



Just Right

A Not Quite Wicked Tale

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

To Brynn, Mia and Dakota – three of most fanfreakingtastic friends a girl could have.

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Chapter One

Gwendolyn Locke tightened her fingers inside her mittens, wishing they were wrapped around her co-worker's throat, instead. Noah freaking Makwa was turning into the bane of her existence.

She'd transferred to this godforsaken area of Michigan's Upper Peninsula to study the black bear population, but thanks to Noah, she'd been here over a month and had yet to see anything. Well, that wasn't exactly true. Today, he'd finally taken her with him to introduce an orphaned cub to a foster mother.

Her stomach had been tied in knots the entire drive. He smelled like wood-smoke and pine needles and looked like every sexually charged dream she'd had since arriving at the Baraga Department of Natural Resources office. In her dreams, he was an aggressive lover, taking her against a tree, deep in the forest. She'd woken from that particular dream convinced she'd felt the tree bark digging into her back. In reality, he was civil but distant, nice enough until she'd remind him about her need to work on her research. Then he'd disappear for hours at a time or invent lame excuses about why he couldn't take her to the known nesting areas. It wasn't until she'd set off on her own today that he'd agreed to take her along on this cub drop.

The trip down the old logging roads was bumpy, the silence interrupted only by the whir of the truck's heater and his monosyllabic answers to her occasional questions. She watched him discreetly from the corner of her eye. He'd pulled back his shoulder-length black hair at the nape of his neck, displaying high cheekbones and sculpted lips. His burnished copper skin hinted at his Native American heritage. Dark brown eyes, bright with annoyance—at her presence, she guessed—focused on the snow covered two-track.

He turned and caught her studying him. A shiver worked through her body at the

intensity of his gaze.

“Cold?” he asked.

“Yeah,” she lied, nodding her head as she shifted to stare out the window and tried to force away the thoughts of how his lips would feel on hers.

Reaching toward the dashboard, Noah cranked up the heat then turned the vents to blow toward her before returning to his pattern of pretending she wasn't there.

The logging road narrowed drastically until they came to a stop in front of a stand of new-growth white pines. Shutting off the ignition, he turned his big body to face her.

“You're going to need to stay in the truck,” he announced.

She couldn't believe it. He was coming up with yet another reason to keep her from doing her damn job. “What? Why?”

“I can smell your shampoo.”

“And?”

“And if I can smell it, the bears can, too.”

She was going to punch him. Right in his ridiculously gorgeous face. “They're *hibernating*. They won't wake up unless I dance around their nest, banging pots and pans together, wearing a necklace made of bacon. And even then, they wouldn't wake up fully. I'm pretty sure we're safe.

Noah scowled at her and got out of the truck. She followed him to the rear of the pickup where he lowered the tailgate and tugged forward a blanket-covered cage. The muffled yelp of the young bear broke the frozen stillness of the afternoon.

Flipping back the fabric, Noah opened the cage door while the cub huddled in the rear of the enclosure. He grabbed a heavy branch from alongside the cage and baited the end of it with peanut butter, letting the scent lure out the bear. As soon as the cub took the bait, Noah shifted the stick so the animal straddled it then hefted the branch, bear and all, off the truck.

“Stay here.” He didn't spare her a glance as he walked toward several fallen trees where a nursing sow had made a nest with her cubs.

“Screw you,” she muttered and followed quietly behind him. She wasn't about to miss her chance to see the potential adoption of an orphaned cub.

Noah noticed her immediately and jerked his head toward the vehicle, indicating that she should go back. Ignoring his narrowed eyes and glower, she continued toward his position a

couple yards from the blow-down that served as shelter for the sow and her cubs.

She watched as he extended the branch toward the nest, turning the wood until the baby bear lost his grip and plopped to the ground. It let out a plaintive cry as it fumbled in the deep snow, and Gwendolyn held her breath, waiting for the mother bear to respond. Finally, there was a stirring amongst the roots and branches and the sow sat up groggily and pulled the orphan against her body before settling again into the dried leaves and pine needles. The cub nestled against her and the other bears. Gwendolyn marveled at the sense of immediate warmth and connection. It was probably the most beautiful thing she'd ever seen.

The second most beautiful thing was the softening of Noah's eyes and the unguarded smile that curved his lips as he watched the animals. His expression faded as soon as he noticed her looking at him.

"I thought I told you to stay with the truck." His harsh whisper was just as cutting as the bitterly cold air. He stalked past her, tossed the bait branch into the truck bed, then closed the tailgate. Following him, she climbed into the passenger seat.

"Look," she said when he'd pulled back onto the old two-track. "I get that you don't like me."

He glanced at her, a glossy black eyebrow raised.

"And I get that you don't want me in your office, but this is where I've been transferred, and I've been assigned to you. If you don't like it, take it up with the Lansing office, but in the meanwhile, I've got research to do, and you just have to get over it."

He didn't even look at her. She might as well have been talking to herself.

"You know," she continued, "I'm perfectly capable of reading a map. Let me make copies of the data you have, and I can go out on my—"

"No," he snapped. "It's too dangerous."

"I've had the same training you have."

His brow furrowed as he frowned. "Things are...different up here."

"More trees. More snow. More bears. That's kinda the point."

The truck coasted to a stop as they approached the main road, and he turned to meet her eyes, the intensity of his stare immobilizing her. "It's not safe out here alone."

"I have a gun—same as you."

"It's not safe for *you*."

“Because I’m a woman?”

An icy trickle of unease slid down her spine as he continued to hold her gaze. “Because you don’t know the area,” he finally answered.

“And whose fault is that?”

Instead of responding, he pulled out onto the main road and headed back to the DNR office. Closing her eyes, she tried to focus on what needed to be done to request a transfer to one of the other offices in the Upper Peninsula so she could actually do her research. Unfortunately, all she could think about was her latest dream—Noah taking her hard and fast from behind. It was impossible to ignore the way her nipples tightened at the thought of him touching her. It was equally impossible to ignore the way her folds moistened at the thought of him inside her. Despite her anger at him, she still wanted him. Or maybe she just needed to get laid, and her brain was fixating on him. She squirmed in her seat, wishing they were back in Baraga already.

High winds buffeted the truck as they skirted the edge of Lake Superior. The waves roiled violently beyond the ice-crusting shoreline and thick gray clouds hung low on the horizon. She’d been in this part of the state long enough to know that a huge storm was on its way. And wouldn’t that just be a perfect end to an already craptastic day.

Almost two hours of near silence from Noah was broken when he pulled into the parking lot and stopped next to her Jeep. “We’re in for a helluva storm. You should get back to your place while you can.”

“As soon as the truck’s unloaded and my paperwork’s filed, I will.”

He looked like he was about to argue, but she hopped out of the truck before he had a chance. Grabbing the blanket and branch, she carried it to the equipment building, leaving the cage for Noah. Folding the heavy, quilted fabric, she stowed it on a shelf, wishing it were as easy to pack away her attraction to her co-worker. Of course, if he kept being a jerk, it might not be as difficult as she feared.

After the rest of the equipment was put away, she knocked on his office door. He glanced up from his computer screen and stared at her expectantly.

“We need to talk.”

“You should get home before the roads get any worse,” he said, returning his attention to the monitor.

Stifling a sigh, she sat in a chair in front of his desk and waited for him to acknowledge

her presence.

He finally leaned back in his chair and studied her.

“I want to be reassigned,” she said once she had his attention.

“What?”

“I know you’re the best in this area, and I was really hoping to learn from you, but you clearly have no interest in working together, so I’d like to be reassigned.”

Surprise brightened his eyes. “To whom?”

“I don’t know...Baker? Or someone else who doesn’t think I’m incompetent.”

Noah frowned, and she had the ridiculous urge to smooth away the creases between his eyebrows.

“I don’t think you’re incompetent.” Before she could open her mouth, he continued, “But this is dangerous country if you don’t know what you’re doing.”

She leaned forward. “Then teach me what I need to know, or assign me to someone who will.”

He glanced out the window before meeting her gaze. “Let me give it some thought and we’ll talk about it next week.”

She shot out of the chair. “You’ve got to be kidding me. You’re blowing me off? Again?” She turned toward the door.

“Gwen, wait.”

She stopped but didn’t turn around. “Forget it. I’ll figure it out on my own.”

Exiting the room, she stormed down the hall, stopping long enough to grab her laptop and purse. She’d fill out her report at home. It would give her something to do since she’d already read the books she’d brought with her, and the TV in her rented motel room got all of two channels—on a clear night. Tonight, she’d be lucky to get one.

She pulled on her winter gear and headed out the door, not sparing a glance for Noah as she passed. Arrogant asshole.

