," he said, turning her and pulling

her chest against his. “You sure weren’t an ice queen last night.”

Flora licked her lips. “You need to go.”

“You left before we finished.”

“We finished,” she said, not too convincingly.

“Did we?” His voice came huskily. “I know you *finished*, but I was just getting started. Tell me you don’t want what I want.”

“I don’t—”

She broke off when Ian nudged his pelvis against hers. A small sound escaped her and Ian thought it was probably the sexiest non-admission he’d heard. She wanted it, him, badly. She just didn’t want to say the words. He cocked an eyebrow, giving her time to formulate her denial if she still thought to make one. His mamma had taught him never to interrupt a lady. If Flora’s glazed expression, her clutched fingers on his shirt, were any indication, Ian was being a very, very good boy while he waited for her answer.

“You don’t?” he prompted.

“I can’t.”

“I’m confident that you can. There isn’t a curve on your body, or an expression you give, or a mannerism to any of your silky movements that suggests you aren’t capable of fantastic sex.”

Ian’s hand stole down over her ass, lifted the hem as his play-roughened hands found her smooth cheeks. He kneaded them, dipped one hand lower to coast his middle finger against her pussy from behind.

Flora gasped, closed her eyes. Her face flushed as she lifted it to him.

Ian took her offering, kissing her with more tenderness than his brash words would have suggested he might. He wanted her to feel him, wanted to chip away at the wall she kept trying to put up between them, not because of Bobby and his agenda, but because of Ian’s ridiculous hunger for this woman.

He needed to know she could soften, possibly care about him when she didn’t seem to care about many people in the business. The Flora that melted in his arms, showed moments of vulnerability, was not the same Flora who out-bargained Bobby for players or blithely seduced and blackmailed. He couldn’t believe they’d be the same woman.

She tasted as dewy sweet as he remembered. Her breasts lifted with each breath to press

against him. With the same wordless cry as before, she lifted her leg to his waist, giving his inquisitive fingers full access to her moist folds. Who was seducing whom, he wondered briefly?

Her hand stole downward. The rasp of his zipper, the pop of his button and his cock sprang free right into her waiting hand.

He swept his tongue inside, unable to hold back and wanting to possess her the way he'd intended to before she'd run out.

"Is this a yes?" he asked, needing to hear her say the words.

"It's a definite maybe," she answered.

Ian withdrew his finger from petting her, brought his hands back up to her clothed hips. "Not good enough."

Flora pushed at his chest. Her gaze met his. She caught her bottom lip with her teeth and a suggestive smile dared him to give in first. Flora unbuckled the leather belt. She held it up, cocked her head to the side as though waiting for him to make the next move, then dropped it to the floor.

He couldn't move. What else would she do?

Flora's arms crossed in front of her as she captured the bottom of his jersey. She wiggled her hips a little and lazily dragged it upward over her head. She held it up the way she'd held the belt. Her smile grew wicked.

Ian's cock warred for the right to make this critical decision.

Pinched between thumb and forefinger, the jersey dangled. Flora released it and it snaked on the floor. She swiped a hand behind her, pushing her keyboard to the side, and hopped up onto the matted surface.

"What are you doing?" he asked stupidly.

"So you're saying you didn't get through school on an academic scholarship?"

"Watch it," he warned.

"No, you watch it," she said, her voice rolling over him in suggestive waves.

Leaning back on her hands, Flora opened her legs, letting her legs swing playfully. She was already wet for him.

Flora tossed her head, flinging her long dark hair back from her shoulders so that it spilled down her back, then casually raised one perfectly manicured hand to fondle her full, firm breast.

Ian took a long, deep breath. He rested his hands just inside her knees, keeping them open as he leaned in. He rubbed the side of her nose with his. “Three hundred pound men tackle me to astro-turf on a daily basis. I get cortisone shots into my knee and shoulder every couple of weeks and I’m used to living with pain. You can tease me all you want, Flora, but until I hear the words, my cock won’t get a formal introduction to your pussy.”

“Are you afraid I’ll cry rape?”

“Possibly. I’m well-versed in the reversal of intentions. Do you know how many players wind up with assault charges?” He was only half-teasing her, but if what Bobby said held any truth at all, Ian did have to be careful with this one, no matter how much he wanted her.

Flora’s hand left her breast and wrapped around his naked cock. She stroked him sensuously. He automatically flexed and thrust into her caress. At this rate, he was fighting a losing battle. She had to know it, too.

“Quite a few.”

“If you want me, you’ll need to be explicit,” he said. The more she refused to say it, the harder he stuck to his guns. Was there something to Bobby’s claim? Did she hope to get him on assault and blackmail him? And if he was even thinking this way, why the hell did he still want to fuck her and damn the consequences?

“Do you have a condom?”

Ian pulled one out of his pocket and held it up. There were more in there from the handful he’d grabbed when he’d found the bed empty and all he’d wanted to do if find her and punish her with the best sex of her life and swear she’d never have it again. Fully aware of the ego it took to think such things, he chalked it up to defensiveness. She’d left him. She’d been partially bound to his bed post, writhing with pleasure, waiting for him to come back to her and her taste still on his lips.

Flora took the condom from him, ripped it open, and rolled it over his aching dick. Then giving his pants a shove from where they barely clung to his hips, smiled when they crumpled to his ankles. He toed off his shoes and nudged the jeans away from his feet.

He’d been angry and yet grabbing a fist full of condoms and tracking her down to finish what they started made him not only stupid but uncharacteristically superficial. What was it about her that made him crazy to crack her shell, plant himself deep inside her heart where she couldn’t shake him free?

“Take off your shirt,” she commanded.

He wanted to affect her, change her, fundamentally alter her until she needed him beyond the façade of control she seemed to clothe herself with.

“You take it off,” he said, not sure if he meant the cloak of self-control or his remaining piece of clothing.

Flora sat up and dragged his shirt up his chest. Ian raised his arms over his head to help. She laughed as she wormed it up and over, one arm at a time.

“Want me, Flora.”

“I do,” she said, swallowing hard on the words.

He leaned over her again, brushed his lips across hers, plied her bottom lip between his and flicked the captured portion with his tongue. “How much?”

She sighed into his mouth. Wrapping her arms around his neck, she said, “I hate that I want you, Ian Tate. I hate that I’m dying to feel you inside me, but I do.”

“That’s all I needed, baby.”

Chapter Seven

Ian cupped her shoulders and pushed her backward in one swift movement. He sat on the edge of her chair, hooked her knees and pulled her forward forcefully parting her sex with his nose and mouth.

Surprised, aroused, she squawked at the rushed intimacy of his face in her pussy and the way her channel tightened instinctively. Heat raced through her veins and Flora's tummy flipped as Ian groaned against her clit.

"I can't get enough of your hot little cunt," he murmured.

Flora fisted her hands in his hair, holding him to her. She gasped for breath as his lips, tongue, whiskers drove her mad. Her legs trembled and she forgot to complain when his fingers entered her grasping pussy instead of his sheathed cock.

The strangled sounds coming from her weren't words. Her body buzzed, heated, begged for her in a way words would never express. Flora wanted this or she'd die.

His arms wrapped her thighs in an iron grip from underneath. Ian's hand curled over her hip as he roughly pulled her nether lips apart. Nothing hidden from him, he devoured her pussy. Cool air touched her wet flesh when he left one spot for another. Her cunt squeezed hungrily around his fingers. He added another to the thrusting duo and Flora saw colors streak across her vision.

"Oh, God, Ian!" She let go of him to touch her breasts, stroke, and roll her jutting nipples into tingling twins that mirrored the need Ian had stoked inside her.

Sharply, he hooked his fingers inside while his thumb rubbed the mouth of her opening, building fire upon fire. He backed off, giving her only that one handed stimulation as air touched her in every exposed part.

Her clit strained forward, she could feel the tiny nub as erect as it could get in its quest to find Ian's attention. Flora looked down the length of her body, watching him watch her, seeing

the way his lust-heated gaze darted from the way she tugged on her nipples to her open pussy inches from his face.

Ian sucked her clit, rhythmically.

Flora's hips tipped toward him as he splayed her legs as wide as they would go. She tossed her head from side to side. Orgasm closed in on her.

Suddenly, he pulled off, stood, and trapped her wrists to the desk. She protested, ground her hips up against his rigid cock. Orgasm shimmered so close!

"Don't come," he commanded.

"I want to."

"I said no."

She stared up at him, seeing the same half-crazed expression on his face that she knew she must share. Why was he stopping? "I was almost there."

A smile lifted his lips. "I know, baby."

Flora lifted her hips to his cock, grinding on him. If he wouldn't give it to her, she would give it to herself, damn him.

"I said, no, Flora. You aren't rushing it this time. You're going to take it slow if I have to drag this out all day."

Slow? What the fuck? She didn't fucking want slow. She wanted immediate release, damn it. "I don't want slow."

"No kidding," he said, panting. "Believe me, there's nothing I want more than to bury my cock inside you right now, but I'm not letting you hide from this."

"Who's hiding? I'm open for display across my desk, going against every principle I have about fucking a co-worker. I'm naked, and you've had my cunt attached to your lips for the past few minutes, driving me crazy. If the office doesn't know we're getting busy yet, then they're deaf."

"I'm not rushing this. I bet you're great at begging."

"What?" she screeched. "Hell no!"

"Hell yes."

"For the love of all things holy, fuck me, Ian." Flora's folds shivered against his latex covered rod. Her clit twinged happily as every breath throughout their discussion caused the smallest friction to tease it. His balls tickled her ass when she struggled, swaying against her in a

way that had her struggling more just to feel them bounce, feel the cock-heated latex brush against her clit.

“I will definitely do that.”

“Then what’s the problem? Do it now,” she pleaded. He’d put the pause button on her orgasm, but it was still within reach. Just a little more stimulation and she’d be golden.

“You’re gorgeous when you get pissed,” he said.

His lips hovered over hers. Flora craned her neck, boldly making contact. Ian settled his pelvis gently against her splayed body, seeming to take great care that he not hurt her as he pinned her down to keep her from moving against his throbbing penis.

It twitched, nestled in her folds, and they both groaned, sharing the sound in an open mouth kiss.

“You should see me when I’m pissed and wearing makeup,” she said.

“I have.”

“Oh, yeah.”

“I definitely prefer you unmade. It’s sexy as hell to see you undone and still begging for it,” he murmured.

His tight abs flattened on her belly, his ribs pressed hers almost painfully. The angle was wrong for her breasts to smash against his chest, yet her nipples grazed it, which tantalized her impossibly more.

Flora wrapped her legs around his waist. How was it that she could feel so close to him like this when she’d never felt this close to another lover, and she had yet to actually have intercourse with Ian?

He shook her to the soul. She craved whatever he would give her. She didn’t like it one bit. She should tell him to get off and go away. She should tell him she wasn’t interested and only wanted to see if he was a good fuck. What he did, this prolonging of sex, made her distinctly uncomfortable.

Flora didn’t do commitment. This felt way too much like it was headed in that direction. “If you don’t continue, I’ll finish myself off.”

“No you won’t. I won’t let you, remember? This is a joint showing of talents, and fucking you slowly is at the top of my play book.”

She thought she was ready. When Ian lifted off her, she wasn’t prepared for the way he

flipped her onto her stomach, grabbed her hips, and dragged her back until her feet touched the floor. The tip of his cock nudged her pussy and she couldn't help but tip her hips back to meet him. Ian slid in, stretching her as he filled her inch by loving inch, making her groan as his slow possession forced her to think about what they were doing.

It's why she liked fast fucks—why when she actually had sex, she liked the quick satisfaction. It didn't require thought. Consciously accepting her partner's length and girth got lost in the torrid moment until it ended and she could chalk him up as a nameless, inconsequential lay to be lost among other conquests.

Ian didn't allow her to categorize him like the others. Did he realize that making her feel every part of him as he entered her with painfully slow precision would make it impossible for her to lump him in with the others?

She gripped her desk and tried to block out the intimacy, but her thoughts coalesced on the differences, on the sensations unique to Ian being inside her which far surpassed the hurried couplings she'd had prior.

He reached the end of her channel and yet with a moderated roll of his hips, he pushed at the firm muscles making up her cervix. She felt its solid resistance against his cockhead and her body's slight muscular tremble as nerves she'd never given much thought to *woke*.

"Do you feel me?" he murmured, holding still inside her. "I feel you, Flora. Your body is taking mine, adjusting, responding."

He rolled his hips and her body's muscular resistance quaked with every intimate nerve, filling her belly and chest with strange, tight fluttering. Ian smoothed his hand down her spine, rocked his hips liquidly against her ass. Another groan tore from her throat where she'd been holding it captive since he first entered her.

Ian pulled out of her just as slowly as he'd entered. Where he'd stretched, now felt hollow. Where his head had nudged, now felt the pathetic lack of stimulation. He left her body at a creeping pace. Flora's moan this time had nothing to do with unspeakable pleasure and everything to do with acute loss.

Moisture gathered in her eyes as she fought the urge to cry. Ian was breaking her. How would she ever be with a man again and not remember this moment when sex became a dance of need, fulfillment, desire, and sorrow. Her body ached for him to fill her.

She refused to ask, bit her lip to keep the plea from spilling forth.

She nearly sobbed when his cock parted her folds in his unhurried devastation to her sexual defenses. He reached her center, pushing into the springy hold and setting her nerves into a riot of immeasurable bliss.

“Ian, please,” she begged, unable to stop herself.

He reached around and between her legs. Sliding his fingers on either side of her clitoris, his touch was studiously distant from where she wanted it, but close enough to curl her toes with the possibility that it would take her to orgasm.

Ian set up a measured pace, moving in and out of her grasping pussy while loosely cradling her desperate nub. Too far, too close, too slow, not slow enough, he kept her just on the wrong side of the peak she yearned for. She hated what he made her feel. She loved it with every fiber of her being. She wanted more, faster. She wanted his pace to take a more agonizing delay.

Flora rubbed her eyes and cheeks on her wrist when the moisture from her unconscious tears distracted her.

His fingers closed in on her clit, one pad stealing over the swollen nub. She gasped, ground her hips backward meeting his soul-stealing thrusts. Her breath quickened as she sensed the climax nearing. Ian gave her three hard, fast thrusts, pounding her pussy and squeezing her clit between his fingers.

