

THE AGENCY:
Bear's Den



MICHELLE HASKER

Changeling Press

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Richard's had his best agents on this case from the start, but after one too many mistakes he's not going to trust this final mission to anyone else. His ex-lover is his one hope to fix the trouble his agents have caused and capture the head of the drug cartel once and for all. Unfortunately, Sydney's not the same woman he once knew and loved.

Sydney blew her last chance with Richard because of her fears and insecurities. She's learned from her mistakes, and even if Richard never forgives her, she'll do her damndest to win him back, and prove she's all the woman he needs, or die trying.

Dedication

To Tina Bandoni:

Without you this story would have never been finished. Thank you.

Chapter One

Richard studied the all white exterior of the house and wondered why Erik Hardaway had a fascination with the color. Or lack of color.

Sydney had convinced him that Erik was only guilty of ignorance in this case, but it didn't mean he had to trust the man. A woman could be swayed by a handsome face. Especially one she'd been sleeping with for the past year.

Too much depended on this. It had taken years to get this close to shutting down the operation, and nothing -- not even personal feelings -- would keep him from putting the mastermind behind bars. He would retire with every case satisfactorily solved, and move as far from the luscious Sydney as he could.

The door opened before he could press the doorbell a second time. He pasted a smile on his face and waited for the person to step out of the shadows and greet him. The man who did was as immaculately dressed as Jess and Chase had warned him Erik would be, but the look on his face was not what he'd expected. Instead of a pleasure loving man concerned with his appearance and entertainment, he was a man who looked haunted by demons both internal and external. Richard could relate to that well.

"You look even fiercer than Sydney described."

Richard gave a harsh laugh. That made two of them. Before he could make a comment, Erik pulled the door open wider and stepped to the side. "I've sent some of my staff on vacation while we sort out this mess. The attempts on my life are one thing, but I've already lost enough staff members I actually care about. I'm not even sure if I can trust my kitchen help anymore."

"You're worth more to them alive than dead." Richard looked around the foyer. The bright white, enormous and expensive decorations were everything Chase had promised, and then some. And Erik was exactly as Jess described.

They stood almost the same height, except Erik was about an inch taller. Richard stiffened his spine and stared into the man's blue eyes. As he studied the man's tanned skin and blond hair, he understood why Jess had referred to Erik as a beach bum. Was Erik Sydney's type? Why did he care?

A growl built in his throat. He tried to disguise it by clearing his throat, but knew his host wouldn't be fooled for too long if he didn't keep his animal urges under control.

"Sydney's been busy preparing for your arrival."

"I'm sure she has been. Are all the deadly weapons locked up so she can't kill me?"

"She doesn't want to kill you." Erik's genuine smile dimmed even more of Richard's hope that Sydney hadn't fallen under the man's spell. With his perfect appearance, manners and money, no other man would be able to compete with him for a woman's affections. Not even his weird quirk for white would scare off the ladies.

"I believe I know her better than you." Richard smirked and adjusted his tie. Being polite to the man bedding his ex was more trying than he'd anticipated. Hadn't he gotten over these feelings years ago?

"I don't think so." Erik shook his head. "You may have been intimate with her, but what Sydney and I share goes beyond that."

Richard clenched his fists so tight they shook at his sides from the effort to keep his hands off his host. He had a job to do here. Whether he liked Erik or not, the man was actually innocent of any wrongdoing. That he was a pervert who hosted kinky parties wasn't in question, but no one had ever been hurt, and no complaints had ever been lodged against him.

"Down, boy." Erik flashed him another toothy grin. The urge to break some of those pearly whites was almost overwhelming. "I'm not trying to one up you or

anything, but I've spent months with Sydney, and I know her inside and out. I know her better than you ever thought you did."

Richard growled. "Shut up while you're still breathing."

"Listen, Richard. You dumped her, so you can't come in here acting all possessive."

"I'm not possessive!" It wasn't until his voice echoed in the foyer that Richard realized he was shouting.

"So I don't need to warn you that our suites connect, and Sydney spends as many nights in my rooms as I spend in hers?"

Richard drew in a deep breath and released it on a hiss. "I don't care what she does as long as she completes her mission, and so far she's not done a good job with that. You might be the first mission she's failed, but --"

"I wouldn't finish that sentence." Sydney stepped out of a darkened doorway. She looked mouthwatering in her anger. Her brilliant white hair was styled in a boyish spike that suited her better than it should. Her arms were crossed under her ample breasts, emphasizing them rather than hiding them. The white peasant blouse and loose flowing skirt had Erik's name written all over them. Did she dress to please her new lover? Did she give Erik what she'd steadfastly refused to give him?

She shifted, lifting her breasts when she tightened her arms around her midsection. Good. He made her nervous and reminded her of what they'd once had. Erik couldn't be satisfying her if she was looking at him so hungrily.

"You're staring."

He licked his lips and focused on her nose instead of the large, soft mounds of flesh he wanted to suckle. He narrowed his eyes and tried to ignore her tempting body. Something about her was off. Warnings blared in his head, but he didn't know why. Instead of giving in to the urge to make her his again, he retreated behind his boss demeanor. "You were sent here to catch the criminal, and it took you about a year to prove it isn't Erik. This whole mission has been nothing but wrought with mistakes from the start."

"You sent me here to catch the wrong man. If we hadn't spent so much time trying to prove Erik was someone he's not, we might have figured this out sooner."

"As delightful as your bickering is, I'm dying to know how Jess and Chase are. Is that luscious woman still leading him on a merry chase?" Erik chuckled, probably at his own joke, lame as it was.

"They're going to be married before the end of the year." Richard's gaze inadvertently landed on Sydney again. Once upon a time he'd planned to marry her. He still had the ring. He'd kept it as a costly and painful reminder of his lack of control.

"If things don't work out, please tell --"

"I will not tell Jess you're interested. She's finally admitted her love for Chase. I won't allow you to ruin things for them."

"Actually, I was going to tell you to let Chase know I was interested."

Richard bit back a laugh. He knew about Chase's issues with Erik's interest. Sydney didn't need to be with a man who couldn't decide if he preferred men or women. Although, maybe she deserved to be treated as she'd treated him several years ago. Not that she'd cheated on him with a woman, but that she'd found a need to look elsewhere for sex. As if he wasn't good enough.

"Sydney's quite the firecracker in bed. I find it hard to believe she doesn't keep you satisfied with her insatiable appetite."

Her face darkened and her lips tightened in a frown. "Enough." Sydney shut the door behind her. "Let's get you situated upstairs."

"Eager to get me into your bedroom?" Richard grinned. She was as easy to anger as always. At least some things never changed.

"Perhaps you two should just have sex and then we can move on." Erik looked back and forth between them.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

Richard knew exactly what Erik meant. "Yes, you do. Deny it all you want, Sydney. You still desire me."

"And you want to jump her bones. I don't mind watching if you two can't wait to get to the privacy of Sydney's rooms."

"I just bet you don't." Richard narrowed his eyes and studied the man. He didn't sense a trap, but he wouldn't trust Erik as easily and as quickly as Jess and Sydney had. "You might be our host and client for this mission, but I'm still the boss."

Sydney sighed and turned her back to them. Stupid men. Someone wanted to kill Erik, or at least scare him into not looking for the man responsible for using his home to sell drugs, and they were busy comparing the size of their dicks. Of course, her glance had gone straight down there when she'd first seen Richard in the hallway. She'd never admit it, but she was so horny she had to fight to keep from throwing herself at him and begging for forgiveness. Her body screamed in need for him.