Bitterly cold air swirled around her as soon as she stepped outside, making her eyes water. At least a foot of snow had fallen since she’d arrived at work that morning, and it was still coming down. Starting the engine, she let the Jeep warm up while she scraped the windows, anxious to get out of the parking lot before Noah decided to leave. She could do without seeing him in real life or her dreams for a good long time. Besides, she needed to hurry if she was going

to make it to the grocery store before it closed. She didn't even have bread to make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. She'd likely be stuck at the motel all weekend and the tiny kitchenette in her room was dangerously under stocked.

After a brief stop at the IGA to pick up a couple bags of groceries, she maneuvered through the near whiteout conditions along highway forty-one. At the rate she was going, it would take her over an hour to make the twenty-mile drive to her motel.

Gale-force gusts pummeled her Jeep as she inched along the Lake Superior shoreline, fighting to keep the vehicle on the road. Her fingers tightened on the steering wheel and she was pissed at Noah all over again. This time because he'd been right. She shouldn't have taken the time to try to talk to him. She should have just left as soon as they'd gotten back from the cub drop.

Squinting, she followed the curve of the road as it angled away from the lakeshore and through a stretch of marshland. The wiper blades couldn't keep up with the thick, wet snow clinging to her windshield. The tires caught, then slid on a patch of ice and she took her foot off the gas and tried to steer through the slide. As soon as she made it to the tree line, the drive would, in theory, be slightly less harrowing. The heavy pine forest on either side of the road made drifting and ice build-up less of a problem. Of course, on a night like tonight, all the roads in this area sucked.

Snow spiraled around the vehicle, obscuring her vision so much that she almost missed seeing the dark shape that darted in front of her. She tried to brake, but she hadn't seen it soon enough to make much of a difference. The passenger side of her Jeep clipped the flank of a huge bear with a sickening thud.

A scream strangled in her throat as she tried to keep the vehicle on the road. The force from the impact pushed her toward the tree line and down an embankment. The Jeep slammed into a tree and her world went completely white as the air bag deployed.

Pain lanced through her forehead where she'd smacked it against the driver's side window. Trying to stave off the dizziness, she unbuckled and crawled out the door. After pushing the button to release the lock on the rear door, she clung to the side of the vehicle as she made her way around to the back to find her service weapon. If the bear wasn't dead already, she refused to let it suffer until it finally did die.

Fighting vertigo, she pulled the rifle from the case and loaded it with leaden fingers. She

grabbed her flashlight and scanned the ground, looking for the injured animal's tracks. They weren't difficult to find. Bright red blood marred the pristine snow, dripping steadily as the bear stumbled through the underbrush.

Gwendolyn followed the path as rapidly as she dared, blowing snow stinging her exposed skin. The whipping wind carried the bear's anguished cry to her, and she tried to move faster. She hated to have to take its life, but what choice did she have? Judging from the blood loss she'd seen, there was no way it would survive the night—especially not in a storm like this. For a brief, crazy moment, she considered calling Noah, but she dismissed the thought just as quickly. He'd already made it clear she was on her own.

She stumbled across a log only to fall face first in the snow. For a moment, her world went dim as the lightheadedness returned, but she forced away the woozy feeling and pushed to her feet. A few yards ahead lay a dark shape. She'd found the bear. Training her flashlight on it, she watched for signs of life. It moved, and she saw the spreading pool of blood that melted the snow around it.

Feeling sick at what she had to do, she raised her gun to her shoulder and took aim. She tried to still her shaking hands as the bear began to twist and writhe on the ground. Suddenly, its body thinned and lengthened and she thought she heard the muffled sounds of flesh tearing and bones breaking. Before her eyes, its fur receded leaving bare skin, the body of a predator becoming that of a human man.

She must have hit her head harder than she'd thought. How could she have possibly mistaken him for a bear? What the hell was he doing naked in a snowstorm? She needed to get help. She lowered her gun and dug in her pocket for her cell phone. No signal. *God damn it!*

Quickly, she darted to his side and checked for a pulse. Faint but steady. Her blood ran cold when she saw his face. For a moment, she thought it was Noah. Relief flooded her when she realized it wasn't, followed quickly by guilt. She'd hit this man with her car and now she had no idea how she was going to get him help.

Stripping off her coat, she covered him with it, careful not to jostle him. She couldn't tell the extent of his injuries, and she didn't want to make it worse. Standing, she turned in a circle, looking for any sign of life. The only light she saw was the faint glow of one headlight and the taillights of her vehicle.

Not knowing what else to do, she fired several shots into the air and yelled for help. Her

scream was cut short as a rustle sounded behind her. Whirling, she faced the biggest black bear she'd ever seen. She lifted the gun to her shoulder, but before her frozen finger could find the trigger, it growled and knocked it from her hands. Standing on its hind legs, it advanced on her.

It must have smelled the blood of the injured man and been drawn out of its nest. Bears rarely attacked people, but in this case, she could see where it might make an exception. And considering she was standing between it and a potential meal...she was fucked.

Everything within her screamed at her to run, but she couldn't leave the man unprotected. Her gun was behind the bear, well out of reach. Glancing around, she searched for anything that might serve as a weapon. Maybe if she could scare it away, she still might have a chance at getting help for the injured guy.

Crouching down, she grabbed a stick and quickly stood up again, holding it like a baseball bat. A wave of nausea washed over her as the dizziness intensified. The cold sank into her bones as her sweater absorbed the heavy wet snow that continued to fall. For the first time, she began to wonder if she'd make it out of these woods alive. *It would certainly solve Noah's problem if she didn't*, she thought with a near-hysterical giggle.

The bear cocked its head to the side and looked at her, then behind her at the injured man.

Keeping herself between the man and the bear, she took a swing at the bear and cracked it in the head, hoping to scare it off. It didn't work. Growling, it grabbed the end of the stick and splintered it before wrenching it from her hands. With a shriek, she dove for the gun, brushing against the bear as she rolled through the wet snow. She gripped it with aching fingers and pointed it at the animal. At this range, she should be able to kill it, but if she aimed wrong, she'd just piss it off, and that was the last thing she needed.

"I don't want to shoot you, but I can't let you hurt him."

She squeezed the trigger and fired a warning alongside its head.

The bear reached out and grabbed the barrel of the gun and pushed it toward the ground. She tried to wrench it from its grasp, but the animal held fast as it sank to all fours. All at once, the animal began to writhe and the nauseating sounds of joints popping and bones snapping filled the air. As she watched, the furry pelt receded, revealing smooth, burnished copper skin stretched over tight, lean muscles. Her breath stalled in her chest as a naked man rose, long dark hair partially covering his face, but she'd know those eyes anywhere.

"Hello, Gwen."

She stumbled backward, tripping over the remainder of the branch she'd used to smack the bear...no...Noah...upside the head. She had to be dreaming. She didn't know everything about black bears, but she was positive that they didn't change into people at will. The lightheadedness she'd been fighting since hitting her head against the window stormed back with a vengeance. Her eyes drifted closed, replacing the crazy images with blessed darkness. Maybe if she rested a while, the world would make more sense when she woke up.

A warm hand cupped her cheek. "Gwen, c'mon sweetheart. I need you to stay with me. I need your help."

Forcing her eyes open, she saw Noah—still naked—squatting in front of her. Oh God, was he ever naked.

"I need you to help me get Quinn home. And you've got to get out of this weather, too. You're freezing."

"Who's Quinn?" she mumbled.

He jerked his head toward the man lying in the snow behind him. "My cousin." Noah stood, and tugged her to her feet.

"I'm having a hypothermia induced hallucination," she muttered.

"You're going to have a hypothermia induced death if we don't get you someplace warm, soon.

She frowned at him. "Says the naked man wandering through the snow."

"It's not how I'd prefer to be wandering around tonight." He shrugged. "But it seemed like a better plan than getting shot."

Gwendolyn's head spun with the implications of what he'd just said. She hadn't imagined him transforming from a bear to a man. "What are you?" she asked, almost afraid of the answer.

"I'll explain. Just help me get him out of the cold first.

"Okay."

He moved to his cousin's side and propped his cousin into a sitting position.

"Wait! You shouldn't move him. You could make his injuries worse."

Noah shook his head. "As soon as he shifted back to his human form, he began to heal."

She stared at him skeptically, until he leaned forward and scooped up a handful of snow and used it to wipe away the blood from his leg.

"See? It's not bleeding anymore."