The burn summoned her toward the end, called her like a siren.

Ian pulled out of her.

“Ian, goddamn it!”

He pressed a soft trail of kisses down her spine. “Not yet, baby.”

Flora felt like crying. She’d been so close. She wanted it more than she wanted her next breath. Her legs trembled with a combination of fatigue and sensory overload.

He knelt behind her and kissed her inner thighs, her ass, her pussy. He stood and helped her upright, lifted her and carried her to the ottoman bench in front of the seating area.

She cuddled into his arms feeling simultaneously conquered and adored. It made no sense, yet giddily, she wanted to know what came next. He set her down on her back as though she were precious. Brushing the hair off her forehead, he bent and kissed the tip of her nose.

“I want to see you when you come.”

Her pussy throbbed. Her body still shimmered with need. She wanted to tell him to quit teasing her, but her pride still rose up between them.

“I’m not just a fuck,” he said, a small smile touching his lips.

She blinked back the affect his words had on her, the same she’d been trying to deny though she knew it to be true. Ian Tate would never be just a fuck. He’d seen to that as though he’d read her mind and set out to prove a point.

His gaze held hers until she felt compelled to nod minutely.

Ian’s chest relaxed with her nod. Getting her to agree, however superficially, was half the battle. If she could agree, she might come to believe it. He didn’t think she believed it yet.

He wanted her. He ached with wanting her. Holding back the building tension as her body gloved his cock, milked him, clung to his length with greedy demand. Every internal clench held him as though it were the sexual equivalent of a gasp—shocked, desperate to keep the sensation where it was, but unable to resist the reflexes of her body’s demand.

His need mirrored hers. He just had to keep it under wraps. If he let up, gave Flora one iota of relief, she’d take back the control he’d been systematically stripping from her. Wound up so tight he could hear her springs creaking, Flora was a woman who demanded things be done her way. And as long as they were, no man would actually touch her.

It was simple.

Flora rushed sex. She had it and moved on to the next item on her agenda. If he hoped to get a glimpse of the woman behind the order, he had to change her pattern, slow her down, make her live in the moment.

“Kiss me,” he said.

Her eyes darted between his. Her lips alternately pressed and relaxed as though she were debating the wisdom of his request, yet found no fault in it.

Ian trailed his fingers from her shoulder, over her breast to her waist and the flair of her hips. She licked her lips and arched to kiss him. He found himself smiling at the awkward tentative nature of it after the way she’d twisted in unabashed urgency as he fed on her pussy.

He’d given her too much time to think. That would have to change.

Reaching between her legs, he unerringly found her clit and pinched. “I said kiss me.”

Breath exploded from her as she grabbed his face between her hands and yanked him to her. “Do it again.”

God, why couldn’t she just do as she was told? Why did everything have to be a

competition? Her body trembled visibly with need, and still she fought him over a kiss.

Ian's balls ached. The condom was plastered to his cockhead with the abundance of pre-cum leaking from his dick. He wanted nothing more than to plunge in and out of her slick, grasping heat and lose himself to satisfaction streaking up his shaft and emptying his balls.

Flora made him crazy.

"Kiss me."

She hesitated only a moment before she obeyed. Flora crushed her mouth against his with bruising force. Ian withdrew his hand and she whimpered. Her breath fluttered on his lips before taking a gentler approach.

He cupped her mound as encouragement.

Flora's tongue flicked out, tasting the center of his upper lip then fusing their mouths in easy supplication.

Petting her curls, he indirectly coaxed her to continue.

She was a fast learner. Her lips parted beneath his, and he followed suit, loving the slide of her tender mouth on his. Their tongues touched, greeted each other flirtatiously. His circled the tip of hers. When her fingers speared his hair, using it to pull him closer without the anxious rush she'd been showing, he groaned.

She welcomed him to taste her, explore her mouth with the same thorough speed he'd adopted to their lovemaking. Moisture cooled on his fingertips as he felt the evidence that she was as aroused as he was. He wanted to touch her, needed to hear her gasp again.

Ian traced the seam of her pussy, pushed inside and pinched her clit. The shuddering breath and slight quiver of her mouth nearly stripped his self-control. Flora rested on the ottoman, staring up into his eyes.

"Please, Ian. Please take me."

The request, so sweetly uttered, came with great difficulty. The woman under him, stripped of clothing and pride, didn't seem like the conniving blackmailing bitch Bobby insisted she was. Flora was merely a woman who trusted her satisfaction to a man for the first time in a long time—a virgin in giving herself over to a man's control.

She wanted what he could give her, and damn if it wasn't a total fucking turn on.

"I'm not taking you anywhere I'm not going, too," he murmured, peppering kissed on her cheekbone, her jaw, her winging collarbone. His thumb rolled over her clit and he slid two

fingers into her channel.

“Do you want me to beg? I’ll beg. Tell me what you want,” she said, nearly frantic.

“I won’t fuck you, or take you, or make you take me. This isn’t sex the way you want it to be. Not this time, beautiful. This,” he said at her nipple, letting the heat of his words wash over and pucker the already wrinkled flesh. He flicked his tongue out to tease it further. “This is making love and it’s a joint activity. We can fuck some other time.”

His mouth closed on her breast as he pumped his fingers inside her and then dragged his cunt-wetted fingers through her folds, giving her clitoris one last pinch.

She clawed at his back. “Yes, please. Make love to me,” she begged.

He glanced up, seeing the sheen of tears at the outer corners of her eyes. His chest tightened at the beauty of her capitulation. Ian withdrew his hand. Kneeling between her legs, he tucked his hands under her arms and lifted her upright. He sat her on his waiting, throbbing cock, parting his thighs to spread her wide.

Flora’s legs encircled his hips and she clung to his shoulders. He caught her by the hips, rocking her and lifting her as she took him, sank down his length, her head thrown back as though she couldn’t contain the scope of her pleasure.

His balls drew up and he willed himself to hold off. “You feel amazing.” Taking advantage of her exposed neck, Ian dragged his lips up the slim column of her throat. He found a quick tattooing pulse and grazed his teeth there before kissing it.

Flora rose and fell, shuddering each time he filled her. Chills pooled at the base of his spine. He wouldn’t be able to hold back much longer. She picked up speed, rolled her hips when she pulled up to hit a spot only she could find but managed to make him crazy with need, too.

“Open your eyes,” he commanded.

When she didn’t, he buried his hand in the hair at the back of her skull and forced her head up while trapping her on the downward stroke with the his other arm around her waist.

“Open them.”

Her brow furrowed but she opened them. He stared into the tawny depths nearly eclipsed by dilated pupils. He lifted their bodies, taking their weight as he kneeled. He kept her in place, hand in her hair and making her connect with her eyes.

Sure he had her attention and about to lose the battle of wills, he pistoned his hips, flexing and thrusting with renewed vigor. Slow no longer cut it for either of them.

Her legs tightened around him. The walls of her sex clamped hard as the first quakes of orgasm began. He grunted, slamming their bodies together.

Flora's cries rose in pitch, carried on breathy gasps. Her eyes glazed over and her brows climbed her forehead. His gaze traced the perfect "O" formed by plump lips and he wondered fleetingly how it would feel to have that mouth sucking him off.

"Are you with me?" he grunted. Sweat trickled down his spine, rolled between his ass cheeks.

"Yes," she panted. "Yes. Yes."

Ian popped his hips up, striking the back of her channel. Flora bit down on her bottom lip, stifling her scream as she came and came, milking his cock and wringing an answering orgasm out of him. As though a dam burst, his balls squeezed hard, shooting cum up his cock and emptying him in sharp thick spurts. Her sweet cunt continued to flex in subtle aftershocks.

Flora dropped her face to his neck, cuddling against him.

Ian lowered them both to the ottoman, careful to settle her in his arms while staying linked. "Thank you for coming with me," he murmured at her temple.

Flora shook her head against his neck ever so slightly and held him closer. "I didn't know," she said.

"What didn't you know, sweetheart?"

"I didn't know it could be like that."

He hadn't either. One thing he did know was that he had to get to the bottom of why Bobby wanted her compromised. He trusted his uncle, but that didn't mean his information wasn't wrong. Yet the passionate, closed woman he'd just climbed to the stars with could very well be hiding something more than her heart.

Ian ducked his head. He breathed in the slight cinnamon and berry fragrance at the nape of her neck, rubbed his cheek along the top of her shoulder, then placed a kiss on Flora's supple honeyed skin. Would he ever get enough of her?

"We should get dressed," he said, kissed a spot next to the first.

"Done with me all ready?" she teased.

"Not even close." He didn't know if that admission was a blessing or a curse. Guilty or not, Flora Harper would be impossible to root out of his system. What the fuck had he just done?

Chapter Eight

What the fuck had she just done? Begged a man to take her? In her *office*? The schedule she kept meant she'd overlooked several appointments for their rendezvous. She wouldn't have an explanation for it and she'd acted completely out of character to take such an unprofessional risk.

At what cost?

"Ian," she began, trying to carefully voice her concerns. She sat up. His hand moved to her hip, stroked the protruding bone absently. "Why did you follow me here?"

"What?" he asked, laughing as he, too, sat.

Flora stood, walked casually to where they'd left their clothes. She could practically feel his gaze moving over her bare body, lingering on her ass. Her pussy tingled. From his angle, he could probably see the curls shadowed between her upper thighs with each step away from him.

She crouched to swipe up the jersey. No reason to give him more of a show until she knew what he was about. She faced him, pulled the shirt over her head, and let the material fall into place.

"You left things unfinished," he answered.

"You pursued me for a fuck?" She cocked a brow and ambled over to him, shaking out the belt and cinching it as she went.

He looked amazing naked. Spread out for her benefit, he rested back on one elbow as a knowing smile tugged at his lips. All lean muscle mass and sinew, Ian's sculpted form glistened from post-coital afterglow. His impressive cock rested on his thigh. No, it didn't rest, it *lounged*. Sprawled with ownership and confident it had recently brought someone pleasure. Could a cock be cocky? His darker-toned sack cuddled the base of his restful shaft. They too glistened but she was the cause of that.

She motioned to the tissue box by the couch and he reluctantly got up to take care of the

translucent sky-blue condom. “I didn’t actually formulate a coherent thought beyond wondering where you had gone.”

He dropped the tissues and condom in a waste basket by the sidebar and washed his hands in the small sink. Leaning back against the bar with his ankles crossed and his hands propped behind him on the edge of the countertop, he looked completely comfortable in his skin.

And why wouldn’t he be? Ian Tate had the body of a God and the skill to back up the claim.

“But you *did* follow me here. Were you angry because you felt I owed you something?”

Some unknowable emotion flashed across his features. The sunny, relaxed expression turned less so and more watchful. “What do you mean?”

Flora stopped in front of him. She traced a manicured nail up the center of his sack. “I mean, usually when a player wants to fuck me, it’s because he has an ulterior motive. Do *you*?”

“I think I’m offended.”

“It’s a legitimate question for a woman in my position.”

He snorted, pushed up from the bar and walked past her. “No ulterior motive, Ms. Harper. I just think you are a fine piece of ass and I wanted to *tap that*.”

She swallowed hard, trying to compose her features into one of mild amusement before she faced him again. When she turned, she saw that Ian had on his jeans and was reaching for his shirt.

“Don’t bullshit me. I deserve an honest answer,” she said.

Ian barely paused to look at her as he roughly tucked in his shirt, closed and belted his pants. He ran a hand through his hair. The short strands barely stirred from position. “I like you. You interest me. It’s a boy-girl thing. You seemed to like me, too, so I thought I’d take a chance. Was I wrong?”

“No.”

He came to her, drawing her into his arms. “Good.”

“It’s awkward and completely against policy.”

“We’ll deal with stuff as it comes up,” he said, shrugging. “It doesn’t have to be awkward.”

“You’ll have to sneak out.”

He winked. “The old quarterback sneak it is.”

“That was awful.”

Ian took her hand and led her to the door where he flipped the latch open. “When can I see you again?”

“Thanks to Bobby, you’re pretty much going to see me every day.”

“I mean,” he said, murmuring huskily. “When do I get to *see* you again?”

Anticipation knotted her stomach. She hadn’t felt this giddy since grade school and she knew her smile went from ear to ear. “Ah! You mean *see* me,” she reiterated, using his impromptu code word for *fuck*.

“Uh huh.” He nuzzled her neck, reached for the hem of his jersey and began tugging it up only to reach beneath and massage her ass.

“If you aren’t careful, it will be sooner than you think.”

“Fine by me.”

“I have a job to do,” she reminded. He nibbled her neck and goose bumps tracked over her body. “I know. If you find out where I live, I’ll let you in and you can *see* me all night long.”

“Can’t I just ask you where you live?”

“That’s cheating. So I guess we’ll find out how much you want to *see* me.”

He ground his hips forward. Already hard, his cock teased her barely covered pussy. “I have time for a look-see now.”

She giggled. She hated gigglers, but she actually giggled. “I don’t.”

“Harper!” Bobby Sterling bellowed. “Well, shit!”

Flora felt the hot-cold wash of fear. She hadn’t heard the door open! “Sterling, get the fuck out of my office.” Abruptly, she pushed Ian away and straightened the jersey. Folding her arms across her chest gave her some security that he wouldn’t see how undressed she actually was under Ian’s shirt.

Bobby laughed gleefully. “Fantastic! Fucking fantastic.” He shut the door behind him as though he were in on their secret. He clapped Ian on the back. “Where is it?”

“No, Bobby, not now,” he muttered.

“Do you mind?” she snapped at their intruder.

“Not at all. Just go ahead and give me the footage and I’ll get out of your hair,” Bobby said.

His eyes lit with unfriendly joy. Flora glanced from him to Ian, noted the way Ian’s teeth

ground together and the slashes of color that marked his cheekbones. Embarrassment? Shame? What was that look?

“Why would Ian have practice footage?” she asked. “Don’t the coaches keep that for weekly review?”

“Let it go, Flora,” Ian said, his voice tight.

“So?” Bobby asked again. “You two fucked, right? She sure as hell looks like she’s been mounted,” he added.

His laugh made her stomach shift uneasily. “Ian?”

Bobby clapped him on the shoulder, pounding it in some strange man-ritual of accolade. Ian tried to shrug him off, shoved him toward the door. “I’ll talk to you later.”