His thick brown hair looked nothing like the ruffled mess it used to be. Instead it was combed into submission. He was dressed in a perfectly pressed suit, and even though he'd spent at least twelve hours in the limo to get here, he looked as if he'd just gotten dressed. From the top of his perfect head to his shiny shoes, she wanted to jump him. She wanted to fuck him right here in the foyer, but the stubborn, uptight man wouldn't appreciate it. He thought she was a liar and a cheat. Letting him believe that had been easier than trusting him with the truth.

Perhaps if she'd known then that she wasn't the only shapeshifter in the Agency... If she'd heard the story about how Richard saved Jessica from experimentation and not only saved her life, but treated her like a normal person and not a freak, she might have told him her secret. But Sydney hadn't known, and she'd done what she had to so she could protect herself.

Erik was the only man who knew her secret, and it hadn't been her choice to reveal it. He'd caught her one day in the huge walk-in freezer in the kitchen. Instead of finding the ice cream he'd been searching for, he'd found a polar bear.

Though she'd had no choice but to trust him with her secret, it had eaten away at her over the past few months. The man she'd been sent to prove guilty of drug trafficking now had something he could hold over her. If she'd ever found anything to

incriminate him, there'd have been nothing and no one to protect her if he'd chosen to reveal her secret.

Fortunately, Erik had proven himself trustworthy, even after the botched investigation by Jessica and Chase. That crazy monkey woman owed her big time.

Richard was quiet as they walked up the grand staircase and down the long hallway. She wondered if Richard would change his opinion of Erik after he got to know him, or if he would stay true to form and not bother getting to know the man at all.

Tension emanated from Richard in waves. His desire was obvious, as was his determination not to act on it. They had unfinished business. A lot of it. Her fear of trusting him had ultimately resulted in losing him. She'd been paying the price ever since.

Erik was right when he said they needed to get this out of their system, but how could she make Richard see that? He thought she was a cheater, and she let him think that because it had been an easy way for her to end the relationship. Or rather, let him end the relationship.

She had hoped he would move on and find someone else, but he still had a chip on his shoulder, and he seemed unlikely to let it go anytime soon. Perhaps she could use that to her advantage. The only major problem was that Richard thought she and Erik were lovers.

It was true that they had experimented, but Erik preferred not to sleep with employees. It was bad for both business and health, he always said. When asked why he'd given in to his desire for her, he'd explained that it was his curiosity about making love to a polar bear shapeshifter. Though he'd enjoyed the sex, she'd found it lacking, and now she understood why. It wasn't the need for another polar bear. It was her need for Richard. Her love for him kept her from enjoying what other men might offer.

They stopped in front of her room. Erik turned to Richard. "Now remember, you've come here to join your lover and check out her boss to make sure there's no

hanky panky between us. There will be another party this weekend. In fact, my guests start arriving tomorrow."

Richard looked at Sydney, his eyes blazing in anger. "Someone forgot to mention this to me. Is there a reason you didn't tell me that the groundwork had been set for me to be your lover?"

"First of all, I didn't think you'd be the one coming out here. Second, it's not like it's gonna be that much of a stretch for you. And third, you need to blend in. No one will fall for a new couple again. Everyone knows me. I've been here for so long most people don't even remember Erik's last personal assistant. After Jess and Chase's screw up, it's important to keep Erik as safe as possible. We can take turns staying with him through the night. Our love life will explain why we're so tired, and we can slip off for a rejuvenating nap when the daytime guards are on duty."

"It sounds as if you have this all planned out." Richard frowned and crossed his arms.

"Everything but you and your suits. Am I gonna be able to get you to loosen up enough and relax so that people will believe we're lovers?"

"I think it works this way. Who better for my methodical, perfectionist PA to fall in lust with than a work-obsessed man?" Erik chuckled.

"It would have worked better if we didn't have all this bad history between us." Richard frowned at her.

Sydney wondered when he'd begun to frown so much, and what she could do to change things. She wanted him back, and this time she was ready and willing to share her secret and her life with him. All she needed to do was persuade him they belonged together. It sounded easy, but would be far from it. Richard was stubborn and thickheaded, but she still loved him.

"It might be too late to convince people you two are lovers anyway." Erik walked over to a window, pulled the curtain aside, and looked out.

"What do you mean?" Richard stiffened and glared at Erik.

"Your reunion was nothing spectacular. In fact, it wasn't even warm and fuzzy. How do you expect whoever is doing this to me to relax their guard when it's obvious to even a child that you can't stand each other?"

Richard's back stiffened even more, something she hadn't thought possible. "We were lovers once, we can pretend to be again."

"Pretending ain't gonna cut it, Richard. My life has been threatened. Someone has tried to kill me twice, and you want me to have faith that you can unbend enough to pretend to be Sydney's lover. I don't think so. I want to see something that will convince me." Erik walked in between Sydney and Richard as he headed for the door. He winked at Sydney. "Sydney better look thoroughly satisfied when you two come down to dinner, or else."

Chapter Two

The door slammed behind Erik. Sydney turned away from Richard to get her emotions together. She was grateful that Erik was doing what he could to push Richard to her, but it could also backfire. What she needed to do now was ensure Richard didn't find a way to back out of having sex with her. Once they'd had sex, she would know if she had any chance of winning him back.

"You put him up to that!"

She spun to face him. "I don't know what the hell you're talking about."

"You put him up to forcing us into this situation."

"Why, Richard? Why would I do such a thing?"

"Maybe you regret losing me? Maybe you haven't had a real man since I left?"

Sydney bit back a laugh. Other than Erik there hadn't been anyone else. And she'd only slept with Erik out of curiosity and a need for comfort. Breaking up with Richard had hurt her more deeply than she'd realized. How much had she hurt him? Would making love to him and confessing the truth be enough? She needed to know he wouldn't reveal her secret. He'd kept Jessica's, but she'd also been his little protégé. She was lucky he hadn't fired her after their break up.

"No argument?" Richard's expression made her heart race. She longed to hold him close and confide in him, but nerves and fear held her back. Need and desire had built to an overwhelming level, but she couldn't make herself take that first step into his arms.

"Argument about what?" Sydney forced her trembling legs to walk her closer to Richard. He obviously wasn't going to take the initiative, and that meant she had to -- unless she wanted to waste what might be her last chance to get him back.

"That you put Erik up to this so you could have your way with me. That you want me back."

"Any way I can have you." The words popped out unbidden, but she didn't try to take them back. They were true, and here and now, before the others arrived, was her chance to find out how he really felt about her. To see if she had a chance.

The stunned expression on his face was well worth it. While she had the advantage, she closed the rest of the distance between them. Before he could back away, she slipped her arms around him and pressed up against him. Her inner bear roared in pleasure. Her pussy clenched in anticipation.

"I want you, Richard. Orders or not." Then she kissed him before he could refuse her.

His lips opened in surprise, but he didn't push her away. A groan from deep in his throat sent a thrill of pleasure through her right before he grabbed onto her waist and squeezed. The pain wasn't enough to make her ask him to stop. In fact, it only added to her desire. She wanted him to take her hard and fast. She didn't care if he was rough as long as he loved her thoroughly.

As if she'd snapped his control, Richard pressed her up against the nearest wall and ground his lower body against hers. Simulating the act of sex wasn't enough though. She wanted unrestrained sex. She wanted him to lose control and let her in. If she wanted to sneak past his thick exterior, she needed to get him completely sated. He'd always been more amiable after sex. More loving.