It was true. A huge bruise marred his flesh, but the torn skin was gone. She couldn't believe it, but it was no more bizarre than anything else she'd seen tonight. Noah motioned for her to pick up Quinn's legs as he lifted him from under his arms. Walking backward, he led them through the dense forest as they slowly made their way over fallen logs and thick stands of oak, pine, and birch.

The wind whipped icy snow into Gwendolyn's eyes and they watered, freezing the tears on her lashes and cheeks. The frigid air burned her lungs as they hefted Quinn's unconscious form through the night.

The snow was so heavy she couldn't make out any of the obstacles in front of them. She had no idea how Noah managed to avoid them—while walking backward, no less. Hell, she wasn't convinced they weren't trudging in circles, but he seemed to know where he was going. Eventually, the dull glow of lighted windows in the looming shadow of a large cabin came into view.

Noah urged her to move faster as he backed up the rough-hewn stairs to the house. "Careful, they might be a little slippery."

Still holding Quinn's legs, she climbed steadily to the porch. Noah kicked at the door with the back of his heel. The door flew open and they stumbled into a brightly lit kitchen.

A third man, by his appearance, another relative of Noah's, looked the three of them over as he pushed shut the door behind them. "Awkward."

"Shut up, Lucas," Noah growled. "Turn down Quinn's bed and crank up the electric blanket."

"Aye-aye, Captain Crankyass."

Gwendolyn snorted, trying and failing to stifle it as Noah's gaze swung to meet hers. "This way," he grunted as he led her through the rustic cabin.

They carried Quinn's deadweight down a dim hallway before turning to the right into a decent sized bedroom. After laying Quinn into the bed and tugging the covers over his body, Noah pulled down several quilts from the top shelf of a closet and spread them over the bed.

"What happened?" Lucas asked.

"I hit him," she admitted through chattering teeth. "I couldn't stop in time." Tears clogged her throat. "I'm so sorry."

"He'll be okay. We—he heals really fast."

She looked at Lucas. “Are you one too?”

He glanced toward Noah. She saw him nod from the corner of her eye. “We’re all shifters,” Lucas said.

“You’re what—some kind of werebears?” she asked, hysteria threatening to swamp her now that everyone was out of immediate danger. Except maybe her.

Noah saw the panicked light fill Gwen’s eyes. “It’s as good a name as any other,” he said softly.

Gently, he took her arm and led her from Quinn’s bedroom into the hallway, but she tried to pull free.

“Look, I should go. Can I use your phone? I just need to call for a tow, and then I’ll be out of your hair. It’ll just take a sec.”

“Gwen, stop.”

She looked at him, her dark green eyes wide.

He tugged her into his room and gently pushed her into a chair. “First thing, first. You’re cold and wet and you need to get into some dry clothes before you do anything else. You can’t go outside again until you warm up.” He pulled two pair of flannel pajama pants from his drawer and set one pair on the corner of the bed next to Gwen, then quickly stepped into the other pair. Opening another drawer, he removed a thermal shirt and placed that on top of the pants.

She pushed out of the chair, her teeth still chattering. “I’ll be fine. Really.” Her wet hair was plastered to her head, and blood seeped from a cut on her left temple.

“Think about it, Gwen. No one is going to come out in this weather. Well, they might, but do you really want to risk their lives in this kind of a storm?” He wielded guilt like a master—his mother would be so proud.

She slowly shook her head and sank onto the chair.

“Lucas is going to get your stuff,” he said loud enough for the other man to hear. “And he’s going to bring it back here. In the meanwhile, you get into these dry clothes, and I’ll make you a cup of tea and fix up that gash on your head. Okay?”

She nodded slowly, but didn’t move other than to lift her fingers to her head, frowning when they came away stained with blood. Great, she was going into shock.

He sank to the floor at her feet and began unlacing her boots. Lucas stood by the door,

wearing his boots and parka. “Where am I going?”

“Follow our tracks until you come to the blood. There’s a shotgun and a flashlight there somewhere. After you find them, follow the trail of blood back to the jeep, grab whatever stuff she has in there, and make sure it’s locked up before you leave.

Lucas nodded. “Got it.”

Noah barely noticed the outer door open and shut as he pulled Gwen’s boots off her frigid feet.

“I can do that,” she murmured, moving as though she was about to stand.

“No, you can stay here and get into some warm clothes so you don’t get sick.” He peeled her socks off and briskly rubbed her feet.

She winced as the circulation increased and rested her head against the wall, closing her eyes.

He replaced her damp socks with a pair of wool ones from the clean laundry basket beside the bed.

“C’mon, Gwen. You’ve got to get the rest of these wet clothes off.”

“I’ll do it in a minute,” she said groggily.

Worry skittered through him. Did she have a concussion? He needed to keep her talking and engaged. He tugged her to her feet. “Nope. Later isn’t going to work for me. Gotta get you warm and dry now.”

She wobbled for a minute before gripping his shoulders with her icy fingers. “You’re just as bossy outside of work.”

“I try.” Despite the chill of her skin, he wanted her touch. He wanted to feel her hands all over his body. He wanted to lay her back in his bed and warm her in the most primal way possible. Hell, he’d wanted to do that and a helluva lot more since she’d walked into his office three months ago.

With her short stature and her long blonde hair pulled back in braids, she’d looked almost like a kid—until she’d taken her coat off. There was nothing childlike about her full hips and breasts. Nothing childlike about the way she watched him when she thought he was oblivious. And certainly nothing childlike about the scent of her arousal as it had drifted to him while they were on the cub drop earlier that day.

He shook off the memory of riding with her and focused on the present. He shifted his

hands to her waist and unbuttoned her jeans. As dispassionately as he could, he pulled down the zipper tab, hooked his thumbs inside the waistband and tugged the damp denim over her hips. The backs of his thumbs brushed over her silky skin and the lace of her panties. Her dark blue panties.

He tried not to stare at the scant amount of fabric covering her pussy or inhale her sweet scent. It wasn't working.

"This isn't how I imagined you taking off my pants," she mumbled, still shivering violently.

His cock jerked at her words. "You imagined me taking off your pants?" He yanked the jeans from her body and grabbed the flannel pajama pants off the bed. He needed to get her covered up as fast as possible. For her warmth and his sanity.

Shaking them out, he urged her to lift one foot then the other as he slid them up her legs before pulling the drawstring snugly around her waist and tying it. They were too big for her, but they covered her sweetly rounded ass and that was really all that mattered right now.

She stripped off her coat and sweater, exposing her lace-covered breasts to his grateful gaze. His mouth watered at the sight of her braids brushing across her tightly puckered nipples. What he wouldn't give to lean forward and taste them. His cock throbbed to life at the thought of that crinkled flesh hardening further against his tongue.

She grabbed the folded shirt from the corner of the bed and pulled it over her head, hiding her body from view. Disappointment and relief collided as her pale, soft skin was covered by textured cotton. Her teeth chattered as she rubbed her arms. Her eyes seemed a little clearer and her focus sharper.

He stood, hoping she hadn't noticed his erection, and offered her his hand. "Why don't you let me take a look at that bump on your head?"

She placed her slender hand in his and stood, slightly unsteady on her feet. He slipped an arm around her and led her to the kitchen. He sat her at the kitchen table before heading to the bathroom for the first aid kit. When he returned, her head had lolled to the side and she looked like she'd drifted to sleep.

"Hey, wake up, sleeping beauty."

Her eyes fluttered open and she frowned at him.

"I know you've got to be pretty tired after the adrenaline roller coaster, but I need you to

stay with me.”

He shined a penlight in her eyes. Both pupils were the same size and reactive. A good sign. Using a damp cloth, he sponged away the drying blood around the cut on her temple.

He frowned. “Looks like you smacked the window pretty good.”

“Yeah. I’m kinda wishing I’d sprung for the side airbags right about now.”

She winced as he wiped at the seeping area.

“What’s your name?” he asked.

She frowned. “I don’t have a concussion.”

“What’s your name?”

She rolled her eyes. “Gwendolyn Elizabeth Locke.”

“What’s the date?”

“Seriously?” Annoyance flashed in her gaze.

“What’s the date?”

“January nineteenth,” she said with a sigh.

“Are you feeling nauseated?”

“No.”

“Seeing spots or having double vision?”

“No and no.”

“Dizzy?”

She paused briefly. “A little, but I did just hit my head.”

“Headache?”

“Nothing a few Advil and a nap won’t cure.”

She was certainly sounding more like herself. Gently, he smoothed her hair back and dabbed hydrogen peroxide on the cut. He turned her face while he inspected the wound. “I can butterfly suture it, but it might leave a little scar.”

She shrugged. “Better than a big one.”