“No,” Flora said, her voice ringing out clear and far bolder than she felt. She caught the door with the tips of her fingers and slammed it. If there was a confession to be made, hell would freeze over before she let the office hear it.

The pit of her stomach went sour. Her ears roared and her mouth went dry. There was more to this exchange and she instinctively knew she had to hear it. “What footage?”

“Flora, it’s nothing,” Ian promised.

“That’s right, Harper, nothing for you to concern yourself with. *Yet.*”

“What’s he talking about?” She directed the question at Ian, ignoring Sterling all together.

“She’s good, right? Tight ass, perky tits, she had to be good.”

“Shut the fuck, up, Uncle Bobby.”

“Uncle? Oh, God.” Her temples throbbed. “No wonder you keep pushing him on me. Nepotism at its best.”

“It’s not like that,” Ian insisted.

“Of course it isn’t, Harper.” He smacked Ian as though he hadn’t already boy-clubbed him enough. “I couldn’t believe it when you scored a kiss on your first down, but *shit*, Ian, you fucked her and it isn’t even half-time!”

“Bobby!” Ian shouted.

“That’s right, Ice Princess, my boy set out to seduce you and we got it all on tape. Guess you’ll be offering to suck my dick to get it back. Won’t Deeks be pleased with my ass?” Bobby boasted.

Flora thought she might be sick. All that tenderness, the calculated plowing of her body until she wept for the sensations he created, all her begging and eagerness to take Ian's cock again and again—was orchestrated?

“God, I’m such a moron,” she whispered. “Get out.”

“Bobby, fuck off! Flora, I never filmed you.”

“You were going to.”

“Bobby asked me to—”

“—fuck me? Get in my pants and post video footage on UWatch.com? Ruin me? Nice. Classy. Well done, you *giant prick!*” she shouted, enunciating the last two words individually.

“Flora. Shit. This is all going wrong,” Ian ground out in apparent frustration.

“Did you or didn’t you agree to screw me for Bobby?” she demanded.

“No,” Ian insisted.

“He’s telling the truth. I only asked him to…” Bobby started out helpfully.

Ian glared at him.

“To?” she pressed.

“Put you in a compromising position,” Bobby confessed.

“And?” she asked.

“To make sure I got it on film,” Ian finished.

“Then there is no way this is going to go well, you asshat! Get out!”

* * * *

“Wow, you look like warmed over shit,” Dill Harper said five hours later.

“Thanks. I love you, too, big brother,” Flora grouched.

“You should have seen her when I first got to her office.” Fauna grinned, apparently pleased that she wasn’t the center of this sibling snark session.

“Why?” he asked. “Where did she transport this time?”

Flora rolled her eyes. Of course he would know it all had to do with the damn curse. Stupid faeries and their tricks—couldn’t even give her a magical gift that worked. No receipt, no exchange. She leaned on the breakfast bar knowing that Fauna was dying to tell him and for once, being okay with that. Maybe Dill would offer to take down Ian Tate as a matter of family honor.

“The *where* isn’t the problem,” Fauna sang.

“Uh oh. Do I want to know?”

“I transported to the office wearing nothing but Ian Tate’s jersey and his belt,” Flora interjected.

Dill laughed loudly.

“You forgot to mention you were wearing his whisker burn and cum, too,” Fauna said, grinning. A blush darkened her cheeks.

“No shit? You and Tate? Won’t you get fired for that?” Dill asked.

“Yes.” And the most miserable part wasn’t the job loss. It was the hit to her dignity. That’s why she hurt deep inside, her dignity had been bruised. *Sure, keep working that angle, Flora.*

Dill and Fauna grew silent. They’d all suffered the effects of faery magic and knew when silence was the best remedy.

Flora swirled her mother’s lace doily on the cool marble surface. A hot pink rose, embroidered at its center, spun dizzily. The kitchen clock ticked, its ancient workings grinding gears as they prepared to jump the minute hand forward. Dad had fixed that clock, had spread it out on the dining room table as he cleaned gears and reassembled it, nearly every summer of her childhood until it worked. It still sounded rough.

She closed her eyes, absorbed the familiar sounds of her childhood home. Rose potpourri tickled her nostrils and she could make out the supporting ticks of other clocks throughout the first floor. They were hallmarks of her parents. If she opened her eyes again, she’d see lace and various shades of pink roses over-decorating every inch of usable space. It was as though her parents’ hobbies competed with each other. It might even be true if they weren’t so disgustingly, drippingly in love with one another.

“So Mom and her sex party. What’s the latest excuse for that, again?” Flora asked, abruptly opening her eyes on the subject change.

“Not sure,” Dill said. “She said something about Joe and Sage needing toys for their post-commitment ceremony vacation, but I also heard her tell Willow that Dad broke his cockring.”

Flora and Fauna groaned.

“Sage and Willow can handle themselves,” Fauna said, commenting on the two siblings not present. “Mom lives to shock us. We all know the toys are for her and Dad.”

“So, you going to be okay, or do I have to go kick some ass?” Dill asked.

The random flip-flopping of subjects didn't faze her. She and her siblings didn't need explanations to follow the tangents typical of them. It's why she'd asked Fauna to take her to the house after she'd called for clothing. No matter what they said, her family always made sense. She couldn't say the same about Ian.

Between him and Bobby, they'd given her enough clues and admissions that while she understood that she'd been used, she didn't know why. She couldn't make sense of it.

Flora didn't know what she'd been expecting. Coming home wouldn't suddenly translate the confusion into substance. Still, coming home made her feel a little less shaky. She sure as hell couldn't face the possibility that Ian would find her apartment as she'd dared, and then expect her to *see* him all night long. He couldn't be that stupid.

She wasn't.

"Flora?" Dill put his hand over hers.

"I'll kill him," Fauna promised vehemently. When Dill and Flora both laughed, she interrupted. "I'm serious! I'll show up at his place unseen and kick him in the balls. Then I'll do something...*damaging*."

"And with any luck, your invisibility won't wear off? What world are you living in? It's Murphy's Law *à la* Faeries. When have you ever had your curse work in your favor?" Dill reasoned.

Flora kissed her cheek. "I love you, but you don't have a vengeful bone in your body. I got all that when our DNA split."

"What did Tate do to you?" Dill asked. "I haven't seen you this down on yourself in years."

"It's nothing," Flora said, shrugging as though it would reinforce her claim. Talking about the last time she'd been down wasn't something she wanted to do. If Dill found out Halder had been hired by the Gladiators, it would spark a whole different line of questioning she didn't want to get into, too. "I'm tired. I have to get up tomorrow and deal with a bunch of male testosterone laden football players."

"Instead of seeking the solitude of your penthouse, you thought you'd hang out here?" he asked skeptically.

"Why not? You are." Flora reached for her glass of ice water and headed for the hall.

"What kind of guy does that to a woman?" she heard Fauna murmur.

Flora paused in the hallway to listen.

“What kind of guy is able to do that to *Flora*?” Dill countered. “He got close, fast.”

“He got her guard down, somehow.” Fauna sounded as dumbfounded as Dill had.

Not wanting to hear more of their speculation, Flora continued down the hall. She couldn’t help them with their questions. She had the same ones cycling through her head.

How *had* he gotten so close, so fast?

Most of the guys she had gone out with had deferred to her, let her handle the course of the relationship. Not Ian. Ian had barged into her life, into her personal space, and had taken up residence in her head without apology.

He’d taken ownership of her feelings as though she’d only been borrowing them for a time. She’d felt every slide of his cock as he stroked inside her. Sleeping nerves had woken. Now she had to deal with the aftermath of knowing what it was like to experience the full scope of orgasm with a man who’d touched her body and her heart in new ways. He’d left her with a mess of emotions to explore and untangle. Trying to fit them back where they belonged seemed an impossible task.

Not that they’d ever be the same again. They couldn’t possibly be. Ian had changed something by stripping her of more than clothing. He’d cradled her dignity and coaxed truth from behind her usual façade, and then left them on the proverbial table for anyone to see.

It was similar to having a finger wrapped in a bandage and once the bandage was removed, the finger felt new and alive where it had been deprived of sensation. That’s how she felt, like her feelings were on sensory overload at his hands because he’d removed the bandage around them and left them exposed.

God, it hurt. He’d used her. Ian had left her raw, open, bare. The media flies would have a field day with her if she showed any vulnerability. Hell, they’d swarm when they found out about her affair with Ian and she had no doubts that he’d tell them. Isn’t that why he’d promised Sterling he’d get it on film?

Betrayal etched a painful trail beneath her breastbone.

How the hell did she get herself back? As long as he had her, her equilibrium was shot.

Chapter Nine

Ian had just about had it with Flora's cold shoulder. They'd been intimate for fuck's sake. He'd made her beg. But when it came to explaining Bobby, she'd been unwilling to listen. Yeah, it looked bad, but it wasn't really. Well, maybe a little bad. Okay, fuck, he'd acted like a bastard and he didn't have any defense at all because he was going to do what she thought he was going to do and what Bobby had asked him to do, but he never would have delivered a sex tape if she were innocent.

As he thought it, Flora's gaze skipped over him. She motioned for the set director to join her, then bent her head over her clipboard as he nodded. Two child wranglers brought in the five kids meant to share the cancer research photo promotion with Ian, Tilden, and Bing.

Basically, it was more of the same. Two days now of Flora ignoring him and him trying to catch her eye. Jesus.

So maybe he *hadn't* figured out the technicalities of whether or not she was innocent. He hadn't actually asked, nor had he researched the entire situation, but mostly because he'd been too busy trying to get his cock buried inside Flora where he could get as close to her as two people could get, but he'd *meant* to. Didn't that count for something? Damn, even his thoughts sounded awkward.

He'd have looked into the blackmail, guilt-innocence thing eventually, once they'd come up for air.

His stomach flipped eagerly at the thought of where he'd like to be muffled when he *opted* to come up for air. Ian wouldn't have served her over to anyone else. Sharing Flora with another man, even for the purpose of having her arrested for blackmail, or blackmailing her to stop blackmailing Deeks, stirred jealousy in his gut.

The set director smiled at her and Flora smiled back, warmly.

"Bing, Tate, Tilden. We need you behind the kids," the set director bellowed.

Bing nudged him and motioned with a tip of his head, as though Tate had needed the additional clarification. Tilden smirked, moving off and keeping his distance.

“Yeah, I got it. Behind the kids,” Tilden muttered.

Flora gave Ian a flipping stomach and swirling gut. He vaguely wondered if Mento-bismol made a product for romantic indigestion. He’d buy stock.

Granted, from Flora’s point of view, Ian couldn’t blame her for not wanting to speak to him. He got that loud and clear. Could even understand it. But in his mind, he wasn’t all that bad a guy. Not if one looked at the reasoning, the information, the motivation behind why he promised Bobby he’d catch Flora in the act.

As though she heard him, their gazes locked and she frowned. Her gaze fell away. The set director whatshisname told an intern to hand Ian a football. Flora’s jaw tightened and he wondered what she was thinking when the intern giggled and stroked his forearm.

Probably that he wanted the intern in the sack, too.

Ian sighed, trying to smile for the camera as flashes spotted his vision, leaving him with black holes in his sight.

Shit. If he were Flora, he’d be pissed off, too.

From Flora’s point of view, he was a fucking bastard. Of course she wouldn’t talk to him.

Fuck logic.

Fuck pride.

He needed to talk to her. The silent treatment had gone on long enough. They were working with each other nearly every day, thanks to Bobby. Did she really think they could keep avoiding each other?

If he explained, she might come clean with him about Deeks. They’d shared something special. Hadn’t they?

On the other hand, she had no reason to. He’d pretty much put the *kibosh* on that when he hadn’t denied Bobby’s announcement. According to Bobby, she fucked a lot of guys in the ranks. To her, Ian Tate was just another name, another lay, and another man to manipulate with the sweet clench of her pussy.

Ian eyed defensive coordinator, Coach Wilks, standing in the wings. Had Wilks screwed her? Valstet? Dryden? Had she moaned so sweetly for them? Begged them and made them feel all powerful between her legs? Had Ian merely been another stepping stone along her single-

minded path to bagging the entire team?

“Dude, you’re glaring, man,” Bing whispered. “The public don’t like brooding players hanging with their children.”

“I’m having a bad day,” he muttered. “And the blond kid keeps kicking my shin.”

“Be nice. He’s a regular on these shoots. You got about two minutes before he starts getting difficult,” Bing said.

“Difficult as in more than kicking my shin?” Ian guessed.

“My nephew has a recital today and I promised I’d be there,” Bing said. His look explained it all. Ian needed to get his shit together or get his shit beat down on the field during the next practice.

“Hey,” Ian said, forcing a toothy grin for the camera while leaning toward Bing. “What’s the story with Ms. Harper.”

“Ain’t no story,” Bing replied. He, too, spoke through his teeth.

“There’s a story,” Ian insisted.

“Naw, man, there ain’t. She’s cool.”

“What about her and the team?” Ian winced as the kid nailed him with another stinging kick to the shins.

“What about her?”

A tug on his shirt drew Ian’s attentions downward. A tow-headed boy with an upturned nose smothered in tan freckles glared at him. “Mr. Tate.”

“Yeah, kid?” Ian resigned himself to the fact that he wasn’t going to find out about Flora during the shoot. He’d have to find another avenue.

“My daddy says the Gimlets suck. He said we sold out by buying you and we oughta throw you back to the swamp you crawled from.” The high pitched condemnation flung venom.

“Sounds like your daddy is a big Gladiators fan,” Ian said smoothly.

“The biggest.”

The set director clawed at the air in frustration. Seeing the shoot deteriorating by the minute, and being the inadvertent cause, Ian squatted down to eye level with the kid. He was thin, scraggly in the way kids are after a growth spurt before they look like they fit into their skin.

“He probably liked Gentry a whole lot,” Ian speculated. When the kid nodded, Ian nodded too to show he understood. “It’s a bummer he retired. Who did your dad like for

quarterback?”

Flora clutched her clipboard to her chest, darting looks between the boy and the impatient director.

“I thought you were a tight end.” A tiny redhead said. She adjusted her royal blue headband. “Momma said you were a tight end.”