Tears almost slipped free when she remembered exactly how loving and romantic he'd been with her. And she'd thrown it away because she couldn't believe he loved her. Couldn't trust that he would love her enough to accept her, polar bear and all. If it hadn't been for Jessica's fuckup, she'd never have known.

He slid his hands up to her breasts and cupped them. Slowly, he massaged them through the soft fabric. "I've always loved your breasts."

Even as she wondered if he'd meant to say that out loud, he grabbed the fabric and jerked his hands apart. Her buttons flew off, scattering around the room as Richard exposed her breasts to the cool air in the room. The hint of danger and his hunger excited her. Her heart raced as heat coiled in her stomach. When his hot breath fanned across her swollen nipples, she realized he'd opened her bra.

"Richard." She moaned his name as she arched so her breasts lifted toward his mouth.

When his lips closed on one stiff peak, she moaned again and pushed into him. He suckled on her nipple while he pinched and tugged the other with his finger and thumb.

Sydney choked on another moan when he increased the pressure on her nipples. She didn't remember him ever being forceful, but she loved it. Needed it. She needed him to fuck her hard. To make her his. Mark her.

Richard kept his mouth on her, but released her other breast and yanked her blouse down her arms and sides. Sydney struggled free so she could thrust her hands in his hair. She wriggled her thighs together to try and ease the ache in her pussy. She didn't want foreplay, she wanted him to take her up against this wall. Now.

"Please." She barely recognized her lust-filled voice as she thrust against him, rubbing against his erection. Her stomach tightened, and her entire body tensed at the delicious sensation of his hard cock. She tugged on her skirt until she managed to get it up to her waist. "Please."

Richard abandoned her breasts, and kissed her aggressively. He devoured her mouth while he reached down and stroked her mons. Frantic for more, Sydney whimpered and undulated against his hand. The sound of tearing material reached her ears a split second before a hot finger pressed against her clit.

"Yes," she hissed, fingers digging into his shoulders as she gave in to the multitude of sensations tumbling through her.

One hand played with her breast, tugging and pinching her nipple, while the other rubbed against her clit in slow, gentle motions. So slow she whimpered in agony. Close. So close.

"Richard..." Sydney dug her nails into him, hoping the pain would make him comply.

Two fingers slipped deep into her, and crooked, rubbing against her sweet spot. She screamed as she rode his fingers, dragging out the delicious orgasm. Ripples of pleasure washed over her again and again as Richard ruthlessly finger fucked her. He abandoned her mouth and bit her nipple, almost giving her another orgasm.

As if sensing it, he released her nipple, dropped to his knees and pressed his mouth against her clit. Sydney moaned and buried her fingers in his hair. She rocked with him, rubbing her swollen nub against his lips. Richard sucked on her clit, and she came again, even harder this time.

Wave after wave of pleasure rippled through her. She gasped for air, enjoying the tingling of her body. She still wanted his cock buried deep inside her, but she hadn't come so hard in years. Five years, to be exact.

Without warning, Richard removed his fingers and pushed back. He rose in a swift move and turned away from her. "There. You had your pleasure. Mission accomplished."

Her heart stopped for a painful minute, then slammed in her chest when he began to walk away from her. No man pleased her and then walked away as if nothing had happened.

An outraged roar escaped from her as she launched herself at him. She tackled Richard to the floor and they rolled around until he pinned her beneath him. His breath came hard and fast. As hard as the cock pressing against her so intimately again. Sydney instinctively arched against him.

"I gave you what you wanted."

"You. I want you!" Sydney used her superhuman strength to roll him beneath her.

"You had me and gave me up. You can't have me again." Richard bucked and then flipped her faster than she could blink. He went to get up, but she locked her legs around him and squeezed.

"I can and I will." She ignored the pain at his words and focused on his erection, which proved his desire even though he claimed to be immune to her. Did he think she was stupid? She had been in the past, but not anymore.

Since her hands were tangled with his, and her legs were busy keeping him from moving away, she did the only thing she could do, and bit the area of skin between his neck and shoulder. Hard.

Richard froze, his body tensing. She searched his face for signs of anger, and was shocked by the unbridled lust she saw there. So he wanted it rough too?

Sydney arched her back, rubbing her nipples against his silk shirt while she rubbed her wet pussy against his slacks. His jaw clenched, letting her know he was fighting his body's response. She doubled her effort, locking her fingers around his and dragging them down. He didn't fight as she guided their joined hands to her pussy.

"I want you, Richard. I need you. Fuck me good and hard. Make me shatter around your dick. Make me come so hard I scream your name. Fuck me, Richard. Fuck me now!"

His eyes changed color. Shocked, she looked again and saw that they were his normal brown color. Whatever she thought she saw wasn't there.

"You want me to fuck you?" His voice had deepened almost past recognition. It was more a growl than anything else. He looked down at her pussy and their joined hands. He released her hand and cupped her.

"Yes." Sydney rocked against his hand. "Hard and fast and now!"

His nostrils flared as he stared down at her pussy. She knew she was soaking wet from the two orgasms he'd given her, but she wanted more. Needed more.

"Please!" She didn't like to beg. Never had. But for him, she'd do anything.

Still, he continued to stare down at her. Damn it. She'd been so close to having him buried inside her. Desperation drove her to it. At least she'd use that as an excuse if anyone asked.

With another burst of her animal strength, she rolled Richard over and grabbed his hands, reaching them up past his head and pinning them there. She stared down at him, panting, her breasts mere millimeters from his mouth. He stared at them hungrily, which encouraged her.

In a swift movement, she released his hands and grabbed his shirt, yanking it so his buttons popped off. Her hands were on his belt before he could grab her, but when he did, he stopped her.

She whimpered and doubled her effort. She was not giving up without a fight. He wanted her. He was as aroused as she was. It was highly possible that the fight itself was making him even more desperate to have her.

In the past he'd been a gentle lover. This Richard was someone she didn't know. She loved it.

When she couldn't tug free, she went back to rubbing against him, riding him even though she'd never managed to open his pants. "If you don't finish this, I'll have to find Erik and beg him to finish what you started."

His eyes did change. She had no doubt when she saw it this time. They lightened to gold and had a slight glow to them. His face distorted. Shifted. His features reminded her of a bear, and then the image was gone. When his mouth pressed against hers, she realized her back was flat on the floor and she had no idea how she'd gotten in this position.

Stunned, she stared up at him. But his tongue thrust into her mouth. She gave up trying to figure out whether she'd imagined what she'd just seen, and focused on kissing the man she loved.

It was the force of his kiss and the harshness of his hands on her that made her wonder if the mention of Erik had upset him. Was he jealous? He had to still care about her if he could get jealous about her being with another man. With renewed hope, she

unbuckled his belt and tugged it free so she could work on releasing him from his pants.

"I'm in charge." Richard growled again, and pushed at her hands.

He rose and stood, staring down at Sydney. If he didn't take the edge off, he'd be finished before he started, and if he was going to have sex with her then he wanted it to last. It would be the last time he touched her before he retired and started his new life.

"If that's what you want this time." Sydney smiled up at him. Her expression made him think of a satisfied cat. His cat often had that look on her face when she'd just finished a bowl of cream.

"There will be no other times."

"Whatever." Sydney reached for his pants again.