He leaned closer trying to affix the suture tape, but the angle was wrong. Scooting forward, he pulled her chair closer until his thighs bracketed hers and her knees nearly brushed his groin. She glanced down, then up at his face, then looked away completely, her cheeks flushed a healthy shade of pink. Embarrassment wasn’t quite the method he preferred for getting her blood flowing, but it worked. Cupping her face, he angled her head to the position he needed

and carefully applied the suture strips.

With his hands on her face and her lips so close, it was impossible not to imagine kissing her. Even with the bruises that were beginning to form on the side of her face, she was still gorgeous. Not in a traditional sense. Her eyes were almost too big for her face and her mouth too small above that pointy chin, but when she looked at him, all he could focus on was how fucking much he wanted her. But he couldn't think about that now—not with her knees grazing his still-hard cock and her tempting lips mere inches away.

As he was applying the last suture, the door opened and the icy wind swirled around them as Lucas stomped the snow off his boots.

"I think you'd have more luck with that if you both took off your pants and switched positions," Lucas announced. "It's a better fit that way."

Noah sighed. "Don't be an ass." He turned to look at Gwen. "Ignore him."

A surprised giggle escaped her, and he realized he'd never really heard her laugh before. Annoyance flared in him that he hadn't been the one to make her laugh. His cousin had.

Lucas set her computer, purse and several bags of groceries on the table and extended his hand to her. "I'm Lucas Makwa. Captain Crankyass' cousin."

She shook his hand. "I'm Gwendolyn Locke, Noah's co-worker."

Lucas' eyes widened and he turned to face Noah. "*This* is Goldilocks? From work?" His incredulousness was impossible to miss.

Noah didn't even have to look at Gwen to know that her eyes were narrowed and her lips were pressed together in a tight line. He'd seen that expression often enough since they'd begun working together.

"Goldilocks?" she repeated, her voice deadly calm.

He couldn't deny it. He'd called her that. More than once. On days when she'd pissed him off beyond belief. There was nothing he could say in his defense, so he just nodded.

"And now I'm snowed in with the three little bears?"

"Hey. I'm not little," Lucas protested.

She didn't spare a glance for the other man and instead held Noah's gaze.

"Pretty much," Noah answered her question. Before she could say anything else, he stood. "Lucas, will you make Gwen a cup of tea? I'm going to check on your brother." Not giving either of them a chance to respond, he left the room, taking the first aid kit with him.

Quinn was healing rapidly. By the time he woke tomorrow, he'd be mostly pain free. He wasn't sure what he was going to do with Gwen. The snowstorm was supposed to last through the weekend. They could easily get another eighteen to twenty-four inches.

He sighed as he put away the first aid kit and got out the Advil for Gwen. It wasn't the weather as much as what she might do with her newfound information about them. He knew her well enough to realize that as soon as she could think more clearly, she'd want to know every last detail about shape-shifters. She was a damn good biologist and her scientific curiosity and intelligence was one of the reasons he'd agreed to her transfer to his station in the first place.

Funny that those same traits had become such a pain in his ass. Of course, taking her to bear sites would have been fine if he hadn't been guiding his cousins through their first change. At twenty-five, they'd only reached shifter maturity in the last couple of months. Having a smart biologist poking around while they were getting their bear-feet under them was not what he'd needed. But that's definitely what he'd gotten. What were the odds?

Noah piled logs in the fireplace in his room and lit the kindling. He wanted the room warm enough for Gwen since that's where she'd be sleeping. It was going to kill him to have her in his bed while he sat there staring at her all night, waking her up every two hours, wishing he was under the covers...between her legs...buried inside her. Christ, it was going to be a long fucking night. He pulled on a t-shirt in an attempt to hide the hard-on that got worse every time he thought about her.

When he returned to the kitchen, Lucas was putting her groceries away in the fridge and Gwen held a steaming mug of tea, laughing at something the other man had said. Noah put the pills in her hand and sat down next to her.

"Gwennie was just telling me about the fight in the woods. How's your head?"

Gwennie? "It's fine."

Looking up, she lifted her free hand as if to touch his face before letting it fall to her side. "About that." She frowned, remorse shadowing her eyes. "I'm really sorry I clubbed you with that stick."

He shrugged. "It's not like you knew it was me."

A small smile curved her lips. "Believe me, I've thought about it often enough the last few months. You really know how to piss a girl off."

"Frankly, I'm impressed by your restraint." Lucas grinned. "Three months is a long time

to wait.” Before Noah could respond, the other man headed toward the hallway. “After everything that went down tonight, I’m sure you and Goldilocks have plenty to discuss. See ya in the morning. Sleep well, Gwennie.”

She smiled at Lucas, and a spurt of jealousy flared in his gut. Her smile faded as she turned her attention to him. “I’m going to ignore the whole nickname thing for a minute since I’m still trying to get past the wishful thinking that I imagined everything I saw in the woods and just ask the obvious question. What the fuck?”

“Lucas? He’s always an ass.”

“Not him.” She frowned. “Seriously, what the hell is going on here? How is any of this even possible?”

“You realize that I’ll deny any of this if anyone ever asks me about it. I won’t put my family in danger by confirming anything.”

Concern shown on her face and she laid her hand on his arm. He didn’t miss the nervous tremble in her fingers or the hint of worry in her eyes. He supposed that finding out that he’d hidden his true identity—that he was what most people considered a mythological being was more than enough to make her a little skittish. He could understand that.

“I’d never do that to you—or them. Believe me, I feel horrible enough about hurting Quinn. I’m just trying to understand what’s going on.”

She pulled her hand back and he immediately missed her touch. He also realized that he trusted her completely. He hoped it wasn’t misplaced.

He took a deep breath. He’d never spoken of this to anyone outside his immediate family. “My family is of Ojibwe descent. As long as anyone can remember, there have always been shifters among us. Wolves, bear, deer, fox, lynx—we are the other.”

“The other?”

He nodded. “Human, but more. Animal, but not. Other.”

The light of understanding dawned in her eyes.

“As far as I know, there’s only one type of shifter per family, and only one or two males in every generation born with the ability to shift. However, in ours, there were three. Probably because Quinn and Lucas are twins.”

“Fraternal, right?” she asked, her expression rapt. She’d looked much the same watching the sow and cub this afternoon.

He nodded.

“Have you been able to shift since you were a child?”

“It doesn’t happen until you’re at least twenty-five. No one knows whether they have the ability until the first time it happens.”

She took a sip of her tea. “Well, that could get awkward.”

He laughed. “You have no idea.”

Her smile drew him forward, and he wanted so badly to taste her lips, to thread his hands through her honey gold hair. Instead, he got himself a glass of water and poured her another cup of tea. If he hadn’t, he would have given in to his need that was increasing exponentially.

“I’m guessing this is the real reason you refused to take me to any of the nesting areas. You didn’t want me to run across your cousins.”

“If it makes you feel any better, I was planning on taking you anywhere you wanted to go after they left the area.”

Something flared in her eyes, but she looked away before he could identify it. “So how does this work?” she asked quickly.

“Usually, an elder guides the cubs through their first changes and teaches them to control their abilities. To stay present while in their animal form. I’ve been working with these two for the last few months.”

“What are you? Thirty?”

“Thirty-two.”

“Hardly old enough to be considered an elder, are you?”

“No, but I’m the only one in the area, so...here I am.”

She rubbed her hands together, tugging the too long sleeves over them for warmth. He should have urged her toward his room when he first came out here. “The bedroom’s warmer. Why don’t you go lie down for a while? You can take my bed.”

“I don’t want to kick you out of your own room.”

“I don’t plan on sleeping much tonight, anyway. I’ll be up checking on Quinn and waking you up, too. I don’t think you have a concussion, but I’d rather be safe.”

She stood and headed for the hall, but stopped midstride and turned to face him. “Thank you,” she murmured. “I really do appreciate you taking care of me.”

The sentence hovered between them as if she wanted to say more.

“But you have another question,” he guessed.

She nodded. “So...what about the bears?” she asked.

“What about them?”

“Do you...interact with them while you’re in shifted form?”

“Sometimes,” he answered slowly, wondering what she was getting at. “We occasionally hunt with them or play with the cubs.”

She tilted her head to the side. “That’s not quite what I meant.”

Gwendolyn knew the moment Noah figured out what she was trying to ask him. His lips quirked and he took a step toward her.

“Are you asking me if we mate with the sows?”

Her stomach dropped to her feet at the intense look in his eyes and a nervous laugh bubbled out. “Now that you mention it, it does sound silly.”

He reached out and grasped one of her braids, coiling it around his finger as he stared into her eyes. “I like sex,” he rumbled. “I like it a lot.”