Another red haired girl shook her head. With their appearances so similar, Ian could only assume they were twins.

“No, Cassie. Momma said Mr. Tate *had* a tight end.”

“Oh, yeah,” the first girl agreed.

Bing snorted.

Ian figured he was coming out ahead. The boy had stopped snarling at him, and Ian’s throbbing shins hadn’t been battered in several seconds.

The tow headed boy rolled his eyes. “My dad wanted the guy whose name sounds like the star thingies.”

“Stars?” Ian asked, wracking his brain for a comparable name. “Aster?”

The boy’s expression turned to one of thoughtful consternation. “I think so.”

“John Aster is an excellent player. The Komodos are lucky to get him.”

“I guess you aren’t so bad,” the boy said, finally. “I’ll tell dad to give you a chance. He’ll listen to me.”

“Good thing.” Ian winked at him. “Your dad seems to know football. I’ll try to make sure the Gladiators didn’t waste their money.”

“You mean like you’re wasting mine, Mr. Tate?” the director shouted.

Ian stood his full height and faced down the smaller man. “Have some respect. These kids have lived a harder life than you’ve ever experienced. They’re the community heroes on this shoot.”

Did he win over *everybody*? She’d specifically requested that Taylor Fillmore be put by Ian because of the boy’s temperament and loyalty to the Gladiators. If anyone would have a bone to pick with the new quarterback, it would be Taylor, who kept up on the game and whose father was one of those bare-chested lunatics with painted letters on themselves no matter what the weather.

But of course Ian charmed his way past the little guy.

She'd needed Ian to show irritation, a finger shake, anything at the boy to make himself less appealing. Instead the bastard got down and commiserated about being the worst pick of draft until Taylor had conceded.

Bing's smile widened, seeming to be genuinely impressed with Ian's handling of the situation. Even the set director had quieted to a mutter and the kids were settled in for the final takes. Tilden was less impressed, filling the air with sighs and tongue clicks on the roof of his mouth as the seconds ticked by.

Ian had been dogging her every move as provided by the contract Deeks and Sterling had made her sign. It had gotten to the point where the sound of her name on his lips made her insides feel like melted putty. Not a good thing.

A blonde intern hurried over to take the football from Ian after the shoot concluded. She bit her bottom lip suggestively and twisted from side to side as she looked up at him under sooty lashes.

Ian smiled down at her as warmly as he would anyone, yet Flora had a momentary sense of panic that he gaze might have lingered on the blonde. Did that mean he was interested? Would he be asking for the girl's number next?

Flora's cell phone chimed and buzzed against her palm. She glanced at the screen where her brother's name logged. She looked up at Ian, thoughtfully as she took the call. "Hi, Sage. Glad you called. I need a favor."

Sage Harper's warm chuckle floated through the console. "Where did you beam to this time?"

Ian kept talking to the Taylor, so she turned her back for privacy. "Nowhere. I'm right where I should be, for once. I just need you to meet someone and tell me what he's thinking."

"Not interested. The only guy I want to examine is standing in our kitchen, making a sandwich. I called to remind you about Mom's Lady S Party. She thinks you'll forget."

"I didn't." She *had* been thinking of excuses for arriving late. She wouldn't actually miss her mom's party but sitting around with a bunch of women and passing around dildos didn't sound like a stellar way to pass her precious free time. Flora would rather buy those things in private.

"Good. She's running through the list of siblings. You can expect a call from Willow in

the morning. Hell, Mom might send Dad to pick you up. She's decided you work too hard and need to get laid."

Flora groaned. "Only our mother would set me up with a plastic—" She glanced around sharply, then covered her mouth and the mouthpiece of her phone. "*Penis*," she whispered.

"You're talking dirty at work, aren't you?"

She could practically see the sparkle in his eyes. He'd teased her countless times over the years with that same timbre. "If I bring the guy to you, will you read him for me? Use your special faery voodoo to see if he's really thinking about me or my thong?"

"Ugh. That's gross."

"Whatever," she waved a hand through the air as though he could see the dismissal.

His sigh sounded heavy. "Yeah. If you promise to tell Mom that I did my damndest to get you to the Lady S Party short of dragging you by the hair, I'll read him for you."

"Deal." She glanced over to the staged area only to find the kids gathered around their handlers and no Ian in sight. "I gotta go, Sage. Love you." She tapped the screen and her phone went black.

"Who's Sage?"

The words curled darkly from behind her. She stiffened, then forced herself to relax before facing him. "Eavesdropping is rude."

Ian crowded her. His harsh, whispered words rushed at her. "It's *rude* to fuck some guy's brains out, storm away without letting him explain, and then telling another guy you love him before your cunt has stopped creaming for the first guy, too. Who the *hell* is Sage?"

She stared up at his flashing blue eyes. Her cheeks heated with embarrassment. Gone was his relaxed demeanor and carefree smile. Ian Tate had a full-on *mad* happening. After his little display with the blonde moments earlier, he had a lot of gall accusing her of playing the field.

"What makes you think I'm still creaming for you? Oh, wait, did you plant a panty cam I don't know about? Or maybe you're just pissed because I can see right through you now that *Uncle Bobby* has outted you? Go back to your little blonde, over there. I'm sure she has a use for that lying tongue of yours."

Flora stormed past him. Her knees quaked and her hands trembled. Worse, a lump had formed in her throat and as much as she blinked, she couldn't clear the blurry haze obstructing her vision. *Shit!* She would *not* cry. Would not, she repeated in command to herself.

“Flora!” Ian called after her.

She cleared the corner of the studio and gained the hall. Out of sight from the others, she gulped in great mouthfuls of air, not understanding why the breaths shuddered and caught.

“Flora!”

Clutching her phone and clipboard to her chest, she ran. She didn’t care that the clacking of her high heels gave away her position. There was only one hallway, one direction for her to run, and if it meant getting away from him and what he did to the tightness in her chest, then running it would be. If the faeries had any mercy, she wouldn’t turn her ankle.

“Shit! Stop running,” he shouted, taking up the chase.

His heavier tread only lent speed to hers. The last time she’d been this out of breath was beneath him. No running then. No trying to get away, at all. *Then* she’d been rendered helpless by the passion in his eyes, the softness of his lips, the dance of his body over and inside hers. She’d been on her back *feeling* Ian.

Damn, him!

Her lungs burned and her ankle wobbled, but held. Flora took another corner, running blindly and knowing she had no real way to out distance the professionally trained quarterback, especially when she was blinded by tears and wearing two inch heels. “Of all the things you could have given me,” she muttered to the cursed faeries she was certain listened to everything. “You could at least have given me wings!”

“Flora, I’m sorry. Wait!”

The end of the hallway drew her up short. She realized too late there were no elevators or stairwells here. Flora wheeled around to face him as his easy jog and swaggering shoulders grew larger with each step toward her.

God she loved the way he moved. He even ran like sex. Determined, patient, and fully in pursuit of *her*. Her belly flipped. Her heart begged her to ignore the physical pull his nearness caused. If he had any idea how badly she wanted to be under him again...

Ian slowed. Flora threw her arms up over her face, not wanting him to see her heart more naked than he’d seen her body—and suddenly the narrow echoing changed, muffled, silenced.

She knew without looking it had happened again. Flora lowered her arms. A horrified sob escaped her as she found herself alone, in Ian’s bedroom.

“Oh, God. He saw.” Flora fell to her knees at the foot of bed. The last man who’d seen

her disappear had tried to destroy her reputation. He hadn't succeeded, but Ian had resources and information that other man never had. If Ian used this against her in exchange for sex, Flora wasn't convinced she could resist him.

She hadn't been able to resist Ian, yet.

* * * *

"What the fuck?" Ian froze, midstride. There's no way he had seen what he thought he saw. People didn't just disappear into thin air. It wasn't possible.

The sound of her panicked breathing had ceased. He could swear he'd seen tears threatening in her gorgeous tawny eyes and spiking her thick black lashes. Every image, sound had vanished.

Ian dragged a hand through his hair. It had been too real to chalk up to imagination. Hell, he could still smell that slight sweet berry and spice scent she wore, couldn't he? He inhaled, closed his eyes to catch it. Yeah, he could.

"So where the fuck did you go?" he said to the empty hall, as he once again opened his eyes and visually searched for her. There was nothing to point to, nowhere he could reasonably say she'd gone that quickly. To get to the exit she'd have had to pass him, but where she'd stood, the only door was a small, see-through glass casing for the fire extinguisher.

Just to say he had, and because it made as much sense as Flora disappearing, he looked into the fire extinguisher casing.

"This is nuts. I'm nuts. I'm fucking insane." Ian spun around and headed for his truck. There were two things he knew about Flora. She worked too much and she made his cock stand and salute. Since she wasn't working his cock—*yet*—she had to be at the office. If not there, he'd cross that bridge later and it had better not answer to the name, Sage.

Ian hit buttons on his phone before he'd pulled out of the parking lot. "Bobby. I've played this game long enough. I just watched the woman I'm pretty fucking sure I'm in love with run away from me like I was some kind of demon sadist. Start talking."

"Did you get her crying on tape?"

"No and I'm not going to. Whatever Flora shows me is between us. You can find another lackey, but I swear to God that if I find a snoop anywhere near her, I'll level him and not look back."

He took a curb, hopping over it and narrowly missed crossing the double yellow lines on

the correction. He didn't know where or how she'd disappeared, but one thing was for sure, she wouldn't stay gone if he could bring her back. Bobby being his only tie to the blackmailing claim, Ian would begin there. If it meant going all the way up to Deeks, so the fuck be it.

Ian could see the office park in the distance with the stadium rising up behind it. Would she be there? He knew she worked crazy hours, but on a Saturday? After a big campaign shoot? God, he hoped so.

Bobby's silence stretched the final few blocks. "I told you everything."

A security guard glanced at Ian, smiled brightly, and waved him through.

"You conveniently left out most of that everything. Try again." His tires took the tighter turns of the parking garage with echoing-squeals. He didn't see her car parked in the designated spot, but he also hadn't seen her leave the hall. In the realm of impossibility, the empty parking place meant nothing.

"She fucked Deeks. She's fucked half the team and the coaching staff. She gets as involved as she has to in order to get information on them and then ride it to the top. That's what I know."

"Who told you this load of crap?"

"Deeks."

"No fucking way. If she wanted something on me, she had every opportunity to take it and make my life hell. What I saw on her face wasn't superiority. It was pain."

"Deeks sent Coach Wilks to personally deliver the request to me. You don't think he'd involve himself personally, do you? He owns the team for fuck's sake. Any admission would give her harassment story credibility."

Ian shifted into park, turned off the ignition, and slid off the leather seat. His feet hit concrete. He slammed the truck door and jogged to the stairwell. "I'll ask him myself."

"Who? Deeks?"

"If I have to." Ian fumbled with his wallet, found the code card, and swiped it. The door buzzed. Ian yanked it open and took the stairs two at a time.

"Don't be stupid," Bobby yelled. "Do you know what I had to do to get you in here and cover up your concussion shit?"

"I never asked you to. What the fuck does my concussion—" Ian gripped his phone tighter. Static touched the line but he could hear the silence on the other end like an admission.

“What did you do, Uncle Bobby? What the fuck did you do and what does it have to do with Flora Harper?”

“I owe Wilks a favor. But the whole damn thing with Harper is the truth. You don’t believe me, go web search Wilks back about twenty years ago when he was coaching the Deerhurst Dragons.”

Ian burst through the fifth floor. He didn’t hear anything moving. “Deerhurst? Is that a high school team?”

“Wilks was up and coming. You look into it and get back to me before you go to Deeks. Wilks swears this is all true and I told him that if he brought you on, I’d get his proof.”

“Wilks is a pussy.”

“This is your career, boy-o. Think about what you’re passing up before you throw it all away.”

“I *am*, Bobby.”

“You don’t know Flora Harper. For you, she’s a challenge and a great fuck. For the rest of us, she’s a coldhearted bitch. Get your facts before you do something you regret.”

Ian approached Flora’s dark office. The whole floor looked empty. He swore under his breath. Bobby was right about one thing. He didn’t know Flora Harper well enough to know where she drew her boundaries. His gut told him there’d been a mistake. Still, Bobby was family and Ian *did* have his football career to think about.

Did he risk throwing it away on a naïve belief that the hard-headed business woman hadn’t pissed off a bigwig or two? He’d known Bobby his whole life. He usually had a self-gratifying motive for what he did, but he wasn’t mean-spirited without believing he did the right thing or his actions had a greater purpose. Could he say the same about Flora?

She’d fucked him and run. What did he know about her beyond their very believable chemistry?

“You listening to me, Ian? I’m all the family you got. You owe me at least a listen.”

“I hear you,” Ian answered. Bobby had to be wrong. Flora couldn’t be that much of a self-serving bitch. Ian would have known it. He wouldn’t have fallen for her disarming vulnerability. She kept it well hidden, but he’d seen it from their first meeting. Flora Harper played the big bad executrix, but underneath the tailored skirts and expensive spa-gleaming skin, she wasn’t as secure as she let others believe.

“So you’ll at least check into it before you fuck up your career and mine?” Bobby pressed.

“Yeah,” he answered on a sigh. “I’ll look into it.” A thought pushed to the forefront of his mind. “Bobby, you know anyone named Sage?”

“Nah. Sounds like one of them rich Harvard types. We good? You and me? We squared now?”

“We’re squared. Uncle Bobby?”

“Yeah, kid.”

“You never refer to Flora as a great fuck.”

“Yeah, kid. I got it. She’s off-limits until you get the story.”

“Naw, she’s just off-limits,” Ian said. He ended the call and shoved the phone into his front pocket. Even if it were true about her, what they’d shared deserved a better name than a *fuck*. It would always mean more to him than that, no matter what it meant to her. *Fucking* had nothing to do with what she’d given him.

Chapter Ten

“You can’t hide out here all night. She’s bound to notice,” Willow Harper said, handing an empty lemonade glass to Flora.

“She pities me. Our mother pities me. How sad is that?” she said in her own defense.

“You do look like you’ve been handed your ass.”

Flora threw the sponge into the sink. “That’s because I was. Geez! I *know* better than to get involved with a player. These guys change girls like they change jockstraps.”