"No. I'm serious." He swatted at her hands again. She was getting as annoying as a fly. "We have sex to satisfy you and Erik. Once we've convinced everyone we're lovers then the bad guys will relax and we can grab them and put an end to this whole thing once and for all."

"What are you going to do once you've finally caught your man? You've spent years pursuing the mastermind behind this drug ring. Then what?"

"I've got my future all planned out."

"I'll bet you do. You know, even the best laid plans fail."

"That's what contingency plans are for." Richard focused on her lips instead of her lying eyes. That she desired him, there was no doubt. Love? He'd been there, done that, and had the broken heart and trust issues that went with her kind of betrayal. He didn't know if it was her inability to be faithful, or her "secret" that hurt more.

Instead of going on with the charade, he turned away.

"Richard?"

"You talked me out of the mood. I satisfied you. No one will ever know that I didn't get off."

"They will if you don't crack any smiles."

"This whole thing was a mistake from the start. I don't understand how you could spend so much time here and never find out who the ringleader is. It took Jess fucking up to prove Eric was innocent. You should have been the one to determine that. You haven't proven anything to me on this mission. Actually, you've proved you're good at sleeping with anything with a penis."

"That's not true! You're being so unfair, Richard."

"What's unfair? That you can't keep your legs closed? That you weren't successful with this mission?"

"I don't like this new you."

"Tough. It's who I am."

"I liked the old Richard better."

"The one who was taken advantage of? The one who made the mistake of not taking control of the relationship?"

"The one who wasn't an asshole."

Richard picked up his suitcase and walked to the bathroom. "I'm taking a shower. Then we can skip dinner and stay here and discuss this case and your behavior. Or lack of it." He closed the bathroom door on her squawk and laughed. If she thought she was going to call the shots she had another think coming. He wasn't about to fall for her charms this time around.

Chapter Three

Two hands crept up her sides as a mouth latched onto her breast. Sydney sagged against the wall as she fisted her hands in Richard's thick, dark hair. He must have been encouraged by her response because he drew more of her breast into his mouth and kneaded the other with his hand. Desperate for more contact, she wrapped her legs around him and tried to pull him closer.

He moaned against her, the sound and vibration almost bringing her to her knees. Richard scooped her up and carried her through the living room, to the bedroom. Sydney reached down and turned the knob. She pushed the door open and flicked on the light switch. Roses filled the room. Rose petals in a bowl next to the bed, red roses in a vase next to the phone, a basket of arranged flowers with roses on the counter in the connecting bathroom, and two long, single stemmed roses, one on each pillow of the bed. A heart-shaped box of chocolates sat on the pillows as well, and a bucket of ice with champagne rested near the bowl of rose petals.

Richard slowly slid her down his body and set her on the floor. He released her, but maintained his grip on her hand as he led her into the bathroom.

"The hot tub." She sighed, a soft feminine sound that she couldn't prevent as she saw the bubble bath and another bottle of champagne. "I can't believe you changed your mind and decided to get back together with me."

"I love you, Sydney. I always have and always will."

She melted at his words.

Drying sand covered her feet and ankles. A quick shower was in order unless they wanted to ruin the hot tub. She finished removing her clothes as she walked over

to the shower stall. "I don't know about you, but I want to get clean before I get in there."

Richard grinned, and took off half his clothes before she even turned on the water. "The beach was a great idea for a honeymoon."

"Yes, it was," she agreed as she played with the shower knobs. Before she could get the temperature right, Richard was completely naked and pressed up against her, cupping her breasts while his erection pressed against her ass cheeks.

"No ticket, no admission." She giggled and jumped into the shower, knowing he was right behind her.

"I have my ticket," he said as he climbed in and slid the door shut. "Let me show it to you."

Sydney turned around and stared at a smooth, muscular chest and well-defined abs. Forget six-pack, he had an eight-pack, and his cock was long and thick. She shivered as he stepped behind her and slid his hands around her stomach and down to her mons.

"Soft, smooth and wet. Just the way I like it." His breath tickled her ear as he slipped one finger in between her folds.

"I know. I did it for you," she whispered, breathless as he removed his finger, then rubbed it and her juices on her clit.

"Mmm." He supported her as she leaned back and spread her legs wider. As he continued to rub her clit, he moved his other hand up to her breast and kneaded it. "I love you, baby."

"Richard..." She sighed his name as electricity danced up and down her spine.

A shiver raced through her as he spread several wet kisses on her neck. When he sucked on the flesh covering her carotid, she cried out and arched. Richard dipped his finger in her slit and then rubbed it against her clit again, while his other hand slipped down her stomach and hips to her ass. Slowly, he traced a line between her cheeks, and pressed against her rosette.

"No." She shook her head when he applied more pressure there.

"Maybe later?" He sounded hopeful, and she didn't have the courage to tell him no, not ever. Dream or not, this was not a road she wanted to go down.

But then he moved lower and slipped that finger inside her, withdrew it and added another, before thrusting both of them back in, all the while still playing with her clit.

"Oh, God." Sydney panted as she thrust against his fingers.

"That's right, baby. Come. Come for me."

She whimpered as a tremor ran through her body.

"Oh, yeah," he moaned, his voice husky as he bit the tender skin on her neck.

Sydney screamed as all her senses overloaded and an explosive orgasm rocketed through her. Before the tremors could calm down, she collapsed against Richard, her legs like jelly while she tried to catch her breath.

"Oh, God. Richard."

"Yes?" he asked as he rubbed his lips against her ear.

"I can't stand."

"That's all right. I've got you."

How did he know the exact thing to say to make her melt?

After a few minutes of tender caresses, he squeezed her. "Can you stand now? I want to get us washed off and into the hot tub."

"Yeah, I think so." Sydney stood on trembling legs as he reached past her for a bottle of shower gel. "We acted like a pair of teenagers, didn't we?"

Richard laughed and squirted some gel on his hand. "So what if we did."

Oh yeah, dream Richard was more fun than real Richard. "Um, isn't it my turn to pleasure you?" Sydney asked as she reached for the shower gel.

"No." He pushed it out of her reach.

"Yes." She tried to move past him.

"No," he said as he blocked her.

"Damn. Foiled again." She laughed as she pressed herself against him.

He ran his hands up and down her back, paying special attention to her ass. Sydney cupped his face and kissed him, but she wanted more. Wanted to feel him buried deep inside her once more.

"I can't wait." She slipped free and grabbed the gel. After squeezing an ample amount on her hands, she rubbed them together with a smile and turned to look at him. "My turn."

Richard widened his stance and put his hands on his hips. "Oh yeah?"

"Yeah."

"Mmm." He moaned as she wrapped her fingers around his cock and spread the shower gel on him.

She took her time and made sure he was clean and breathless before she soaped and rinsed the rest of his body. When she could no longer stand the wait, Sydney sank to her knees, ignoring the hard tile as she stared at his manhood. All soft, smooth skin on the outside, but hard as steel inside. He wielded the thing like a weapon, but she already knew firsthand how wonderful it felt buried deep inside her. She wanted that again. Almost as much as she wanted to taste him.

Sydney wrapped one hand around the base of his shaft while she cupped his balls with the other. Massaging the sac, she leaned forward and swiped her tongue across the tip of his cock. Richard's moan filled the air and she smiled. Hands fisted in her hair as she dragged her tongue around the rim and over the slit on the tip. A drop of pre-cum touched her lips, and she lapped it up, eager for his taste. Salty, male essence tickled her senses as the smell and taste of him sent a rush of fluids between her legs.