“I’m sorry. That was incredibly nosy of me to ask.” She took a step back, but he followed, still holding her hair and staring into her eyes. Swallowing nervously, she tried to speak, but he beat her to it.

“I like sex with *women*.” Her belly flipped at the rough sound of his voice. He brushed his thumb across her trembling bottom lip as he lowered his head against hers and inhaled deeply. “Especially with women who smell like apples and honey.”

“Oh,” she breathed.

“In the truck today, it was all I could do to keep my hands on the steering wheel. I could smell your arousal. I could smell your need. And more than anything, I wanted to lay you back against the seat and taste it.”

Chapter Two

Gwendolyn couldn't move away from Noah anymore than she could stop breathing. Eyes flashing with annoyance-laden desire held hers, and she wished she'd kept her mouth shut. She also wished he'd just kiss her already.

"Heightened sense of smell?" she ventured with a squeak.

He nodded slowly, his big hand stroking the line of her throat.

She swallowed hard and stared at his chest. "Good to know."

Noah tugged on the braid he still held and tilted her head back until she met his heated gaze. Her pussy clenched at the look on his face, at his nearness, at the heat emanating from his body. His nostrils flared slightly, and she knew he smelled her renewed arousal. His free hand slipped around her waist and pulled her flush against him.

There was no mistaking his erection. The hard ridge of his cock pressed against her. They were separated only by lace panties and a couple layers of flannel. He wanted her. Or maybe he just wanted sex with someone who used the same shampoo she did. Either way, she wasn't sure she cared. His nearness drove away every thought but one. More.

She breathed deeply, trying to steady her nerves. Instead, all she took in was his intoxicating scent. Faint traces of wood smoke and pine mixed with the unique smell of his skin, sharpening her need for him.

Without warning, his lips covered hers. There was no gentle coaxing, only the heat of possession, the need to absorb. Her lips parted beneath his, inviting him in. On a ragged groan that sent flutters through her belly, he delved inside, stroking her tongue, tasting her thoroughly. Pulling back slightly, he nipped at her lower lip.

"I've wanted to do that since the first time you walked into my office."

“Do it again,” she breathed. She threaded her fingers through the silky length of his hair and tugged him forward, drawing his mouth to hers.

He kissed her. Slower this time, but no less intensely. He took her mouth like he wanted to devour her. His fingers slipped beneath the hem of her shirt, and he stroked her back. Big and callused, his hand caressed her skin. She arched against him, wishing he were touching her nipples. They ached, the lace of her bra feeling coarse against her swollen flesh. The tight peaks had nothing to do with the cold. He’d finally chased that away. No, this was all him. His mouth, his taste, his scent, his touch all combined to make her shudder with want.

He backed her against the wall, pinning her there with his body as he continued the assault on her lips. Sliding a thickly muscled thigh between her legs, he pressed against her mound, catching her needy whimper in his mouth. With a butterfly-light touch, he trailed his work-roughened fingertips along her side and over her stomach, circling her bellybutton with the pad of his thumb. A tremor fluttered through her at the barely there caress. Finally, he made the upward climb to her breast and cupped it, covering her, the heat of his palm soaking into her skin.

“Oh...hey...never mind. I can see you’re busy.”

Noah broke the kiss, resting his forehead against hers, his hand still wrapped firmly around her breast. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Lucas’ gaze riveted to the spot and inexplicably, a fresh rush of desire coursed through her and her nipple tightened further against Noah’s palm. Her eyes closed in mortification.

“What do you want?” Noah asked, raising his head.

“Quinn’s awake.”

“I’ll be in there in a second.”

“Take your time. I’m making him a sandwich—he’s starving. Big surprise,” he murmured as he maneuvered past them in the narrow hallway, pushing Noah more firmly against her.

Noah released her and stepped back and she felt the loss of his warmth immediately. Shivers raced through her and the desire in his eyes turned instantly to regret.

She swallowed the bitterness of disappointment and stepped around him, crossing her arms over her chest. “I think I’ll go lie down and leave you to check on Quinn.”

“I’m sorry, Gwen.”

She had no idea if he was apologizing for the interruption or kissing her in the first place. Or maybe he smelled her increased arousal when she caught Lucas staring at Noah groping her and thought she was a slut. Judging from the regret, she'd bet the latter. She was stupid to think she could actually have anything with him.

Humiliation heated her cheeks and she ducked into his room and quickly closed the door behind her, slumping against it. She'd give anything to go home now and avoid this whole awkward mess. This night couldn't get any worse.

The door handle jiggled behind then stopped as if whoever it was had second thoughts. It was likely Noah, but she supposed it could have been Lucas. She had no doubt that he scented her arousal as easily as Noah had. God, maybe they both thought she was a whore.

She walked to the huge window and glared at the falling snow. The way it was coming down, she wasn't getting out of here any time soon. Noah was right. Tow trucks wouldn't be out until the roads were passable. She'd be here well into the next day—if not longer. It looked like it would never stop snowing.

Her headache was back and the adrenaline fueled energy finally left her body. Noah's big bed looked better by the second. Branches and tree roots entwined to make a high headboard and footboard and the huge mattress in between looked like heaven on earth. She pulled back the heavy quilt and flannel sheet. Of course, it would be better if Noah was in here with her, but that clearly wasn't going to happen.

Climbing into the bed, she pulled the covers over her and immediately breathed in his scent. Her pussy clenched with need and she shifted, trying to get comfortable. It was going to be a long night. She lay on her side and watched as the blue glowing numbers on the alarm clock changed, slowly counting the endless moments she'd laid in his bed. Nearly midnight and finally they began to blur as sleep inched closer.

Gwendolyn's eyes snapped open and the first thing she saw was the clock switching to two-thirty-six. Shifting, she sat up and tried to figure out what woke her. She had no trouble remembering where she was. Noah's bed.

A shadow moved by the door and her breath caught in her throat before she realized who it was.

"You're awake," Noah's voice rumbled quietly. He crossed the room to sit on the mattress next to her. "Have you slept at all?"

He leaned forward and shined his penlight in her eyes.

Squinting, she blocked the light with her hands. “I don’t have a concussion.”

“I just want to be sure.”

She sighed. “My name is Gwendolyn Elizabeth Locke, I’m twenty-eight, it’s January nineteenth—well, twentieth now, and I don’t have a freaking concussion.”

She could make out his smile in the dim light of the alarm clock and the glow of the still burning fire. “Good.” He picked up the end of one of her braids, slid the hair tie off the end and began unraveling her hair.

“How’s Quinn?” she choked out.

“His side is pretty bruised, but he’ll be fine.” Slowly, he raked his fingers through her hair before freeing the other one. “I’ve always wanted to see it down.”

The low rumble of his voice stroked her nerve endings as thoroughly as his fingers stroked her scalp. Closing her eyes, she leaned into his touch.

“I know I should get out of here and let you sleep, but every time I touch you, I can’t seem to find the will to stop.”

She gripped the bedding and held perfectly still—afraid to speak, but more afraid not to. “What if I didn’t want you to stop?”

The words had barely left her mouth before he cupped her face with both hands and covered her lips with his own. His fingers slid through her hair as he cradled the back of her head, urging her closer.

Releasing her death grip on the sheets, she trailed her fingers over the tight muscles of his abdomen, tugging at his shirt. She hadn’t had the presence of mind to enjoy the sight of his bare skin earlier. It was time to make up for that now.

He broke the kiss long enough to let her pull the fabric over his head before devouring her lips again. Skimming her hands over the fluid, flexing muscles of his back, she laid back on the pillows, trying to pull him down on top of her. Instead of following her to the bed, he threw back the covers and straddled her legs.

Even in the low light, she could make out the tightly-corded, delineated lines of muscle on his chest and arms as he planted his hands on either side of her head, caging her with his arms. Taking advantage of his position, she trailed her hands over his chest, sweeping her thumbs across his nipples before caressing his stomach. The warm expanse of skin teased her

palms as she slid her fingers through the fine dusting of hair on his lower abdomen. Reaching his waistband, she tugged at his drawstring and untied his pants.

He caught her hand before she could reach inside and pinned it above her head. When she reached toward him with her other hand, he secured that one, too. She pulled against his grip, but he held fast. She moaned at the sensation of his fingers tightening around her wrists and he chuckled.

Nuzzling the side of her neck, he brushed his lips over the sensitive skin of her ear. “Good to know,” he breathed.

“What is?”

“So far tonight, I’ve discovered that you like to be held down and that you like to be watched.”

Her stomach flipped in nervous anticipation of what he might say next. “I…”

“You aren’t going to deny it, are you?”

She couldn’t answer—she was too far out of her depth with him. Instead, she turned her face away.