“Now, now, big sis. You and I know a lot of players who *never* change their jockstraps—bad mojo for the big game.” Willow wiggled her brows. “Still, you might want to poke your head in there before she comes looking for you. They’re giving away a strap-on,” she sang as she left the kitchen.

Flora snorted. Okay, so maybe the jockstrap analogy was a bad one, but she did feel used and sweaty. Images of Ian’s glistening chest as he moved over her flashed into her mind and sent a shiver from nipples to clit.

“Oh, *God*, that man could make me come,” she whispered.

“In the realm of too much information, that was a doozy.”

Flora spun. “Sage! I thought you weren’t coming.”

“Mom.” He smiled wryly.

Nothing further needed to be said. She understood completely and nodded to let him know she did.

“Still can’t shake the guy?” Sage asked.

“What’s wrong with me? He’s absolutely the wrong man to get involved with. He’s a football player. He’s tight with Sterling. Correction, he’s *family* to Sterling. He used me and is trying to destroy my career. He should be the scum I scrub off the bottom of my galoshes, not some on-going fantasy.”

“You’re right. He’s an ass,” Sage agreed firmly.

“Then he turns around and defends Taylor, this kid from the campaign who hates him. He won’t even let me stay mad at him!”

“You’re right. He’s perfect,” Sage agreed, just as firmly.

“I have to see him every day. Do you know what that’s like?”

“I have an idea of the blessed misery,” Sage murmured. “I couldn’t stand to be in the same room and not touch Joe, but I was confined to the same building and didn’t want him out of my sight. Meanwhile, he’s giving me conflicting signals. I couldn’t have walked anyway. Not if there was a chance he might feel the same way about me.”

She smiled, hugged him. “We all know how that ended.”

“How what ended?” Joe asked, coming into the room.

“You and Sage,” Flora said, smiling.

“We’d better not be ended.” Joe came up behind Sage and wrapped his arms around his waist, pressed his lips to Sage’s shoulder. “Hey hon, your mom won’t be distracted for much longer. She actually handed me a vibrating butt plug and asked me to demonstrate how it’s used.”

“Like hell,” Sage growled. He twisted, captured Joe in a firm hold and kissed him. “I’m the only one who sees that.” He glanced back at her. “You going to be all right?”

“I’m fine. I’ll buy one of Kimberley’s gadgets and Ian Tate will be a thing of the past.” She said it, but she wasn’t convinced. Clearly, Sage wasn’t either. “Go back to the party. Stall for me. I’ll be there in a minute.”

“Don’t be too much longer. The strap-on went to Marge from down the street. I think Kimberley is giving away some pheromone scents next,” Joe said. “Maybe it’ll work on a certain football player.”

“I don’t want him,” she told herself after they’d left. But she did. She really did. Only she also really didn’t. The bastard. The sexy, insufferable, sweet, backstabbing jerk. Even her adjectives were confused.

She put down the dish cloth and decided to work her way back into the party. Mom would never forgive her for missing it. Flora sneaked into the room and sat on the back of a nearby chair.

Kimberley handed Jennifer a small white, unmarked tube. “Put a small dot of this on your

finger and don't do anything until I tell you." The tube made its way around the room. Like the others, Flora put a dot of clear gel-like fluid on her fingertip.

"Everyone have some?" Kimberley asked. With the murmur of agreement, the hostess continued. "Now put it on your lips like gloss."

Flora applied the goo and her lips went numb.

Jennifer whooped. "Anal Ease! It's Anal Ease! I use this stuff all the time!" She giggled and blushed.

They all laughed together and Flora watched as Sage and Joe got into the teasing. Sage made a show of measuring the bright pink dildo and giving an impressed nod before passing it along. Her mom seemed to settle in, too, now that Flora had rejoined the gathering.

Kimberley had just bestowed a hostess gift to her mom when Willow nudged her elbow. "I think he's here for you. If you want, I'll take the tall guy with him to give you two some time alone."

Flora followed her gaze. Bing and Ian stood in the arch to the living room, shifting from foot to foot as the women slowly became aware of them.

"You scheduled entertainment?" one woman asked hopefully.

Ian reached her side. "We need to talk."

"Go on, honey. If you win the clitoral clamp, I'll come get you," her mom offered.

"Clitoral—never mind." Ian's fingers curled around her upper arm. "Let's go, sweetheart. You got some 'splainin' to do."

She followed him. Bing and Willow did, too.

"Flora? Should I get Sage?" Willow asked.

"He's here? You brought him here? What the fuck, Flora?" Ian sputtered.

"I didn't have to bring him. He's welcome here any time," she shot back.

"Whoa. This just got weird. Okay. I'm leaving you two to creep out the neighbors while Bing and I introduce ourselves over lemonade. I'll send Sage and you can explain this to him." Willow ushered Bing back the way they'd come.

"I'm tellin' you. She's not like that, man."

"Thanks, Bing. I got it from here." Ian didn't bother to break eye contact with Flora long enough to look up at the other man. He waited. She heard the front door close, heard it reopen and latch again.

Ian's nostrils flared. Annoyance tightened his mouth as he flicked a glance over her shoulder.

"Say the word, baby, and I'll call the cops," Sage said.

His calm voice and still presence helped her center her thoughts. "He won't hurt me. Can you stay? Maybe you'll see what I don't," she hinted.

Ian's hands left his hips. He folded his thick arms across his chest. Unconsciously, he shifted his weight and widened his stance. His chin came up defensively even as his lips settled into a thin line. "So, you're Sage."

I can take him, Ian thought. He saw the flicker of amusement settle in the other man's eyes and a knowing smile cross his ridiculously handsome face. Flora wouldn't date a football player, but apparently she had no qualms dating a pretty boy model. Vapid and easy on the eyes? It didn't ring true, yet the proof was wearing faded blue jeans and a polo shirt not four feet from where they stood.

"Yeah, I'm Sage."

Ian couldn't imagine this guy with Flora. As soon as he realized it, he dismissed Sage as a threat and categorized him as an annoyance instead. Ian looked back at her. Her stance mirrored his. The corners of her mouth pulled down slightly and all he could think about was kissing them in the hopes that he could make her smile again.

"Who is this guy?" Ian asked, his voice sounding quiet in the evening air.

"I told you who he is."

Ian found himself studying the sidewalk. "Flora, where did you go yesterday?" He looked up, hoping to read something in her expression. Her gaze darted away.

"The shoot ended. I went home."

Were they going to talk about the disappearing act? Had Sage ever seen her do that before? The other man stared at Ian intently, curiously.

"Can we talk privately?"

"Anything you have to say to me, Sage can hear, too," she insisted.

"Fine. *How* did you get home?" Ian asked, pointedly.

He thought her cheeks may have darkened. The streetlight didn't give enough illumination to be sure.

“I, uh, took the express lane.”

Sage inhaled sharply. Flora winced. Her shoulders tightened.

“From the hallway where I blocked your exit,” he said dryly.

“Is that why you came here? I pulled a disappearing act so you had to find out how? Go home, Ian. I’m tired. My mom’s throwing a party. You’re wasting my time. Pick a reason.”

She turned to leave and Ian reached for her wrist, pulling her back around to face him. “Damn it, Flora, I found proof. I fucking found the article about Wilks and the girl.” She might as well have torn his heart from his chest. The guilt was written all over her face.

“Goddamn it. It’s true. You’re blackmailing Wilks and Deeks.”

“Sounds like you’ve already decided that I am.”

“Do you make *anything* easy?” he asked, frustration tightening his throat.

“Well, apparently, I’m easy. I fuck men indiscriminately, cackle into the mist, and made my way to the top of my profession by lying on my back. That is how you see me, isn’t it?”

“That’s not what I believe.”

Her eyes narrowed and she bent toward him from the waist. “You were instructed to film me in a compromising position and give the evidence to Sterling. I can understand Wilks’ motivation. It’s your motivation which escapes me.”

“Tell me it isn’t true that you used Wilks indiscretion to further your career. Tell me you didn’t wreck his future by threatening to lead the media to him,” Ian said, hoping she’d come up with a believable argument in her defense.

Sage cleared his throat.

“Stay out of it, Sage,” Flora snapped. “He’ll believe what he wants to believe. I’m the one he tried to compromise. I owe him nothing.”

“He’ll believe it because you aren’t contesting it,” Sage argued.

“Stay out of it, Sage,” Ian repeated, not taking his eyes from her.

From his vantage point, he saw the slash of light as the front door opened and closed behind another man. This man was slightly taller than Sage, built like a bear. He had the same dark hair and chiseled features, but unlike Sage, this guy wasn’t beautiful.

Ian looked from one man to the other. They had to be brothers. The newcomer, though attractively compelling, couldn’t be called handsome. His face cut too many angles, held too many shadows. As he watched the man approach, there was an instant where he could have

sworn the man jumped several feet forward. It was like watching an old film with missing frames. One minute he descended the steps, the next he had crossed several paved squares toward them.

“What the hell?” Ian murmured. “Gotta fucking get my eyes checked.”

“Flora,” Sage said, quietly coming to her side and touching her shoulder. “You need to tell him.”

She turned, studied him for a few minutes with questioning eyes.

“I know about you, already,” Ian said to Sage. “I get it. You two are together. Can you step off now and let me finish this adult conversation with Flora? Hmm?”

Sage sent him a warning look. The other guy loomed closer, too.

“Can I hit him?” The stranger asked.

“No, but I might,” Sage bit out.

His hand curled possessively on Flora’s shoulder and Ian lost it. Cocking his arm back, Ian shifted his weight and hooked his fist sharply under Sage’s chin. It was over almost as fast as it started. Sage and the other guy pinned him to his back on the grass.

Flora crouched at his head. “Sage is my brother. So is Dill.”

He blinked dazedly, looking from one man to the other. Laughter spilled in rolling swells from his chest.

“He’s crazy,” Dill muttered.

“He’s in love with her,” Sage explained.

“He tried to have me fired and publicly humiliated. Check your tuner, Sage.”

Incredulous, she stared at Sage and slowly shook her head.

“If he were trying to humiliate you, why is he asking you for the truth? He wants a reason to continue feeling the way he feels about you,” Sage said.

“Because he didn’t get the footage Sterling wanted and he thinks I’m stupid enough to fall for him again,” she denied.

“You fell for me?” Ian asked, hopefully.

“Who wrote this fucking script?” Dill got up and walked away. “I think you have this thing under control. I gotta go check on Willow. Last I saw, she was trying to lick Bing’s head.”

“What?” Flora and Ian asked.

“Which head?” Sage wondered aloud, simultaneously.

Dill shrugged. "Fuck if I know."

Sage still had him pinned. Ian looked up at Flora, not bothering to struggle against him. He could free himself if he wanted to but if he stood, she'd back off. Here on the ground, he let himself be exposed, trapped, and deliciously close to her.

"You fell for me?" he said again, hoping she'd answer.

Sage wiggled his lower jaw, carefully stretching out the sore muscles from Ian's hit.

Flora looked toward the house.

"He might be an asshole, but he's an asshole who is actually trying to get to the truth. Cut him a break," Sage told her. He rose and left.

Ian stayed on his back looking up at her.

"Don't use puppy eyes on me," Flora said.

"Are they working?"

"No."

"Not even a little?" he wheedled.

"No."

"How about if I..." Ian rolled to his side, wrapped his hand around her ankle and pressed a kiss to her toes.

"Not even then."

"How about if I..." He turned completely on his belly, caught her other ankle. The movement landed her on her butt and he took advantage of his freer access to kiss the inside of her arch. Her toes curled slightly. Thank God she was wearing sandals.

"Stop it. You can't seduce your way out of this one."

"I could try."

"And it would make you look like an insincere prick."

"At least come down here and join me. Your family has really soft grass."

"Don't be a douche," she said. Her tone had softened and he took that as a promising sign.

"Mm. Plumbing. My favorite female subject."

Ian crawled up her body, forcing her to lie back in the grass. Her hands automatically came up to his chest. Looking down at her with her head pillowed in the inky swirls of hair and bathed with distant yard lights, the moment felt surreal. He thought she might allow anything in

the semi-darkness. Even forgiveness if he wanted it.

If only his questions had been answered.

“Sage thinks I should tell you what really happened. Sage is always right about what other people are thinking. He’s not always right about it being the best thing for me. He can’t deduce that. He can only see thoughts and motives,” she said.

“Well that’s cryptic.”

“He said you’re in love with me. Is that true?” she asked.

Ian couldn’t imagine a more beautiful woman. He hadn’t met anyone with more determination to succeed. He liked those qualities, but if she had succeeded how Bobby had insisted she had, he should be disgusted by her.

He wasn’t disgusted. He was turned on, intrigued, curious, confused, infatuated, bewildered, and protective of her. Disgusted figured nowhere in his feelings. Did he love her? She made his heart race. She made waking up to see her again worth the sore muscles in practice and the red tape of publicity. She made him think about babies and herb gardens and *cats*, for fuck’s sake. Love?

“Yeah,” he admitted, hating the way his insides roiled as he waited to see what she thought.

“You barely know me and you think I’m a slutty blackmailer. You aren’t so great at dating, are you?”

“I didn’t say it made sense or that I’m waiting to hear you deny the claims. Are you a blackmailer? It would really mess with my head—fuck up the whole ethics thing.”

“Proving integrity is a slippery slope. Have I done anything that makes you think I’m dishonest?” she asked.

“I barely know you,” he reminded her with a wry smile.

“Circular argument. You barely know me, but what you think you know shouldn’t be attractive,” she pointed out.

“Is that your indirect way of asking me why I think I love you?”

Now she smiled, too. “I’m lying on my parents’ front lawn while there’s a sex toy party going on not twenty feet from us. The neighbors are probably thinking that we’re about to engage in lewd public conduct. You couldn’t frame me for inappropriate behavior with a contracted player better than you are right now.”

“Oh, I get it. Another indirect answer. So if I’m reading you right, you *are* asking me why I’m in love with you if I fault your character.”

She smiled agreement.

“You’re also demonstrating that you trust me enough to let me put you in a bad position in front of witnesses as your way of acknowledging that you have unresolved feelings for me, too.”

“I didn’t say that.”

“You didn’t have to.” He grinned. “Which means you may not want to trust me or believe that I’m in love with you, but you do and you’re waiting for me to make good on my claim that I’m in love with you by trusting you. That about right?”