Moans and sighs filled the stall as Sydney worked him with her mouth and hands. She took him deep in her mouth and hummed.

"Oh, God. I'm going to come. If you don't want me to come in your mouth you need to stop."

"Mmm," she moaned around him and sucked harder as she squeezed him.

"Sydney!" He shouted her name as hot cum filled her mouth. Sydney swallowed all he had, and didn't stop until he sagged and braced himself against the wall. "Damn, what a wicked mouth you have."

"All the better to suck you with, my dear." She grinned and rose, wincing at the stiffness in her knees.

By the time they made it into the hot tub Sydney was grateful for the heat that penetrated her sore muscles. With a moan, she sank up to her chin in the water.

"Keep making noises like that and I'll be ready to take you again."

"I'd love that, as soon as my body doesn't feel so rubbery. I'm getting too old for blowjobs in the shower. Damn tiles bruised my knees."

"Poor baby," Richard cooed as he slid closer and reached under the water. He caught her foot and lifted it onto his lap. Slowly, he massaged her, starting at the toes and working his way to the heel of her foot and back again.

Sydney moaned once more and almost slipped under the water at the pleasure that shook her to her core. As he manipulated her foot, she could feel tingles in her belly. Spineless. She felt completely spineless as he worked his magic on her foot. When he released her, she went to protest but didn't when he lifted her neglected foot to his lap.

Tension eased from her body as Richard massaged her. Then he cradled both feet and moved up to her ankles. Sydney rested her head on a folded towel and surrendered her body to him. By the time he reached her knees she was half asleep, but once his hands massaged her thighs he had her attention again. She kept her eyes closed, pretending to sleep as he slid his hands higher and higher. When he brushed across her folds she jumped. His finger pressed in between them and she opened her eyes to slits as she watched him.

Richard rubbed her hairless mound and teased her clit with his thumb before he dipped his finger inside. A look of utter concentration was on his face as he explored her sensitive flesh. It took her a minute before she realized what he was doing. He was

listening to her breathing to determine what she liked and what aroused her more than something else. Talk about intense.

Without warning, he pulled away, leaving her feeling bereft. She opened her eyes and looked at him. He leaned over her and scooped her up in his arms. Her belly tightened at his show of strength as he carried her out of the tub and through her bedroom to the balcony doors. When he hesitated, she unlocked and tugged on the handle. It opened easily. Richard carried her out to one of the loungers. He placed her on it, then squatted down to rest on his heels.

Sydney blushed as he looked his fill. The longer he stared at her, the wetter she grew. His expression was so intent, so focused, that she wanted his hands and mouth on her again.

Faking a yawn, she stretched and spread her legs open, giving him a glimpse of her smooth pussy. She reached behind and grabbed onto the top of the lounge, a movement that thrust her breasts forward and made them appear even larger.

"Tease," he whispered, his voice rough.

"Mmm." She moaned and licked her lips as she lowered her arms and trailed her hands down over her breasts and flat stomach. When she reached her folds, she spread them open and dipped one finger between them. Juices leaked out of her and dripped down her finger as she spread it around her clit.

Caught up in the sensations, she was surprised when Richard grabbed her wrist and guided her hand to his mouth. He sucked her finger between his lips and closed his eyes as he licked her finger clean. When he opened his eyes again, they held a gleam that was easy to interpret.

"It's my turn to taste you," he said right before he lowered his head and licked a path from her clit to the cleft of her ass and back again. He moaned against her clit and sucked it between his lips before continuing his way lower. He thrust his tongue in her again and again until she squirmed, trying to get more from him.

Richard pinned her thighs in place and licked his way to her rosette. She squealed and tried to pull away, but he held her. "Please, no. Don't." She gasped and tried to break free.

He didn't answer, but moved back up to her clit and rubbed it with his finger while he licked along the length of her folds. He worked her with his mouth until she writhed underneath him, and then just when she thought she couldn't bear any more, he slipped two fingers inside and crooked them.

Sydney shook as her orgasm swept over her fast and furious. Spasms rocked through her as she rode the waves of pleasure. Before the last one ended, he crawled on top of her and entered her in one fast, hard thrust. She screamed his name and dug her fingers into his shoulder as he plunged into her over and over again.

Breathless, she wrapped her legs around his waist and silently thanked Erik for installing the double lounger. The sound of Richard's balls slapping against her brought her to the brink again. What was it about him that set her off like this? She'd heard of multiple orgasms, but this was ridiculous.

"Mine," he growled as he slammed into her harder.

"Richard." She moaned and clutched him tighter as her world shattered again. Her nerve endings exploded, but the sensations didn't end. As he continued to thrust deep inside, the shock waves continued. When he shouted her name and came, she spiraled over the edge again as his hot cum filled her.

Sydney woke with a gasp. Her sheets were wet from sweat, and tangled around her legs. Richard was nowhere to be seen, and it was probably better that way. After his actions earlier, and this kinky dream, she needed to rethink how she would capture his heart once again.

Chapter Four

"Have a good nap?"

Sydney smiled at Richard. If he only knew.

"While you were sleeping I checked out the house and Erik's rooms. He's eating dinner with his guests."

Hurt by his cold, hard attitude, but determined not to show it, Sydney kept the smile on her face by sheer determination. "Why didn't you join him?"

"Because this way it looks like we're up here having a boinkfest."

Sydney choked and glared at him.

"I'm supposed to lighten up, right?" His gloating smile made her want to erase it with her fist. If there weren't so many breakables in her room she'd throw something at him. Apparently the cold shower hadn't helped her any.

"You know, Jess and Chase came here pretending to be lovers."

"Only they are lovers, and are in love. Big difference between them and us."

Sydney ignored his rude interruption. "Don't you think that the person hiding behind Erik is going to know you're here to catch him? What makes you think he'll foolishly come out in the open?"

"The attacks on Erik's life weren't because he wants to kill Erik. He's trying to draw me here to put an end to our investigation."

Sydney crossed her arms and glared at him. The attempts had been curious. In fact, they'd been poorly thought out and executed. It hadn't occurred to her that they'd been done to lure Richard here, though.

"Ever wonder why Jess and Chase weren't killed?"

"She escaped first."

"I don't think so, Sydney. They didn't kill either of them because they'd planned to use them to lure me here."

"You think too much."

"And it's kept me alive this long. I'm the target, not Erik. And now you're the target too."

"I don't think so. No one's made an attempt to kill me."

"If they didn't know you were involved with the Agency before, they know now."

"This is stupid." He made sense, and it both scared and worried her. He had both leaps in logic and some valid points. That she hadn't thought of this bothered her. She'd been too busy plotting how to get him back and lost her focus on this assignment. That made her as bad as Jess and Kim. Both thinking about sex instead of the job.

"It's not stupid. Every single one of my agents has bungled this case one way or another. Kim killed a suspect I needed. Jess went and fucked up what could have been the end of this whole charade. You couldn't find the person you were sent here to find, and now I have to stand here and argue with you?"

Her bear didn't appreciate his tone, even if her human side knew she deserved his censure.

"I'm not quite sure why you're challenging me, Sydney."