He kissed her neck where it met the curve of her shoulder, scraping his teeth over the sensitive skin. “Don’t be embarrassed. I plan to discover all the things that excite you before we’re done.”

Her breath caught in her throat at his roughly whispered words.

Transferring both wrists to one hand, he splayed the free one over her belly. “Now, what I want to know is what you were thinking about in the truck, earlier.”

When she didn’t answer, he slipped his hand under her shirt and gently traced the skin along the lower edge of her bra. She arched off the bed, hoping he’d take the hint and touch her breasts again.

“Nice try.”

When it became clear that he wasn’t going to cooperate, she sighed and closed her eyes. “You.”

He pinched the tight bud of her nipple. “What about me?”

Wanting more contact than he was giving her, she answered. “Just remembering a dream.”

His hand hovered above her, clearly waiting for more.

“About you fucking me. Hard and fast. From behind.”

He drew in a sharp breath between clenched teeth. “You’d probably be horrified if you knew how often I imagine taking you that way.” He slipped his hand inside her bra and rolled her nipple between his fingers and thumb, squeezing and tugging. “Over my desk, the gate of the pickup, a log...” he continued. “I’ve come so often imagining your ass in the air...waiting for me...”

He groaned and shoved her shirt up and yanked the cups of her bra down, exposing her breasts to his hungry gaze. Drawing one of the puckered nipples into his mouth, he let go of her hands. He sucked hard on the aching flesh, flattening it with his tongue against the roof of his mouth before scraping his teeth across it.

She strangled a cry in her throat at the sensation as he dragged his lips to her other breast. “More,” she groaned.

He released her and stripped the shirt and bra from her body. “Too many clothes,” he muttered as he tossed them on the floor. Collapsing on top of her, he shoved her breasts together to suck on both of her nipples at once. She loved the feeling of his weight on her, pressing her in to the bed.

There was no stifling her cry this time. Hot and wet, his mouth felt too good. All she could do was rock against him, begging him without words to fill her with his thick cock.

Instead, he let go of her breasts and shifted to untie the drawstring at her waistband, and slipped his hand inside to cup her mound. Lifting her hips, she thrust against him, loving the sensation of his fingers rasping against the lace.

“Christ, you’re wet.” He tugged aside the crotch of her panties and ran his fingertips over her damp, swollen flesh.

A fleeting touch shouldn’t feel that good, but it did. Still tormenting her nipple, he slid a thick finger inside her channel. Much more of this and she’d come before she had a chance to touch him. That wasn’t going to happen. She wanted to taste him first.

Pushing hard against his chest, she shoved him to his back and crawled over him, slipping off the side of the bed to the floor.

Noah looked at her, concern in his eyes. “Gwen?”

“Stand up.”

When he did, she rose to her knees and pulled his pants to his ankles, freeing his hard,

thick cock. Grasping it, she smoothed her hands up the length of it, loving the satiny feel of his skin stretched over steely flesh.

She dragged the bulbous head over her lips before taking a tentative swipe with her tongue.

“Don’t tease.”

She caressed his balls, tugging gently. “I don’t think you’re in a position to be making demands.” Slowly, she licked the length of his shaft, stopping just beneath the head.

The muscles in his thighs quivered as he fought to stay still. She repeated the action, flicking her tongue over the underside of the wide, flared crown.

He buried his fingers in her hair, flexing and relaxing as if he fought the urge to pull her head where he wanted it. Finally, she took pity on him and engulfed the head of his cock in her mouth. His sigh of contentment sounded more like a prayer of gratitude as she swirled her tongue around the silky smooth skin, tasting the salty-sweet precum that leaked from the tip.

As she took the length of him as far down her throat as she was able, he groaned her name as he slowly fucked her mouth. Digging her fingertips into his ass, she urged him faster and deeper, but he stopped suddenly. With his hand tangled in her hair, he carefully pulled her head back and tugged her to her feet.

“Problem?” she asked as she wrapped her fingers around him, not willing to give up her hold on him yet.

“The problem is, as good as your mouth feels, I want your pussy.”

She clenched needily at his harshly whispered words, wanting him inside her now. She couldn’t ever remember wanting a man as much as she did Noah. Hell, she couldn’t even remember the last time she’d had sex. She kicked the pajama pants off her legs and onto the floor, standing there in nothing but her lacy underwear. Climbing onto the bed, she lowered herself to her elbows, ass in the air.

“I don’t know which of our dreams you’re fulfilling,” he breathed as he ran a reverent hand over her thighs and ass.

She glanced at him over her shoulder. “Do you care?”

He tugged her underwear down her legs. “I don’t think so.”

Pulling her against his body, he leaned forward and trailed open-mouthed kisses along her spine until he reached the curve of her ass. Dropping to his knees, he swiped his tongue

through her wet folds. Unprepared for the sensation of his tongue dancing over her cleft, she cried out. Loudly. She could only hope the other guys were sound asleep.

“You taste so fucking good, I could do this all night.”

“Please just fuck me,” she pleaded. Somehow, having his cock inside her seemed less intimate than having his face buried between her legs. After this was over, she’d need all the distance she could get. She had no illusions that this relationship—if it could be called that—would be anything long term. In fact, she doubted it would last past the moment she left Noah’s house.

“I promise. I’ll fuck you, but first I want to make you come.”

She was nearly certain he could accomplish that with no more than the sound of his voice.

Using his thumbs, he spread her wide, exposing her heated flesh to the lingering chill in the room. The coolness was replaced almost immediately with the sudden warmth of his tongue—teasing along her cleft, swirling over her, dipping into her channel. It was too much. Contractions of pleasure started deep in her womb and radiated outward.

She clung to the bedding as if it would hold her up in the swirling tidal wave of sensation. Burying her face in the blankets, she hoped they’d muffle the desperate cries she couldn’t manage to stem.

Tenderly smoothing his hand over her body and whispering softly, he gentled her, calming her racing heart. This was exactly what she didn’t need. She wanted to continue thinking of him as a co-worker she had the hots for—not a considerate lover.

“I need you inside me,” she whispered.

He stood and her stomach tumbled with nervous anticipation. The sound of a drawer opening and foil tearing drifted to her. Finally, he gripped her hips and pulled her to him. The length of his cock nestled against her slick folds before he grabbed the shaft and prodded her tight passage.

The wide head of his erection tunneled slowly through her sensitive tissues as she stretched to accommodate his girth. Bracing herself against the mattress, she pushed backward to take him completely. His hands trembled where they rested on her hips as his entire length lodged within her. She sighed in contentment. Nothing had ever felt as good as having him buried inside her. Then he moved.

Noah pulled back, reveling in the tight clasp of Gwen's body. Her pussy clenched his dick as if it couldn't bear to let him go. He couldn't believe she was not only in his bed, but naked with her sweetly rounded ass high in the air as he drove in and out of her willing pussy.

His balls were drenched with her cream and she whimpered every time they slapped wetly against her clit. He fucked her harder, loving the desperate little noises she made. His balls began to tighten with every rhythmic pulse of her cunt. He was close—way too close. But damn if he wasn't going to make her come again before he went over.

Reaching around her, he traced the opening of her pussy with his fingertips, caressed the delicate flesh that stretched to take him. Her whimpers turned to guttural cries as he traced upward to find the swollen nub of her clit. He circled it with the pad of his forefinger until her internal muscles began to ripple and contract around him. Her cry turned into a scream as she gripped him so tightly, he could barely move.

He managed a few more thrusts, riding her hard through her orgasm until fingers of sensation shot along his spine, tingling at the small of his back until he emptied inside her. Spurt after spurt of hot cum filled the condom, and for the first time in his life, he wished he'd forgotten to wear one. He wanted nothing between them.

Wrapping his arm around her waist, he pulled her to the bed as he curved around her back, remaining deep inside her.

Their breathing gradually returned to normal. He laid there content to hold her, pressing kisses between her shoulder blades. She was so quiet and the seeds of doubt took root in his head. Did she regret it? Had he made a huge mistake and blown his only chance with her by moving too fast? Was it too much after everything she'd been through that day?

"Are you okay?"

On a yawn, she snuggled closer to him. "Mostly, I'm just really thirsty."

"I'll get you a glass of water."

She nodded sleepily.

Carefully, he withdrew from the tight clasp of her body and pulled the covers over her. Disposing of the condom, he left the room and almost ran into Lucas and Quinn.

He eyed his cousins. "Just passing through or listening to us have sex?"

Lucas scowled at him. "It's a little hard to avoid hearing it. By the way, is fucking head

injury victims senseless an approved method of treatment?”

“Shut up and quit being a dick.”