“Technically, it’s not your claim. It’s Sage’s.”

Ian growled playfully. “Then I’ll make it mine. Flora—what’s your middle name?”

“Ann.”

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

“Flora Ann Harper, I’m in love with you. I don’t understand it and I can’t explain it and I really want to know I’m not a complete idiot for feeling the way I do. Please,” he begged softly. “Please tell me what really happened. In your own words.”

Chapter Eleven

He was good with his eyes, Flora decided. Really, really good. He expressed things with sincerity and sold his words with those eyes. She could believe him so long as she looked at them because his words rang truer. And because Sage had confirmed it.

Now came the hard part.

Knowing he loved her and wanted her to be innocent didn't discount what he'd tried to do without first knowing her character. He should have found out first. He should have given her the shadow of a doubt just because she deserved it as another member of the human race. Filming another person, especially without their permission and especially while in the throes of passion, smacked of dishonesty.

It hurt worse because Ian had made her *feel* him. He'd made her look past their union of bodies where satisfying a physical itch had become a selfless, shared experience. He'd marked her. He'd changed her. No matter what she answered Ian, he'd done that and sex for sex sake would never be the same with another man.

His eyes told her she'd been changed and she believed them, because just looking into them made her want to agree to all sorts of things. She wanted to push their disagreements under the proverbial rug and say *yes* to whatever he asked. Ian Tate had mounted an offensive strike on her heart and those words, those eyes had crippled her defensive line.

If Wilks had taught her one thing, it was how dangerous love could be. It burned, scarred, and left you ashes with which to recreate yourself. Ian Tate was a firestorm the likes of which Wilks could never compare. Ian Tate could destroy her and the ashes he left behind would be scattered by the wind of fall-out.

Her instincts said run. Her heart said stay. Her common sense told them both to shut up and get it over with by just telling him the truth.

First things first.

“Do you believe there are some things which defy logic?” she asked.

“Like?”

“Disappearing in hallways with no exits.”

“I’d say *no*, but I saw it,” he admitted.

“That’s a start.”

Flora pushed on his chest. Ian rolled to his feet. He offered her a hand up which she took. She motioned him toward the side of the house, thinking that the back porch would give them some privacy to talk. If he took this news well, she’d tell him the rest. Maybe.

They walked quietly. Ian occasionally looked at her, waiting for her to speak, most likely. When they reached the back porch, she motioned toward the patio table. How did one inform another person that faeries existed and she was proof?

“My dad is a research scientist by profession. It’s why I choose medical research most often when scheduling the team for charity campaigns. I know what he does and how much support he needs to keep doing his job. It’s easy for the public to say, *let’s find a cure*. It’s not so easy when the funding isn’t there to look for one.”

“Makes sense.”

“Dad goes on field expeditions. He travels to natural settings and looks at the biology and chemistry of the area to find new uses for commonly seen plant-life.” Flora took a calming breath. About to strip her last defense, she had nothing to go on but gut-faith in trusting him with the family secret.

She could see his confusion, yet he stayed silent, letting her talk.

“Mom is a free-spirit.” As though to echo that statement, a female roar of laughter reached them from inside the house. “Mom’s a faery.”

“I don’t get it.”

“Dad went out on one of his expeditions and came across my mom, bathing. She got pregnant. Though he thought she was slightly insane for claiming to be one, the faeries weren’t happy about her pregnancy with Sage and left Dad no doubt about Mom’s, uh, heritage.”

Ian folded his arms and leaned back. The skepticism dripped from his slitted eyes.

“They—the faeries—gave each of the children she bore a double-edged gift. I think it’s their way of punishing Mom for marrying a human while reminding all of us exactly which two worlds we come from. We—all five of us kids—each do something a little different and it never

works when we want it to.”

“I thought you were being serious.”

“I am.”

Hurt shifted his expression from disbelief to sad disappointment. “If you aren’t going to give me the truth, just don’t tell me anything. Whatever. But don’t lie to me.”

“I’m *not* lying.”

“*Faeries*,” he barked. “I ask for truth and you give me a load of bull about *faeries*.”

“I’m half faery. All my siblings are,” she insisted.

She hated the slight whine in her voice. He’d either believe or he wouldn’t. Damn it, she *wanted* him to believe her. Believing her with this meant she hadn’t put her faith in the possibility of *them*, in vain.

“I transport. You saw that for yourself. That’s what I do. Never when I want to. Never conveniently. You think I wanted to end up naked with a vibrator in the men’s locker room? In my team’s locker room where I’d get fired on sight?” The words rushed from her in urgency to make him understand.

“Everyone has a kink, Flora.”

“Sage sees what people are thinking. That’s why I trust his assessment.” Flora pressed on, hoping that adding information would provide the proof he needed. It was a long shot.

“Dill freezes time. My twin sister, Fauna, has invisibility. Willow turns into wooden things. None of us can control it.”

“Enough. Here’s a tip. Next time a guy tells you he loves you, at least have the decency to give him a believable excuse for flipping out on him.”

Ian practically leaped out of his chair.

“I’m not lying.”

“Save it,” he said holding up his hand. “I don’t want to hear any more.”

Flora watched him walk away, his back growing fainter as the night enveloped him. Even the crickets had gone silent.

“You could have started with something easier,” a quiet voice said from the darkness.

Flora started. “Fauna? I thought you weren’t coming.” She could say she hadn’t seen Fauna there, but that was obvious. Flora thought invisibility would be a good faery gift to have right now. Then she wouldn’t have to see the disappointment on Ian’s face when he looked at her

because he wouldn't see her to be disappointed.

"Mom," Fauna said, by way of explanation.

"That's what Sage said."

"Why didn't you tell him about Wilks?" Fauna asked.

Maybe to test him? To see how far he was willing to go in order to hear the truth? Because if he didn't believe her about being a faery, then whether or not he believed the blackmail charge didn't matter? There wouldn't be a happy ending to her story if he believed her about the coach but thought she was a raving lunatic.

Start simple? She had. She'd started at the very beginning, the source of who she was and if he hadn't accepted *that*, he'd never accept her. Well, she'd been right, hadn't she?

God, it sucked being right. How long would it take for the stabbing pain in her chest to ease?

* * * *

Ian turned over, twisting his sheets around his hips. He kicked off the covers and stared bleary-eyed and the bedside clock. There should be a rule that when you had decided to cut your losses on a relationship, the rest of you agreed. Instead, thoughts of Flora tumbled through his mind, replayed moments, wondered why she'd created the elaborate lie to keep him away.

He flopped on his back and the sheet fell, leaving him naked. He'd had her like this—naked, open, ready. Which reminded him, he should ask her for his leather belt. She could keep the jersey. The material loved her body.

God, what was not to love? He could almost see the bottom edge of his jersey pulled up just under the puffy lips of her sex. If he touched her through the jersey, would he feel the moisture on his fingertips or would he have to bury his face against her, his nose and lips hidden by the material as he tasted her.

Eating out by tongue brail. His cock strained, so erect it curved back against him to brush his abdomen.

"The faeries can come suck my cock," Ian muttered. He grabbed the pillow edges at either side of his head and folded them up against his ears. "That includes you, Flora Harper! You can suck my cock!"

Movement and weight trapped his legs. Ian bolted upright. Flora squirmed uncomfortably across his shins and like a wet dream come to life, the bottom of the jersey she wore left a wedge

of shaved pussy visible.

“Flora?” He was dreaming. He had to be.

Ian cautiously leaned over and ran his hand down her arm, felt the knob of her elbow bump against his fingers, and skimmed her forearm. Her fingers curled around his and she unconsciously squeezed them.

His mouth went dry and a cool sweat touched his back. “Flora,” he croaked.

“Mmph.”

“Wake up.” *Faeries*? No fucking way. They didn’t exist. This didn’t exist. She wasn’t really at the end of his bed and his feet weren’t actually going numb from her body weight sprawled across them. It was just a realistic dream.

She shifted her top thigh, drawing his attention to the sweet vee between her legs and the shapely curve of hip to waist. “A fucking realistic dream.”

Still acting on disbelief and a little fear, Ian retracted his feet from under her and squeezed the fingers she still held. “Flora, baby, wake up.”

Flora hitched a sigh. Her dark lashes fluttered as sleepiness became foggy awareness. The transformation to sudden horror sobered him. *That* expression was completely believable. She didn’t know how she’d gotten there.

“Ian? Oh shit, Ian!” Her brow furrowed as she backed off his bed and toward the door, keeping her eyes on him as though he were a vicious animal. “I—I don’t understand. I was dreaming about Willow licking bald cats while Mom tied helium-filled condoms on their tails. I wasn’t dreaming about you.”

“Thanks?”

“How did I get here?”

“I think I called you.” He shook his head. “I don’t know. That sounds insane. I can’t make you materialize.”

“Were you dreaming about cats and condoms, too?” she asked, seeming to search for a link.

“Fuck no.” Well, he had been thinking about cats a few hours ago, but it had been in specific relation to owning them with Flora. He hated cats. He’d love cats if they were Flora’s. He’d make them a damn cat castle if she asked him to. “Do you even *like* cats?”

Total non-sequitor.

“What?”

“Never mind.” Funny how the mind worked. If it couldn’t make sense of the obvious puzzle, it tried to solve an easier one instead.

“I should go.”

“Wait,” he said.

Flora stopped moving backward. Her eyes grew large as they skimmed over him and found the evidence of his desire. He didn’t bother hiding it. She knew she turned him on. He was naked. She’d appeared in his bedroom. If she was shocked, shouldn’t she be the embarrassed one?

Except Flora licked her lips and shot every good intention to hell.

“Why wait?” she asked. Was her voice wavering?

“You’re here, aren’t you? You’re actually standing here in my bedroom. I’m not dreaming this?”

It was as though he’d given her an idea. Her face lit up hopefully. “Nope. Sorry. It’s a dream you’re having. Yay, you on the realistic dream-age. I gotta go now, okay? Good. Don’t even bring this up tomorrow because I won’t know what you’re talking about.”

“It’s not a fucking dream.” Ian leaped to his feet and ran toward her.

Flora squeaked, slipped through the bedroom door and ran. “Bunnies!” she shouted.

Ian drew up, “What?”

“Bunnies!” She shouted again, wrinkled up her nose and made a bunny face. Then suddenly, she disappeared.

“Whuh?” The faded remnants of her scent still teased him. It stood out from the stale hotel cleaning smells as a hint of illusivity. Not a dream, then, but what that left seemed just as unlikely.

Ian went to the door of his hotel suite and found the inside bolted just as it had the last time she’d popped in and out on him. That was the night he’d woken up with her in his arms and the morning he’d found her in her office still smelling like sex.

Other memories crystallized. Flora had been standing in the stadium during practice wearing a sexy red wrap-dress and seconds later, she’d been gone. The hallway, too. The locker room.

“Shit,” Ian muttered. He ran his hand through his hair. “She’s either a faery or a damn

fine magician.”

* * * *

Flora watched the last piece of footage showing Ian Tate in play before the season ended and he was picked up by the Gladiators. About a month before the end of the season, he’d taken a heavy hit when a player *sacked* him. Ian limped off the field with help.

She replayed the sack. Even her untrained eye could see the unnatural bend. Could cortisone shots heal that? She shot a furtive glance toward her office door and decided she’d look at his team statistics anyway.

A quick Internet search for injury statistics pulled up a surprisingly thorough list. The knee injury didn’t appear on it, but Flora decided it must have been less dramatic than it looked on film.

He’d had six concussions among the listed injuries. She could have sworn there’d been another two in practices. Fans leaped on that kind of information. Still, eight concussions was serious. There’d been something about another famous quarterback having eight concussions and warned he’d have to drop out if there were more. Wouldn’t that make him, and Ian, less desirable picks? Wouldn’t Deeks have wanted a stronger player on the team? They’d been up to draft John Aster.

Aster was in prime physical condition, young, lots of increasing play time on the field, and would have been far better received than Ian. Another search showed that while Ian signed for a smaller salary, it wasn’t by much. Certainly not enough to justify Ian’s acquisition with his numerous injuries and age, when compared against Aster.

Having been in the industry long enough to recognize trends of importance, the need for good publicity and involvement with the community, she had to be missing something.

Article after article pulled up some great stories about both men. Aster was an exemplary role model. Ian was, too. Ian did have a certain charm that felt natural. Aster appeared polished to a high gloss. Still, all of that looked great to the public and sold tickets. Why Ian? Why not Aster?

Sterling? The suspicion held weight. Sterling was his uncle. From everything she’d read, Ian had no surviving family. So who was Bobby Sterling to him and if an uncle, why had it been kept from the press? There’d only be reason to hide it if their relation raised doubt.

But this was *football*, not political espionage.

“Reporting for duty,” Ian said, striding into the room like he owned it.

Flora minimized her search window just in case he came around the desk. “I’m thinking of doing a charity auction for juvenile diabetes. Did you know John Aster has diabetes?”

“Bunnies,” he said.

“Pardon?” Flora tried to keep her expression blank. It wasn’t easy when Ian looked as though he wanted to strip her clothes off and fuck like the furry little creatures. Her pussy tingled. She crossed her legs beneath her desk.

“Bunnies and faeries.”

“Aster has diabetes and was first pick as our quarterback draft. I wonder why we didn’t go with him.”

Ian’s expression darkened. “Would he have been less of a challenge for you?”

“Than a player with a fetish for small animals? Sure.”

“You were there last night,” Ian said.

“Where?”

“In my room.”

“Go home. I don’t have anything for you today,” she said.

“What about the diabetes?”

“I’ll call Aster and get back to you.”

“Tell me about the faeries, Flora.”

She looked up at him warily. “I did.”

“Explain it to me again. I’m in new territory with this.”

Ian planted his hands on her desk. It was the same stance Sterling had taken with her the day Ian had come to collect his uniform from her. They didn’t look alike, but Flora was sure they were related. Uncle wasn’t an informal title, it was a familial title.

Sterling couldn’t have gotten Ian on the team without help. He didn’t have the leverage or the position to see it happen. Scheduling appearances just didn’t have anything to do with recruitment. Having them both on the team and the acquisition at least a little bit questionable, did seem convenient. Somehow there was a link.

“Why were you drafted in favor of Aster?” she asked with just as much determination.