She bit her tongue to keep from responding. He wanted a fight because then he wouldn't have to worry that he'd give in to his urge to have sex with her. She knew he wanted her. The proof was evident beneath his slacks. Even when his attention was on the case, his thoughts were firmly on her. That was probably what had him so angry. Not his worry that they were the targets, but the fact Mr. Business couldn't keep his thoughts on business. Maybe now would be a good time to try and seduce him again. If he finally gave in to what they both wanted, maybe then he would be able to keep his focus where it needed to be. Not where she wanted it. She wanted him sated, and willing to listen to her apology.

"What do you want to do then? While we wait for dinner to end? We need to give the impression that we've been up here having sex. That will be hard to do if you keep fifteen feet between us."

"You are using this to get me back into your bed."

"I didn't plan things this way, but I have to admit that I still love you and I do want you back. In my life, my heart, my bed."

"And why would I trust you to remain faithful to me?" Richard crossed his arms and dropped down onto the sofa. He stared up at her, a challenge gleaming in his eyes.

"I was never unfaithful to you." He went to argue, but she held up her hand and continued, "I never cheated on you emotionally or physically. When you made that assumption, I let you roll with it. It seemed easier than telling you the truth. At least at the time it did."

Richard's face darkened in anger. His nostrils flared and his eyes narrowed. She didn't like it when he was angry, but she'd faced his rage before and she'd face it this time. To prove her love.

"You better explain this, Sydney. I'm not in the mood for games, and that is all you like to do. Play games."

"That's not true. I admit I misled you before, but it was to protect myself."

"You broke up with me to protect yourself?"

"Technically you broke up with me." Sydney sat on the sofa next to him, but she perched on the edge, not wanting to drive him away before she could explain.

"Because you were cheating on me. Which you are now saying wasn't the case. Who was the man I caught you with?"

"A cousin --"

"A kissing cousin?"

"He might have been kissing me, but I wasn't kissing him back. We can't all have normal families like yours." The minute the words slipped out, she wished she could take them back. Unfortunately, just like her brain had escaped her, his willingness to listen probably had too, now that she'd accidentally taken a dig at his family.

"I'm sitting here, patiently waiting for your explanation -- one I probably won't believe anyway -- and you are taking pot shots at me and my family? You don't love me as much as you claim you do, do you?"

"Argh!" She closed her mouth firmly while she tried to think of a way out of the hole she'd dug for herself. "Listen, bub. I had trust issues. I still do. What I'm trying to tell you is --"

"Duck!" Richard shoved her on the ground a second before the window shattered.

"What the fuck?" Adrenaline racing, Sydney tried to get up to see what the hell had happened.

"Stay down, damn it. Do you want to get killed?" Richard growled in her ear as he pulled her back down.

"No, I don't want to get killed, idiot. I'm trying to do what I was trained to do. We need recon."

"There are three men climbing up, preparing to enter the window. Another one is across the compound laying down covering fire. You poke your head up, and you're dead."

Sydney debated asking him how the hell he knew that, but knew it wasn't the time. Instead she lay there and listened. She could hear them scrambling outside the window. Damn it. He was right. There were three, and they were seconds away from popping through the window.

She moved and felt something hard press against the back of her thigh. "Really, Richard. Now is not the time." A giggle escaped.

"I can't help it. Danger excites me."

"Danger or being pressed up against a willing woman?"

He shook his head. "When I say go, you take left, I'll take right. The sniper won't be able to see through the men entering the window. We should be able to take out at least two of them."

Still protected under the cover of his body, Sydney nodded. He moved quickly to give her space, and within seconds he gave the order in a whisper. "Go!"

She was well trained and used to this kind of action, as well as acting on the orders of the man she loved. Instantly, she rolled to the left, her gun already pulled from the small of her back.

In one fluid movement she rolled again, aimed and shot. The attackers had spread out as soon as they came through the window, and she took down the one on the left as easily as she took her next breath.

Before she could aim at the final attacker, the third man was already falling to the floor. Richard always had been that much faster. He looked at her, and with a hand signal indicated the need to get out of the room. Luckily, the door wasn't in line of sight of the window, so they were able to crab walk out.

"What the hell was that all about?" Sydney cursed.

"I told you they were after me."

Sydney debated pointing out that they were both in the room, the sniper could have very easily been after her, but her gut told her otherwise. "Fine, you're right. But who the hell are they?"

"How many times do I have to tell you that your precious friend Erik is in on this?" Richard practically snarled at her. "He's the only one that knows who and what I am."

Sydney's stomach plummeted to her feet. He couldn't be right, could he? Erik had been more than a boss to her over the past couple of years. He'd been her confidant, friend and lover. He'd kept both her and her secret safe. At any time he could have turned her over to a lab for experimentation -- or worse. "I still don't agree with you, Richard." She froze, panicked. If Erik wasn't in on it, that could very well mean his life was also in danger. Shit! That thought spurred her into action again.

"Where are you going?" Richard's growl followed after her as she ran down the hallway, heading for the stairs.

She didn't bother answering, knowing he would be steps behind her regardless. Racing down the stairs, she heard shouts coming from Erik's study. She was too late.

Sydney burst through the door to see Erik struggling with a large man dressed in camouflage. "Erik!" she screamed as the soldier struck at him with a knife. At the sight of Erik's blood, she dove at his attacker, intent on killing him.

Her attack was brought to a brutal halt by someone who had been standing inside the doorway. Damn it! She should have cased the room, but Erik had been in danger and all her common sense had fled. The thought ran through her head as she went flying through the room, her attacker holding her tight. They hit the ground together, all air forced out of her lungs as she landed on the wood floor. Hard.

Unfortunately, her attacker wasn't as winded, and he immediately had her belly to the ground, arms behind her back.

Her face was toward the door, and she had just enough time to see the three men lying in wait for Richard before he came barreling through the doorway, straight into their trap. "Richard!"

A growl cut through the room as the men surrounded him, one of them armed with a Taser. The zing of the electricity as it ran through the man she loved sent fear shooting through her body. *No! Not Richard!*

Anger burned away the crippling fear of seeing Richard incapacitated. Before she could bring up her control, her body started to change. She had to protect her mate at all costs.

Tingles ran through her, sparks of energy shooting off. The only thing that mattered was getting free to save Richard. Polar bear cubs might look cute and cuddly, but a full grown female polar bear was nothing to laugh about. And a were polar bear was even more dangerous. She slashed her assailant with one paw. He didn't stand a chance as her claws dug into his stomach, ripping his insides out.

With a roar, she dashed toward the three that had captured Richard, only to stop short when she saw what the Taser had done to him. Instead of seeing him lying

unconscious on the floor, she saw a large grizzly bear tearing into the last of his attackers.

Richard was a were too? Why the hell hadn't he ever said anything? Why had he kept it from her?

Sydney shook her head as she saw Erik struggling with an attacker out of the corner of her eye. What the hell? Erik was struggling with himself. Which one was the real Erik? She couldn't tell them apart.

The two of them turned as they struggled and she saw blood oozing from a cut on one of their arms. That one was the Erik she'd seen fighting as she walked in. But was it the real Erik?

She watched the two of them struggle, obviously equally matched. Richard was a were, Erik had a double. This made no sense. Her mind spun with everything she had learned the last few seconds. She was frozen with indecision. Help Richard? Help Erik?

"Sydney, help Richard!" The Erik with the bloodied arm yelled at her in time for her to turn and see one of the assailants Richard had knocked to the floor aiming a gun at him. She ran and leaped at him, giving him less than a second to decide whether to shoot Richard or the polar bear charging him. Unfortunately for him, he hesitated. She'd already reached him and ripped his throat out.