Lucas glanced pointedly at Noah’s lack of clothing and snorted.

Quinn limped down the hallway, following them as they headed to the kitchen. “I’ve been out of it for a little while, so I want to see if I have this all straight. Goldilocks ran me over and you decided that having loud, hard-on inducing sex with her was the right thing to do?”

Noah ignored him and got a glass out of the cupboard and filled it with cold water.

“For what it’s worth, she did hit Noah upside the head with a big ol’ branch while he was shifted because she thought he was going to eat you.”

Quinn looked impressed. “Carry on, then. But...for the sake of us with only our hands for company, could you be a little quieter?”

Noah made his way back to his room and opened the door to hear Gwen softly snoring, sprawled across the middle of his bed. Lucas and Quinn peered over his shoulder.

“Isn’t Goldilocks supposed to try out all of the bears’ beds?” Lucas asked Quinn.

The other man nodded. “We were robbed.”

* * * *

Noah started the coffee grinder, hoping the sound wouldn’t wake Gwen. God knew she needed the sleep. He’d lost count of how many times they’d reached for each other during the night. Unbelievably, his cock stirred again when he remembered the expression on her face when she’d come. The way her eyes drifted shut and her lips parted as she strained toward the very edge of release was the most beautiful thing he’d ever seen. He wanted to see it again as often as possible. He smiled and shook his head. Yesterday he’d been trying to come up with ways to avoid her, and now, all he could think about was keeping her as close as possible.

It had been a risk to reveal the truth to her, but after what she’d seen, there was no hiding it. He knew the scientist in her had questions, but he also believed that she wouldn’t reveal their secret to anyone. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d trusted anyone so implicitly.

The sound of the shower drifted to him. He peered down the hall. His bedroom door was still shut. One of the guys must be up. He checked the clock. It was only seven-thirty—far earlier than they usually woke. He filled the coffeepot and set it to brew as he contemplated making breakfast, wondering what Gwen would like.

He turned at the sound of shuffling feet. Gwen yawned and stretched as she shambled

over to him. “Morning,” she said on another yawn.

He smoothed her damp hair away from the darkening bruise on her temple. “How’s your head?”

“Pretty good. By the way, I used one of the toothbrushes from the package under the sink. Hope you don’t mind that I went scrounging, but I was pretty desperate.”

“That’s fine.”

She smiled and peered around him. “Please tell me you’re making coffee.”

He pulled her into his arms. “I figured you’d need it after last night.”

“Oh yeah.” She skimmed her palms over his chest. “But I don’t have any complaints.” Her cheeks colored slightly. “You’re worth a little sleep deprivation.”

He slid his hands downward over the swell of her ass. The way the fabric moved over her skin, he could tell she didn’t have any underwear on under the pajama pants. Her nipples peaked sharply against the shirt he’d loaned her, making her lack of a bra equally apparent.

Canting her hips, she pressed against him, murmuring her approval when he took her lips. She melted against him, drawing his tongue into her mouth as she cupped his aching length through his jeans.

Never breaking the kiss, he lifted her to sit on the edge of the table and moved to stand between her spread legs. A shiver worked through her body as he raised her shirt to cup her breast. A whimper caught in her throat when he pinched her nipple sharply. Laying her back against the tabletop, he drew the swollen bud into his mouth while he tugged at the other one with his fingers. She squirmed, pulling his head tight to her chest.

He knew the moment he pussy began to moisten in anticipation. The scent of her soft musk drifted to him and his mouth watered. Tugging off her shirt, he bared her beautiful breasts to his gaze, noticing the faint whisker burns on her pale flesh.

“Noah!” she whispered harshly. “What if your cousins wake up and wander out here?”

He shook his head. “They never get up before noon.” Hooking a chair leg with his foot, he pulled it behind him and sat down.

Gwen propped herself on her elbows and looked at him with raised eyebrows. “What are you doing?”

He untied the drawstring at her waist. “Guess.”

She glanced nervously toward the hallway before she lifted her hips and let him strip her

completely. He dropped her clothes on the floor and scooted closer to her beautiful pussy, inhaling her sweet scent. Nuzzling the insides of her thighs, he inched his way toward her cunt. Pink and swollen, he couldn't wait to taste her again, but he hesitated.

“Are you sure you're up for this.”

“Please,” she breathed, cupping her breasts and pinching her nipples. “I need your mouth on me.”

He groaned at the anguish in her voice and parted her short, blond curls with his thumbs, exposing her folds to his hungry gaze. He traced the length of her slit with his tongue, careful to avoid her clit. She lifted her hips in an attempt to get his mouth where she wanted it, but he threw an arm across her and held her down. As he'd anticipated, the move made her wetter. She wiggled, trying to get more contact than he was giving her.

Circling the opening of her pussy with his thumb, he tapped at it—entering her just slightly, then retreating. He glanced up the line of her body. Her nipples pushed ceilingward, and her lips were pressed tightly together in an attempt to remain quiet.

“God, you're beautiful,” he murmured against her slick flesh.

She trembled as he continued to stroke her. “Please just fuck me already,” she whispered.

“Not yet.” But he took pity on her and slid a thick finger into her swollen channel. She gripped him as he pulled his hand back. Flicking his tongue across her clit, he did it again, watching her strain to remain silent. Or mostly silent. Needy little whimpers seemed to clog her throat as she writhed against him. He added another finger, pumping a little harder. Her hands gripped the edge of the table and her body strained to meet his thrusts.

“Please Noah,” she whispered. “Please make me come.”

He couldn't ignore her request, but he wasn't anywhere near finished licking her honeyed pussy. He added a third finger and scraped his teeth across her swollen clit as he heard the floorboards creak in the hallway.

“Hey I smell coffee. I wonder what's for breakfa—”

Mouths gaping, both Lucas and Quinn stumbled to a stop as Gwen broke. Her entire body stiffened as she came. Her pussy rippled and contracted around his fingers and he nearly blew in his jeans at the sight before him. Gwen naked and sprawled on the wooden table, panting and glancing wide-eyed between him and the other men. A fresh rush of moisture coated his fingers still buried in her body.

“Apparently Goldilocks is what’s for breakfast,” Quinn murmured.

“Is there enough for everyone?” Lucas asked, his voice rough with desire.

“Oh my God,” she groaned, turning away and crossing her arms over her chest as her face flushed bright red.

“Please don’t cover up on our account,” Quinn breathed. “After all, you’ve pretty much seen all of us naked.”

“Not me,” Lucas piped up.

Gwen snorted at that before returning her gaze to Noah.

Slowly, Noah removed his fingers from her still quivering pussy and brought them to his mouth. Holding her gaze, he licked her juices from his skin while his cousins groaned and inched closer. He wasn’t sure how he felt about sharing her with anyone, let alone Lucas and Quinn, but if she was interested, he didn’t want to pass up this opportunity to give her unimaginable pleasure.

She closed her eyes as if unable to face them.

“Gwen?”

“Shh...I’m pretending this is all a bad dream.”

He ran a finger along her cleft, loving the way she trembled. “Everything?”

Her breath left her on a shuddering sigh. “No,” she whispered. “Not everything.”

Chapter Three

Gwendolyn couldn't believe she was lying stark naked in the middle of Noah's kitchen table surrounded by three of the most gorgeous looking men she'd ever seen. Golden brown skin covering tightly muscled bodies and dark, bright eyes all focused on her. She peered at them through her nearly closed lids. All three watched her, longing etched on their faces and their cocks straining against their pants. Noah's eyes were the fiercest though, his raw hunger evident in his gaze

She never would have imagined that she'd ever be in the position to decide whether or not to have sex with three men. At once. The idea was laughable. But here she was. A single finger settled at the base of her throat and slowly trailed down her body, gently nudging her arm away from her breasts. The finger trailed farther down, over her sternum, down her belly, past her bellybutton, stopping when it reached her mound. She knew without looking that it wasn't Noah who touched her.

She opened her eyes to find Quinn leaning over her. Funny, she'd expected Lucas. Quinn's unruly hair tumbled in his face as he leaned over her. "Will you let us give you pleasure?" he asked, his voice gravelly.

Before answering, she sought Noah's gaze for reassurance. "If it's what you want, it'll be okay."

A little piece of her crumbled. Didn't he care if she fucked two of his family members? The answer hit her just as suddenly as the question had. He really didn't. This wasn't anything more than a fling. Disappointment stung, but she needed to be realistic. She looked at all of the guys. She doubted that she'd ever have an opportunity like this again. Slowly she nodded.