“Your numbers aren’t as good, you’re older, and you have more injuries. Aster was our primary. What about you knocked him off that spot and got you drafted in his place?”

Ian's gaze skidded to the side. The muscle in his jaw ticked. "How should I know?"

"But you do," she said, standing. In a moment of clarity, she knew she was right. "You *do* know why you were picked instead of him."

"Who cares? I'm here. What about the faeries?"

"Screw the faeries. Sterling has something to do with you being here. It has something to do with him. It has something to do with wanting me humiliated, and accusing me of unethical behavior with the players, and Deeks, and..." She'd been ticking them off on her fingers when she felt like she'd been slapped in the face with her past. "And Wilks."

Guilt washed over his features. He had the decency to blush.

"Sterling and Wilks. That's a combination I understand," she said, choking on the words. "Sterling got you hired by appealing to Wilks. Wilks wants payback and Sterling promised to deliver using you as bait for whatever lie Wilks told him."

"You're screwing the team *and* the coaches. Who else would he use but a new cock?"

She pressed a hand to her stomach feeling instantly ill. "So that was the actual lie Wilks told Sterling. Sterling went along with it because he's always wanted my job. If he succeeded, you'd be on the team, Wilks would owe him, and he'd have my job."

"He's more worried about you blackmailing Deeks than anything else."

"I haven't blackmailed anyone," she snapped. "Not ever. Not even when I could have sued that bastard Wilks for assault."

"Flora, I don't care about all that. Whatever you've done doesn't seem to affect the way I feel about you."

"How grand of you for graciously forgiving me for crimes I've *never committed*."

"What? I believe you. The faery thing? I believe you."

Chapter Twelve

The conversation seemed to be falling apart, degrading faster than he could secure the loose threads of contention. This was supposed to be an easy admission. He meant to go to her office, tell her he believed her about the faery thing even though he didn't understand it. It would progress to telling her how much she touched his daily life and that he loved her no matter what happened past, present, or future.

She was going to smile and glow with love, maybe flash him some boob and agree that it was all stupid. They'd hold each other, whisper about the future, figure out what to do with her blackmailing past and he'd help her come clean, convince everyone that she wasn't doing that anymore, and they'd make love all night.

That's what was supposed to happen.

She was *not* supposed to turn into a raging vixen of self-righteousness.

"I'm saying it's all right. We'll work it out, together," he soothed.

"There is no together. Congratulations on expanding your mind into the possibility things exist outside your perception of reality. Too bad you can't apply that philosophy to *real life*!"

"They'll hear you," he said, calmly.

She blinked at him, stupefied for a second, then picked up her pen and flung it across the room with a growl.

"You're yelling and they'll hear you," he repeated.

"I don't give a shit what they hear. Your uncle lied to you, or Wilks lied to him. Either way, this isn't my problem. It's yours. So if forgiving me makes you feel like a big man, then you were a smaller man to begin with than I thought."

"Bobby has proof."

"Oh he does, does he?" Flora stepped around her desk and breezed past him.

"Where are you going?"

“To the source,” she snapped.

Ian followed her, barged in on Bobby with her when she plowed through the meager defense his secretary put up. Then he hung back to watch, because Flora Harper, in full wrathful glory, was a sight to behold.

Her dark, black hair streamed down her back in loose curls, her amber eyes flashed righteous fire, and her cheeks glowed with color. Fuck, even her nipples puckered proudly beneath her silk shirt as each tense part of her body prepared for a fight.

She didn’t realize she was wrong, yet—that she didn’t need to go through the *proof* bullshit. He’d stick with her. Life without her would be too boring to consider. She’d made an impact on him and if she was willing to work through the attention seeking behavior, he’d be there every step of the way.

Ian’s chest filled with nurturing pride.

Yeah, he’d stick through it with her, prove to her that her past didn’t matter to him.

“Sterling,” Flora bellowed.

Ian winced, reached behind him, and swatted the door closed. It clunked satisfyingly into place.

“Harper?” Bobby asked.

“*Blackmail?*” She folded her arms across her chest. Ian moved closer, wanting to be part of the discussion.

Bobby sent an asking glance at him and Ian nodded. “I told her what I know. She wants to hear what you have to say.”

“I’m not really at liberty,” Bobby hedged.

“Bullshit. You’re accusing me of blackmail. I have more right than most to know what the hell this is all about,” she argued.

Bobby picked up a paperclip, unfolding it and twisting it until finally it snapped, he sighed and stood. “I don’t have anything to add.”

“You’re a piece of work,” she accused.

“Tell her what you told me. She knows I’m on the team because you got me here,” Ian said.

“Why the fuck did you tell her that?” Bobby swore, put his hands on his hips.

“I’m that good a lay,” Flora snapped.

Bobby looked her over. "I don't doubt it."

"Just tell her," Ian demanded, tired of the snipping word play. Uncle Bobby's appreciativeness of Flora's form may have irritated him a little, too.

This ought to be good, Flora thought. Nothing Sterling could say would justify a claim like this one. She looked askance at Ian. Nothing Sterling could say would justify Ian believing it either. She didn't know if she was more angry or hurt.

Sage would tell her she hid her hurt with anger. He'd be right.

Damn Ian for making her fall in love with him.

Sterling puffed a beleaguered sigh and fluffed his buzz cut by running his open palm against the bristly tips. "You're not going to be proud, boy-o. I did what I had to. You're family."

She watched Ian's expression go from concerned smugness to wary doubt. After all he'd put her through, seeing the smile wiped off his face should have pleased her. Her heart went out to him. She'd learned some things about Ian in the last week, learned some things in her Internet search. If what she'd read was correct, Sterling represented the entirety of Ian's family. He had no one else.

"Wilks came to me with a compromise. He'd bring you on the team, if I helped him get Flora fired."

What Sterling had done would hurt Ian far more fundamentally than a simple accusation. It would strain the only familial link Ian had left. Family, even fucked up faery family, helped define her. What did it do to Ian?

"Why would you do that?" Ian asked, his voice sounding constricted.

Sterling looked away from his nephew.

She tracked the way his expression softened when Ian looked at her, how he glanced cautiously at Sterling who had begun to tell him his side of the story. Her pride had taken a blow. It would recover. Uncovering Sterling's lies for Ian to see would sooth her ego, but it would put a permanent ding in his relationship with his uncle.

She couldn't do that. Not to Ian. He'd find out eventually. Hopefully by then, she'd be far enough distanced from him that she wouldn't be tangled up in the mess. Hopefully, Sterling would see what could have happened, what she meant to preserve for them, and leave her alone

after this.

That's what she wanted, she thought. Well, she'd wanted Ian, but looking at him weighing the validity of her words against his uncle's, she loved Ian enough to step out of the picture.

"Never mind, Sterling." Though she spoke to the older man, she kept her eyes on Ian.

Maybe when they healed, she'd see if they could still find that spark. If there'd ever been one besides his need to please Sterling by offering her up on a silver platter. She should feel sad. What she felt instead was numbness taking the sting from her anger, and providing a blank canvas for the pain which already began to burn her chest with loss.

"I want to hear this," Ian said, quietly.

"Ian, it's not necessary," she said.

"It's not only necessary, it's a requirement." His gaze met hers. "He used me to get to you, and I let him. God, Flora, I'm so sorry."

Tears stung the back of her eyes, but she didn't cry. "Then enough has been said."

He shook his head, looking at her in disbelief. "He'll tell me the entire story because I need to know. I won't let his ass being on the line mess up what we have." He winced. "What we *could* have. The lies stop here, with him."

"It doesn't matter," she insisted.

"It does." Ian stepped closer, cupped her cheek. "I look at you and I see my future. I haven't represented myself well, but I swear to you, I've never tried to record you or get you caught with me. If I'd wanted to do that, I would have called attention to you at every opportunity."

"You believed the worst about me," she pointed out.

"Stupidly. I still want to hear the truth."

Bobby flopped back into his chair. "Wilks knows your history, Harper. He showed me an article from several years back. He didn't have to. Most of us in the business heard about the scandal that cost him the head coaching position in Florida."

"That was you?" Ian asked. "They never released the name of the girl."

Flora's argument froze on her tongue. His expression, the sincerity in his words sounded as though he were sorry for how the scandal had affected her. Had she understood him correctly?

"The girl in that scandal was underage. That story must have devastated you," he

whispered. “No one interviewed her after the story broke to see how she had handled the publicity feeding frenzy.”

She swallowed past the lump forming in her throat and the burn of tears that didn’t seem to want to go away. How did he do it? How did he know to say exactly the right things to her?

“I—I graduated with my head down.”

“You?” he murmured, fondly. “I can’t imagine you hiding from anyone.”

“She didn’t hide. Wilks lost his career and was sued with a gag order,” Sterling blustered.

“I have brothers,” she said.

“What actually happened that day?” Ian asked. He gave her space, released her cheek to put his hands in his pockets.

This time, she knew he’d listen. His whole demeanor had changed, humbled, opened. Flora had buried the memory the best she could. Seeing Wilks at the same company years later had been the source of more tension headaches than she could count, yet Wilks had always left her alone. Til now.

Would Ian believe her? He said he believed her faery heritage and that part was critical. Telling him that piece, needing him to understand how her abilities manifested, mattered in the overall explanation of what had happened that day. That’s why she’d started there. At the beginning. If he doubted that, her story would be chalked up as another lie among the many that Wilks had spread.

“I was a seventeen year old senior in love with the head football coach of our high school team. At first, saying hello in the hallways seemed normal—like something a teacher or coach *should* do. I hung around the football field with my girlfriends and Wilks must have figured out that I wanted to see him.” She laughed harshly. “No accounting for taste, right?”

Ian smiled encouragingly.

“It was a slow seduction at first. He’d squeeze my shoulder or put his hand on my back and walk with me a short way in the hall. I was flattered that an older man found me so interesting. It didn’t hurt that he had the attention of most of the high school girls. One day, he kissed me. He apologized, but he did it again a couple of days later. It escalated like that until right before the Homecoming game. He pushed it a little farther than I expected.

“Things got heavy. He asked me to quit being a tease and go down on him. I panicked, disappeared.” She gave Ian a significant look.

Ian nodded. "I understand. Keep going," he murmured.

Her gaze darted over his face. In the years since the incident, media talked about the shame he suffered and the loss that his coaching abilities to the professional circuit. The young girl who had hidden herself for fear of recriminations hadn't given the media a single sound-bite to hang either of them with.

"Wilks got caught with his pants down and the pre-game news crew caught it, plastered it in the headlines. The coach of the year wound up with charges of indecent exposure with the intent to assault a minor," she finished.

"His career ended instantly, while you got away without exposure," Ian said.

"Being a minor, they kept my name out of the news. When he tried to come after me, blame me for what he'd done, my family made sure he wouldn't keep trying."

"The gag order," Sterling concluded.

She'd almost forgotten he was in the room. "That's right."

"That must have been hell," Ian said. He reached for her, pulling her into his arms and holding her tight against his chest. "God, I'm such an idiot."

"Wilks said you were blackmailing Deeks," Sterling said, confusion making his words pitch higher.

"I've met Deeks exactly four times. Three of them at press conferences. One of them for a charity shoot. None of them were alone or outside the professional arena," she said.

"And all the players you slept with?" Sterling asked.

"The team has nothing but respect for her. If you talked to the players once in a while, you'd know that without asking."

"You believe me," she said.

"One hundred percent," Ian answered.

"I owe you an apology, Harper." Sterling stood uneasily. "I wanted Ian close by, and after all the injuries he'd had—especially the concussions—I knew he wouldn't be a top pick. Some of those injuries I could leave out of the hiring stats, but they'd have surfaced one day."

"I can't believe you rigged my draft," Ian said.

"You didn't know?" Flora looked up at him, her chin resting on his chest.

Ian smoothed the hair off her temples. "No, baby, not until after the fact. I had the same questions, but Wilks said my experience got me the job. I love football. You cheated me, Bobby.

I didn't get drafted on my own merit."

"I wanted you here," Sterling said, shrugging. "Wilks offered to pad the report he sent to Deeks and told me that if he drafted you, it would give us a prime opportunity to expose Harper as a blackmailer. If I got her job as a kickback, I didn't think it was such a bad trade off—you know, thinking she was guilty and all."

"I think I'm going to finish out this season and retire," Ian mused, still stroking Flora's temples and cheeks.

"Why would you want to retire?" she asked. "What about your contract?"

"I'm a free agent, so my contract is written with an out clause. I'm sure Deeks wanted it in there to get him out of a bad deal if I didn't pan out. In this case, it's going to free me from renewal."

"But, but, your *career*," Sterling protested.

"My career is over if I keep getting injured. I'm hoping," he said, smiling at Flora. "That Flora lets me apologize for doubting her, over the next indefinite number of years."

Ian's gorgeous blue eyes held hers. She saw tenderness, acceptance, and the same emotion she'd seen when he'd made love to her. Flora rose up on her toes. She kissed his perfect lips, wanting to see his expression up close, see the banked desire lurking in the sapphire depths.

"I think I can draft up that contract for you Mr. Tate. I'll warn you, though, I don't put out clauses in my contracts."

"So you're in love with her," Sterling concluded.

Ian grinned widely. "I'd say the way I feel about Flora is faery surprising."

"Oh, that's bad," she groaned.

"Get me Wilks," Sterling barked.

She jerked her head to see him holding the phone to his ear.

Sterling covered the mouthpiece and whispered, "Do either of you know how long a gag order lasts? No? Doesn't matter." Uncovering the mouthpiece, he waited a moment before continuing. "Wilks. Sterling here. It's come to my attention that you have a gag order involving Ms. Harper. No, shut up and listen. If I hear a peep about you and anything involving Ms. Harper in the future, I'll see to it that you're standing before the judge, jobless."

A pause.

"You're right. I had a part in it and that's what I'll tell Deeks tomorrow morning. You'll

leave her alone. With the witnesses I have and the emails you've sent, I have more than enough to get you on slander. Yeah, that's what I thought. Asshole."

Sterling slammed the receiver down and held his hand out over his desk. "I'm sorry for my part in your harassment, Harper. He won't be bothering you, again."

Flora shook it.

"Welcome to the family," he said.

"A bit premature, don't you think?" she replied. She grinned, knowing the heat to her cheeks meant she wore a spectacular blush.