She looked back to see Richard had changed to human form, and one of the Eriks was on the ground, the other hovering over him. Sydney took a few deep breaths, and willed her body to change back. The other assailants were all dead or unconscious. They were as safe as they were going to get for a few minutes.

A cool breeze from the open window brushed against her naked skin. She hadn't even noticed her clothing rip off her during her change. She'd been in too much of a hurry to get into the room to save Erik and then Richard.

The standing Erik grinned. "Didn't you ever wonder why I didn't freak when I learned the truth about you, Sydney?"

She had to admit the thought had occurred to her, but she had been so grateful for his acceptance, she hadn't questioned it enough. Obviously.

"This is why. I'd like to introduce you to an old friend of mine." Erik kicked the body at his feet. "Change back, Edward. You're done."

A shimmer surrounded the second Erik as the body shifted. Where once lay a duplicate of Erik, now there was someone else. He looked similar to Erik, similar enough that they could be brothers, but there were slight differences. Edward was younger and thinner, almost gaunt in appearance. He looked a little shorter than Erik, although it was hard to be sure with him curled in a ball on the floor.

"Edward is a chameleon. He can't change into anyone he wants, but he can reshape his appearance slightly. We look similar enough that he has never had a problem imitating me."

Sydney approached the two men and sensed Richard right behind her. Naked or not, he wouldn't rest until all the bad guys were dead or in custody.

Erik looked at Richard. "When you told me that witnesses had seen me in the middle of the drug trades despite my alibis, I knew it had to be him, but I didn't know how to catch him. I also knew you'd never believe me if I told you I had a shapeshifting doppelganger."

He looked up and down Richard's now naked body. "Although why I didn't figure out there had to be more shifters in this agency of yours, I have no idea. I thought Sydney was an anomaly, and she wasn't about to divulge agency secrets to me, despite what I'd discovered."

"So you set Richard up?" Sydney found her voice finally.

"No, Richard did that himself when he chose to come here instead of sending more agents. I have to agree with him too. With agents like Chase, Jess and you failing at your assignments, what else could he do?"

"I did not fail!"

"You didn't find proof that I was the ringleader, and you also didn't prove that I was innocent, did you?" Erik crossed his arms.

"Erik knew you were a shifter?" Richard's fury made her take a step back.

"Trust me, it wasn't something I approached him with."

"It was something you never confided to me."

"I caught her in bear form in the walk-in freezer." Erik put his arm around Sydney.

"Don't make excuses for her!" Richard turned to Erik, his bear form battling his human one.

"I wouldn't have to if you'd back down and turn off the black bear bit."

"I'm a grizzly bear." Richard's growl deepened.

"Yeah, you sure are grizzly." Erik's gaze dropped to Richard's waist. A low growl startled her. Sydney realized it came from her. Erik laughed. "It seems to me that you two have some things to work out."

"The only thing I need to work out is taking Edward into custody."

"After you get dressed, maybe." Erik's grin and Richard's frustration made her want to giggle. Something about Richard made her feel all young and girly.

"Why don't you two go put some clothes on before I jump Richard?" Erik reached down and jerked Edward to his feet.

"I'm not leaving my prisoner." Richard grabbed onto Edward and tugged.

"I think he'd rather you put clothes on. While I appreciate your body, he seems rather nervous."

"I think you need to stop looking at my body and start worrying about your teeth." Richard's hands tightened on Edward until he cried out.

"I like your body, and my teeth are fine."

"They won't be," Richard ground out between tightly clenched teeth. "I'm not leaving my prisoner alone with you. I'm still not convinced of your innocence in this whole thing."

"They tried to kill him!" Sydney couldn't believe Richard. "You saw them attacking him with a knife."

"If they really wanted to kill him, they'd have just shot him." Richard jerked on Edward, and pulled him away from Erik.

"You're just naturally suspicious of everyone," Sydney argued.

"It's kept me alive this long. You'd have been dead if I'd given in to you and had sex with you on the sofa." He looked at Erik. "The very thing your ex-lover wanted me to do."

"Stop it." Sydney wanted to stamp her foot. "Just call in your damned backup. I'll watch Edward while you get dressed."

"Have you forgotten you're not dressed either?"

Sydney cursed. She had. She'd been so worried about Erik trying to put a move on Richard that she'd forgotten she was naked too. "Fine. I'll get dressed." She turned and raced to her room. Stupid man.

Chapter Five

By the time she'd returned to the room, Richard had already left with Edward, and Erik's smile had vanished. Though he refused to tell her what Richard had said, and denied being upset, she knew Richard had said something to make him angry.

Though they'd killed several of Edward's men, they had enough evidence to lock him up for several lifetimes. The man had been smart enough to use Erik, but stupid enough to keep track of all his dealings.

Richard had done what none of the rest of them had been able to accomplish. And he'd done it in a lot less time by making himself a target. Even though she now knew he could take care of himself, in bear form at least, she was still happy he was leaving the Agency. Except for the fact that he thought he could leave her behind too.

They'd flown back to headquarters, and she sat in his office reclining in a chair while he sat on the edge of his desk staring down at her.

"So what do you plan to do now?" Sydney looked up at him, love and hope shining in her eyes. She was close to crying, but he wasn't going to let her tears sway him.

"I'm leaving. John will make a great new boss, and with Chase and Jess to teach the new recruits I'm sure you'll have your hands full."

"I'm quitting." She turned away before he could see if she was testing him.

"That doesn't make a difference to me. I gave my time to the Agency. I'm finished. I'm going to retire somewhere nice and quiet and live out the rest of my life fishing."

"You're going to be lonely."

"So will you if you quit the Agency. What are you going to do?" Richard wished she would look up at him, but she kept her face averted.

"A little of this and that. I may even stalk you."

He laughed, and she looked at him with a silly grin. It was obvious she thought she was in love with him. He wanted to give her another chance. He really did. But what if she fell out of love with him again? He didn't want to be part of some sick seesaw thing.

"What makes you think I'll let you?" He studied her profile while he waited for an answer. She was silent for so long he thought she wasn't going to answer. He was being hard on her, he knew it. He didn't want to get hurt again.

"I've learned to trust you." She looked up at him, hopeful again. "I know you want me as much as I want you. I love you. You could love me again. And this time I won't do anything to lose you."

"Do you have any idea how much you hurt me last time?"

Sydney blushed and looked down at her toes. He tried to ignore how enticing her toes looked with red nail polish on them. Focusing on his willpower, Richard returned his gaze to her face.

"I guess that's a yes?" He took a deep breath and released it. "If so, you can see why I'm not so willing to be hurt again. You've lied and deceived me before, you could be doing so again." If he was a fool, so be it. At least this time he was going in knowing what could happen. This time he would be prepared for her lies. "We still haven't discussed why you kept your shapeshifting ability a secret, and why you used it to drive me away."

Sydney sucked in a deep breath, released it, and rose. She walked over to the large map on his wall and stared at it. "I was afraid to trust you. I loved you too much to risk losing you because of what I am. What I can do."

"And you lost me anyway. Because of your subterfuge."

"I hadn't planned it that way, but when I realized what you were thinking, I kind of went with that and did some things I'm not proud of."

"Why?" He wished she would turn around and look at him.

"I was afraid."

"And you aren't now? Now that you know I'm a shifter as well? Is that what it took? For me to be as much a freak as you?"

"No. I wanted to get back with you before that."