"Nah, my boy-o knows a good thing when he sees one."

"Quite spilling my secrets, Bobby."

"Sorry, kid."

* * * *

Ian held the elevator doors for her. Hooking her arm, he drew her to the back of the car behind the other passengers and pulled her ass to his groin. His hard length only made her anticipation increase.

He brushed the hair off her neck and leaned in to place a row of kisses from ear to shoulder. A couple of the other passengers glanced back. One smiled knowingly and Flora pushed her elbow into his gut.

His quiet snicker tickled her ear. The warm flick of his tongue drawing her lobe into his mouth set off a riot of sensations, all of which settled between her legs. He flexed his hips. Flora barely stifled a groan of longing. When his hand flattened on her stomach and confidently drifted to cup her breast, Flora covertly swatted him.

She noticed that the others minded their business, but she heard the occasional chuckle when her slaps met flesh.

"I want to taste you," he whispered for only her to hear.

Her mouth went dry and her body felt achy with need. Ian detoured from the latest slap, diving low to rub her pussy through her skirt. She grabbed his wrist, meaning to stop him, but finding her will unequal to the task.

She could hardly believe their luck when the last person got off on the third floor. With a relieved sigh, her head dropped back on his shoulder. His free arm circled around her waist and she clung to that arm, too, for balance. The ground shifted beneath her feet. Dappled light from

the fading sun danced through tall, swaying branches.

“Where are we?” she asked. For once the faery gift had taken her somewhere she didn’t mind being.

“This is,” he began, in awe. His hand stroked over the bark of a nearby tree, fingers trembling and reverent as they caressed a lover’s carving. “This is the place where my dad proposed to my mom.”

She turned, wrapping her arms around his shoulders. “You know this place?”

“Very well,” he said nodding. Surprise had rounded his eyes. “We used to camp here every summer before they died. This is incredible. I believed you could transport because there was no other explanation for what I have seen. I never thought I’d experience it firsthand.”

“Only the things touching me, like people or clothing, come with me in a transport. That’s why I ended up in my office naked but for your jersey.”

He chuckled, hugged her close. “That had to have been awkward.”

“About as awkward as transporting nude into the football locker room with a vibrator between my legs.”

“*That* was hot.”

“*That* was embarrassing and potentially career wrecking.” She looked around. “What’s strange is, I’ve never been here. I only transport to places I either know or am associated to through those I know. I wouldn’t have known about this place.”

“It’s private property,” he said, his voice growing husky. “No one around for miles.”

“You brought me here. Just like you called me to your bedroom last night. No one else could do that. Not even my twin sister.”

“After this, nothing surprises me. You walked into my life—correction—*popped* into my life and changed me. I’m glad we’re here and I can show this to you. I had just been thinking about how much I like touching you and how I wanted to have the right to touch you for the rest of my life. It makes sense that this would be where I’d want to go.”

Her heart skipped a beat. “You were thinking that?” she breathed.

“Among other things,” he murmured.

Ian kissed her, firmly possessing her mouth. He cupped her ass and tilted her into his pelvis. A draft touched the back of her thighs.

“Another quarterback sneak?” she teased.

He palmed her cheek. “Not a good one if you figured it out.”

“Oh, it’s good,” she assured him. “It’s very, very good.”

Fingernails scraped her ass lightly, wringing an answering clench from deep in her pussy. His lips and teeth closed on her neck, wetly mimicking his hands. He was going to make her feel stuff again, she thought happily. Holding himself in check while he saw to her needs seemed to be a gift of his.

A wonderful, fabulous, gift. She should return it in the best of ways. She should make him lose control.

Armed with a goal, Flora undid his belt and jeans.

“Nuh uh. I’m not done with you yet,” he said. She felt as much as heard his words murmured against her neck. He caught her hands behind her back.

“I want you in my mouth.”

His pupils dilated, lips parted on a harsh exhale. Catching her hands with one of his, he lightly touched her jaw with the other. Then tracing her lips with the tips of his fingers, he seemed to contemplate the offer.

“Let me.”

Ian’s thumb eased between her lips. She sucked it, swirling her tongue around the tip and holding it in her teeth. His attention held at her mouth as though fascinated with the way her lips moved when he pulled it slowly out. He slicked her mouth with the moisture.

Her pussy ached in earnest and she tried to free her hands. Ian shook his head, seeming to come out of a daze.

“No, baby. I want that more than anything, but I can’t let you do that on the same day I found out Wilks tried to make you do it to him. I don’t want you to have that memory.”

“I want to. Cover the bad with the good, Ian. Let me end a bad memory and begin another one with the man I love.”

He didn’t try too hard to stop her when she tugged to free her hands a second time. Flora lifted his shirt. It took a few seconds before he helped her get it off of him.

“Turn around,” she said.

Curiosity pinched his brows together, but he turned and faced the tree where his parents had carved their initials inside a heart. Flora ran her hands over his back, his shoulders, down his arms and returned to track his sides, feeling her fingers bump over his ribs and each beautifully

delineated muscle.

Flora fumbled with her shirt buttons, then her bra hooks as she stripped the clothes off her upper body. Moving into him, she pressed her breasts on his back. Ian's heated flesh puckered already sensitive nipples further, and when he groaned, she groaned with him. Moisture seeped from her pussy.

Her hands didn't feel big enough to touch all of him like she wanted too, but she ran them up the front of his chest. She couldn't help herself, she had to taste him. Rubbing her open lips on his back, she inhaled his scent, closed her mouth on a spot for a sucking kiss. She loved the smooth texture against her tongue, the slight salty taste. Repeating the kiss, she simultaneously twisted his nipples and was pleased to feel him shudder.

"Take off your pants," she ordered between kisses.

When he didn't shuck them fast enough, she helped, loving the way his firm ass pushed her belly when he bent slightly to free his ankles. Flora took full advantage. She dropped to her knees and nipped his ass cheek.

"Turn around," she ordered, next.

He almost stumbled in his speed to obey. His cock nudged her jaw and she turned to take him into her mouth. Salty, musky, and all male, his length slid partly into her willing mouth. Ian fisted his hands in her hair and she thought she might come right then. He seemed to be having the same problem.

Ian's jaw tightened as he breathed through clenched teeth and stared down at her. His eyes were wild with passion. His control was slipping, and it made her smile around her mouthful.

"You do this and I won't be able to make love to you right away," he panted.

She came off his cock with a teasing lick to the tip. "We'll see about that." She hooked a finger around his scrotum and applied careful pressure to the base of his cock, squeezing its circumference to restrict the blood flow and prolong his pleasure. His head moved easily back into her mouth as she took it and the first two inches only.

Smooth and steely, it slipped between her lips while she sucked and drew. Her tongue worked him, paying special attention to the underside when it elicited excited sounds from him.

Ian tugged her hair, unconsciously trying to push deeper into her mouth.

When his flavor increased, Flora applied more pressure to his base, prolonging his climb

to orgasm as she enjoyed every bone rattling groan of pleasure he praised her with. Her clit throbbed, begging for attention. She reached between her legs, slid her fingers into her aching flesh. She moaned too. He swore, grabbed her shoulders and hauled her to her feet.

Pushing her up against his parent's tree, Ian yanked at her skirt and panties until they joined the small pile of his clothes on the ground. He didn't bother to watch them fall, he stared deep into her eyes and nudged her at her folds. She didn't know who was closer to losing control, but either way, they'd both end up winners.

He lifted her and she fitted him inside, shivering as his length sank into her body, stretching it while she adjusted to his size and the position.

"Yes," she hissed.

"Lock your legs," he instructed huskily.

She understood, locked her legs around his waist as Ian braced her back on the tree. His forearms provided a cushion from the rough bark.

He flexed.

She cried out, threw her head back.

Ian's body hunched rhythmically as drive overtook restraint. He'd taken her slowly before, insisting she feel every moment their bodies had joined with crystal clarity. He'd made love to her heart, soul, and mind by doing it with adoring eyes and worshiping lips. He'd changed her so that she'd never have sex with another man and not think of Ian.

As Ian's body flexed as his cock pumped inside her, she realized he'd done more than that. He'd made it so she'd never want to have sex with another man, period. He'd taken away her pain and replaced it with love.

That's when she knew she had truly lost the battle with him before it had started. She'd blamed his slow lovemaking, yet slow loving or fast fucking, Ian made her feel *everything*.

He reached between their bodies to find her clit, effectively ripping her mind from cerebral pursuits and flinging it onto the deep red canvas of rapture. Her cries of sharp, sudden ecstasy intertwined with his throatier shouts.

A family of birds took wing from the lofty branches to soar. Her sightless gaze locked on them until they were gone as though they were the living forms of her heightened passion. Breathing heavily, she curled into his chest.

Ian cuddled her protectively until they slowly came back. "I can't believe I almost lost

you to my pride.”

She couldn't believe how fast she'd fallen in love with Ian Tate. There would be a lot of explaining to do back at the office. “I don't think you could have lost me if you tried, Ian.” She kissed him, keeping her eyes open the way he'd taught her. No, she couldn't imagine her life without him. “Will you marry me, Ian Tate?” she asked breathlessly, against his lips.

His startled laugh brought a smile to her lips. She liked the way his eyes danced when she'd pleased him. It swelled her heart with joy.

“Are you sure? Because I really messed things up for a while there.”

“I love you,” she said. “The rest is water under the bridge.”

He cupped the back of her head, drawing her down to touch their foreheads together. “As long as we're crossing that bridge together, I'll follow you anywhere.”

“Even down the aisle?” she asked, playfully.

“Especially then.”

About the Author

Mia makes her home in Minneapolis, Minnesota where she divides her time between a job and spying on people. Mia enjoys long walks in Como Park, daisies, dancing in the snow ...(Delete prior sentence, meant for personal ad)...

Mr. Perfect may apply in person for a thorough evaluation and trial. All others will be towed.

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Freeze Frame

Dill is a late-blooming, bitter lad. His talent didn't surface until his majority and then, only accidentally discovered. Dill can freeze time. It's a fantastic gift, but only seems to surface when he has something really important to say. Like, "Piss off" or "I love you". Now that he's found Mason Haliday, a man worth having, will he lose him to an inability to confess his heart?

Boiling Point

Fauna is the shy, second-born twin. She's never really understood her place in the family, let alone the two worlds she's supposed to be born of. With a mother who is wonderfully dim-witted, and all her siblings working through the trickery of the faery world, she has no interest in anyone magical entering her life.

She is a curious girl though, and as a curious girl, uses her invisibility to understand how the sexual components of relationships work. But when she finally gets a chance at her own, can she stay visible long enough for Cooper Blank to notice? And will she care when she realizes that the man who makes her heart go thump-thump is an Elemental?

Hitched

Willow, the youngest of five, has always been particularly *flexible*. She's even comfortable flitting in and out of both realms. Lately, her boy-toys from each realm have begun demanding more from her, but she's not convinced they are ready to handle sharing. Still, she might have a better grip on the situation if conflict didn't leave her as speechless as, say, a plank of wood...literally.

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***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.

Find Melinda Barron's *Desires of the Lamp Tales* at
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Wish Me Up, Rub Me Down

With no love life to speak of, BBW Anya Bartholomew lives only for her job. This dedication has paid off. As a successful advertising agent, she has risen in the ranks of her firm to be the top moneymaker.

But at the insistence of her two best friends, who claim she needs a break from work, Anya takes a weekend vacation to the small town of Pleasant, Maine. While shopping at an antique shop, she rubs a lamp that looks as if it could belong to Aladdin himself.

Things will never be the same.

Back at work on Monday morning, Anya finds that her boss has given her a new account...for a lamp factory. However, her clients—two very handsome, very sexy men—are more than what they seem.

They're Pleasure Djinn. And they have come to fulfill five of Anya's most secret sexual wishes.

Aliya Baban and the Cave of Pleasure

Advertising agent Aliya Baban is beautiful with a capital B. Unfortunately, she's also a witch with a capital B. In her twenty-eight years of life, she's managed to offend almost every woman she has ever met.

But she doesn't care, really. That's just the way life is.

When her boss tells her to get the *Cave of Pleasure* account, or else get a new job, Aliya takes her party invitation—and the strange lamp she's received—and attends the nightclub's grand opening, ready to do battle for her livelihood.

Matuse is more than just the owner of the *Cave of Pleasure*...he's a pleasure djinni. And Aliya has rubbed his lamp. For the next thirty days, she belongs to him. Though he intends to bring intense pleasure to her body, it's also his job to make sure his "she-devil" changes her wicked ways.

Will Matuse be able to help Aliya overcome her painful past? Or will Aliya fail to make the five heartfelt apologies she needs to make to the five women she has hurt the most.

To Rub, Honor and Obey

Moreen McGee is a perfect example of how poor decisions made in youthful rebellion can haunt someone for life. Now on probation for ten years, she serves her court-ordered community service at a center for troubled teens, in the hopes of stopping other kids from taking the wrong path.

But when one of her young charges pickpockets a wallet from her high school nemesis, Aliya Baban, Moreen decides to put the illicit skills she learned as a teenager to good use...by breaking into Aliya's apartment to return the stolen wallet, thus keeping the kid who stole it out of trouble and out of jail.

However, once she's in the opulent Manhattan flat, Moreen can't resist the urge to take one small token from the woman she still blames for her own downfall—an old, neglected oil lamp that she's sure Aliya will never miss.

Moreen accidentally summons a gorgeous demon-turned-pleasure djinni named Paran...and he's not too thrilled with the theft of his property. Moreen has rubbed his lamp; the contract is sealed. For the next thirty days, she belongs to him. And Paran intends to use this time to help his little felon learn some very important lessons, including the true meaning of the words *honor* and *obey*.

Smoke, Fire and Desire

Scientist Rhylie Dawson works hard, but when it comes to play, she's pretty reserved. Until her friends take her to the *Cave of Pleasure* in New York City. She's there to celebrate her birthday, and maybe, just maybe, get lucky.

What Rhylie doesn't know is the *Cave of Pleasure* is run by Pleasure Djinn, and they're eager to show her that there's more to life than just work. On stage in front of a bevy of male dancers, Rhylie is told to choose one for her special birthday dance.

She picks the fireman, and quickly learns that where there's smoke, there's fire, and a great deal of desire.

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