"After you found out about Jessica?" He shook his head. Of course. It hadn't been that hard to figure it out. "And if you'd never found out about Jess and my 'tolerance' of shapeshifters, you would have continued to keep your secret."

"No!" He could read the hurt in her expression, but he wasn't going to let her know it pained him as well.

"You wouldn't trust me right now if it hadn't been for Jess."

"You never told me what you are!"

He ignored her tears. Instead of comforting her as he wanted to, he turned to look through the one-way glass at the testing room. "We're bears, Sydney. You know we're different from humans in certain ways. Our sense of smell is keener. So is our hearing. We interact a little differently. We're more touchy, more playful. We're just different."

Her gasp brought him back around. "You mean you knew what I was?"

"That you're a polar bear shifter?"

She nodded.

"No. But I knew you were a bear shifter." Richard rested his forehead against the glass and sighed. He was torn between welcoming her back with open arms and keeping her at arm's length, if not more.

His conversation with Erik replayed in his mind. *She was so heartbroken over you. I understand why you sent her on a mission far from where you were, but you've been really hard on her. She's missed you.*

I don't believe you. She wasn't faithful.

I beg to differ. She's been a very faithful employee.

You slept with her. That makes you biased.

You slept with her too. I could say the same about you.

You didn't fall in love with her. Richard had fought the urge to beat the cockiness out of Erik.

She was in love with you, and I knew it.

You also knew she was a polar bear, something she never saw fit to trust me with.

She wouldn't have trusted me if she'd had any other option. I think you know that.

Maybe she has other secrets, too. Richard had shrugged. He didn't like Erik's smooth looks, or his white toothy grin, or his cocky attitude. *I'm not taking another chance. She's not worth the risk.*

She is and you know it.

If you love her so much why don't you go after her? Oh wait, you've already had her.

I wanted to know what it would be like to have sex with an animal shapeshifter. You know I prefer men.

Whatever.

Erik hadn't been happy with him after that conversation, but Richard didn't care. He hadn't gone there to make friends with the man, and he certainly didn't need to be friends with someone who'd slept with Sydney because she wasn't human.

He hadn't been happy ever since the breakup and he knew she hadn't been either.

"Richard, I'm sorry. I don't know how many times or ways I can say it, but I'm sorry. I'm sorry I didn't trust you. I'm sorry I didn't trust our love. I'm sorry. But I want you to know that I do still love you. I always have, and I always will." Her voice broke. "I understand you aren't ready to accept that, and maybe you never will be. But if you ever change your mind, you know where to find me." She turned to leave.

His chest tightened. Every part of him screamed not to let her go, even though he was still afraid to trust her. Had this been how she'd felt? What had he done to make her not trust him?

If he could give Kim a second chance, and Jess too, why couldn't he give Sydney one more chance? "Wait!"

She froze with her hand on the doorknob. He held his breath while she turned only her head to look at him. "Yes?"

"Don't go."

She stopped crying and smiled. "You mean..."

"I don't want you to leave. I'm not sure I'm ready to forgive you yet. I'm also not sure I won't end up hurt again."

"We'll take it slow." She walked toward him, an extra sway in her step. "Real slow," she added as she pressed up against him.

"Yeah," he sighed, "real slow."

"Anything you say, boss." She walked her fingers up his chest and finished at his mouth.

Richard sucked the tip of her finger in between his lips and teased it with his tongue. A shiver ran through her body. "Anything?"

Her eyes darkened and she shivered again. Sydney licked her lips and nodded. "Yes."

She hadn't been with a man in a long time, and her vibrator just wasn't cutting it anymore. She needed this, needed him with a desperation that surprised her. For months she'd gone without a man. Her sensual nature was letting her know it didn't appreciate being stifled. Apparently the orgasms he'd given her at Erik's hadn't done anything to sate her inner beast.

"We don't have much time. John will be back soon."

"Want to do it one last time while this is still your office?" She grinned and tugged his shirt out of his pants.

"Yes."

"Good." No way was she going to wait until tonight to have him inside her. Neither did she want to give him a chance to change his mind. She guided him over to his sofa and pushed him down on it, following him to straddle his lap.

After she slid back on his thighs, she could reach his zipper. He helped her slide it down, and as his cock sprang free from confinement, she took a moment to gaze at it. She licked her lips and debated tasting him before riding him.

"Later. I don't want to wait." Richard tugged her shirt over her head.

Sydney wrapped her fingers around his cock and slowly slid her hand up and down. "Promise me that the next time I can have this," she gave a gentle tug on his erection, "in my mouth."

"Done." He moaned and captured her mouth with his, devouring her with a fierce hunger. "Next time we'll have foreplay because I want to pleasure you in more ways than one, but right now, I can think of only one thing. Me, buried deep inside you."

"Mmm." Sydney nodded and climbed off him to remove her underwear. Once she did, he yanked her back on his lap, his hands sliding under her short skirt, caressing her thighs. Impatient, she guided him into her core. Slowly, she took him inside, savoring the way he stretched her and filled her so completely.

"Are you okay? You're so tight."

"Contrary to what you think, I've not had sex in a while. Besides, you're so damn big," she said with a sigh. "It's part of the reason Erik has such a crush on you."

"You are so good for my ego." He laughed. "Erik can go back to lusting after Chase. He has a better chance there than with me."

"We need to find someone for him."

"No, we don't. What we need to do is find a way for you to start moving on me, and riding me like the cowgirl I know you can be."

She met his gaze and shivered at the look in his eyes. Like a predator, he stared at her as if he wanted to eat her up. And she wanted him to. The thought had her squeezing around him. Someone moaned, her or him, it didn't even matter. Sydney pushed Richard back and leaned forward so her breasts moved tantalizingly close to his mouth. She hoped he got the hint.

Richard grabbed her and held onto her hips as she began to move on him. Sighs and moans of pleasure escaped both of them as she rose up, then sank down, taking him in all the way. Then, again, as slowly as she lifted off him, she lowered back down, her body sucking him in deep.

He drew one of her nipples into his mouth while he cupped her breasts. Sensations sparked through her fast and furious. Conscious of the time constraint, she picked up her pace. She listened to his noises and tried to move the way that drew the deepest moan from him, but the sensations were so intense she knew she wasn't going to be able to prolong her orgasm. A tingling sensation and warmth spread throughout her body and she trembled.

"I'm sorry," she whispered. She gave up trying to hold back.

Her muscles constricted around him, and he groaned and he pressed up into her. With a whimper, she ground down on him, shivering. "God, Richard." She gasped his name and bit back a scream as her body erupted into an inferno. The orgasm seemed to go on and on until he grunted and came, sending another rush of fiery pleasure through her. A choked cry escaped from her this time as she gasped for breath.

Richard rubbed her back while she buried her face against his neck and kissed him. "I think the world really did move," she whispered, finally able to catch her breath.

"I don't know. I think we need to try it again. Maybe in your office this time."

She looked up at him and laughed. "Do I need to stalk you, or are you going to invite me along on your fishing trip?"

"It's going to be a really long trip." Richard dragged his fingertips up her back.

"Good. We're due for a really long vacation." Sydney snickered. She wouldn't let him regret giving her another chance. She'd make it up to him. Somehow.

Michelle Hasker

Michelle Hasker has been writing for three years. She loves vampires and things that go bump in the night, so it's no wonder her creations are truly paranormal. While most people only dream of finding love, Michelle's characters find it, but in the most unexpected places. Visit Michelle's website at www.michellehasker.com.