It was as if they'd been collectively holding their breath, waiting for her to decide, and as

soon as she did, they descended. Quinn leaned forward and tenderly kissed her lips. She lifted a tentative hand and threaded her fingers through his hair as his kiss grew bolder. He coaxed her lips apart as he pinched her nipple.

Warm, firm lips closed over her other nipple and she groaned into Quinn's mouth at the contact. Gently, she pushed his head toward her chest, hoping he'd get the hint. Eagerly, he drew the aching bud into his mouth and sucked hard while she held their heads where she wanted them. She was sure nothing had ever felt this good before. Two men sucking her nipples at once was heaven. If they kept this up, she'd come from nothing more than the rhythmic tugging of their lips and the scrape of their teeth.

They stroked her body, running their hands up and down the length of her as Noah once again settled between her thighs. The chair scraped the floor as he drew nearer. The brush of his tongue against her clit sent an electric wave of pleasure through her body and she arched against him. Pushing her hips to the table, he spread her wide and lapped at her needy flesh.

Lucas released her nipple with a pop and nuzzled her ear. "You smell so good."

Noah pumped two fingers into her aching pussy while Lucas murmured to her. "That's nothing compared to how she tastes."

"I want a turn," Quinn said. "I want to eat you 'til you come."

Her tummy fluttered with anticipation. "It probably won't take much," she groaned. She was so damn close.

He took her nipple again while Noah slicked another finger with her juices and stroked it along the cleft of her ass. Repeating the motion, he pushed gently at her anus. It was all the stimulation she needed. Sensation washed over her in a sharp burst of color as the release traveled in waves through her trembling body.

"So fucking beautiful," Lucas whispered in her ear.

"God, yes," Noah breathed against her cunt.

Her heart twisted at the longing she imagined in his voice.

Noah moved to stand at her head. She reached out and ran a hand over his bare stomach, down over the thick ridge of his cock. Grabbing his waistband, she pulled him closer and fumbled with his button and zipper until she freed his rock hard shaft. She stroked him firmly, twisting her hand up and down the length of his erection, urging him nearer to her mouth.

His breath caught when she swiped her tongue over his head and he stepped closer. She

took him deeper as he twisted her nipple, tugging and pinching, causing her arch into his touch.

Reaching out with her other hand, she stroked it over Lucas' ass as he continued to torment her nipple. He opened his jeans for her and she tugged them down and caressed his bare skin. He shuddered as she slid her fingers between his legs and cupped his balls.

She released Noah's cock and turned toward the other man. She gripped his heavy cock and brought the thick head to her mouth before she noticed the three heavy studs piercing him from top to bottom. Her pussy clenched as she imagined those steel balls sliding in and out of her body. Holding him tightly, she swirled her tongue around his head, lapping up the sticky precum before taking him as far down her throat as possible. She swirled her tongue over and around the metal studs as he fucked in and out of her mouth.

Reaching out blindly, she grabbed for Noah's cock. With one in each hand, she alternated sucking one thick shaft after the other—drawing on them while they slid across her lips and tongue.

Quinn's warm breath bathed her pussy as he slid both hands under her ass, lifting her to his lips. He nudged her thighs farther apart and they fell completely open, baring her cunt to everyone in the room. Unlike the slow build-up she was used to with Noah, he buried his face in her folds, tasting her thoroughly, licking her from top to bottom. She wanted to thrust against his mouth, but she couldn't get any leverage with her ass raised off the table.

Noah and Lucas continued to pluck her nipples and caress her breasts. While she sucked Noah's cock, Lucas dragged his shaft over the aching bud closest to him. The steel balls rasped across her swollen flesh. She screamed around Noah's flesh as he did it again and again, hot precum leaking onto her over-sensitized skin.

"*Christ*," Noah groaned as he watched, mesmerized. He twisted her other nipple faster and tried to pull from her mouth. "I can't hold back."

She held him firmly, refusing to release him as the other two men worked her body into a desperate frenzy. His cock jerked in her mouth and he flooded her throat with hot splashes of cum. She swallowed him down, holding his gaze the entire time.

Quinn lifted her higher off the table and sucked her clit between his lips, flicking it furiously with his tongue. Lucas continued to torment her nipple as her back arched, her limbs trembling. As if from a great distance, she heard her keening cries, repeating Noah's name over and over as her arousal coiled like a rope in her womb. The rope snapped and liquid fire raced

through her veins, leaving her out of breath and trembling. Slowly Quinn lowered her to the table and leaned forward, placing a soft kiss on the skin above her mound.

Had anything ever felt that good? Having Noah buried inside her had, she admitted, but not much else. She was almost afraid to open her eyes—afraid to see if they viewed her differently somehow now that she'd participated in a foursome. She looked at Lucas first. He just watched her hungrily while he absently stroked his still hard cock. Quinn stood and loomed over her from the edge of the table, his cock tenting his pajama pants, a wet spot on the fabric.

Hesitantly, she turned to Noah. His cock was nearly hard again and he watched her with hooded eyes, his thoughts impossible to read. He walked around the table and she pushed up on her elbows, following his movement. Shouldering Quinn out of the way, he pulled her toward him. He lifted her in his arms and she wrapped her legs around his waist to keep her balance. Her wet pussy slid against his rock hard stomach.

Pulling her closer, he brushed his lips across her ear. "We're not even close to done, yet."

Anticipation and a healthy dose of anxiety slithered through her as Noah carried her to his room, the other guys hard on his heels. With one hand cupping her ass and the other tangled in her hair at the nape of her neck, Noah kissed her, thrusting his tongue deep in her mouth.

Still kissing her, he laid her on the bed, pressing her into the mattress. He thrust his cock through her slick folds, the engorged head brushing over her clit. He did it repeatedly while she arched against him, mindless with need, desperate to have his cock—hell, any of their cocks inside her. She thought of Lucas' piercings and her pussy clenched hungrily.

Noah broke the kiss and rested his forehead on hers. "On your knees, Goldilocks."

The gravelly arousal in his voice scraped along her nerve endings, leaving her raw and aching.

He rose and she realized that she lay on her back, naked, surrounded by three aroused, nearly naked men who all wanted the same thing—her. She was certain they'd react that way to any naked woman willing to take them all on at once, but it didn't lessen her excited anticipation.

Rolling to her side, she raised herself on hands and knees, glancing over her shoulder at Noah. Sure that he was watching, she spread her legs wider, exposing herself completely to him and the other men.

"Fuck, that's hot."

She had no idea who said it, nor did she care.

Noah smoothed his hand over her ass before smacking it sharply. Her breath caught in her throat, and he did it again, rubbing his hand over the rapidly warming area. Her pussy moistened with increased arousal as his hand fell repeatedly. She'd had a boyfriend who'd been into spanking, but it had never turned her on like this did.

Quinn moved to stand behind her and drew a finger through her gathering cream. "If anyone gets to paddle her ass, it should be me. After all, she did run me over."

A whimper escaped her parted lips.

"You deserved it," Lucas laughed. The laughter faded as he rolled her nipple between his thumb and forefinger. "Whether she deserves it or not, it definitely looks like she wants it."

She felt a disturbance in the air behind her as Quinn's hand rose. Soon after, she felt the stinging contact as blow after blow rained down on her ass. She couldn't predict where or when he'd strike, or if he'd smack her pussy in the process. The occasional sharp taps against her swollen flesh drove her hunger higher. She needed one of the men inside her. Soon.

She had no idea how long the slaps continued. Her head sank to the mattress while her ass remained up in the air. The sharp swats morphed from a stinging pain to a tingling pleasure as the sensation blanketed her. The pleasure intensified as Quinn rubbed the palm of his hand onto burning flesh of her bottom. When he bent to drag open-mouthed kisses over the heated area, it was too much. She cried out.

Noah dragged a finger along the cleft of her ass and circled her anus, teasing the tender flesh. Her pussy fluttered with each stroke, protesting its emptiness. A chilly substance covered her, and Noah's callused finger prodded the tight opening, working its way inside, creating an unfamiliar pressure.

"Relax," he soothed her. "I promise that you're going to feel nothing but pleasure."

He added a second finger, and the pressure became more intense. Just as quickly, it turned to something else. Something darker that made her ache for more. Scissoring his fingers apart, he stretched her for the fucking that was sure to come.

A condom flew over her head toward Lucas and Quinn's outstretched hands. Lucas caught it. She shivered at the thought of Lucas' pierced cock sliding in and out of her body.

She met his gaze as he tore open the packet. "Hurry," she whispered, her voice raw.

He muttered something, but it was more growl than intelligible language. For the first time since Noah had told her the truth about his family, it really hit her that these men she was

about to sleep with were far more than human. Maybe it was the bump on the head or the crazed need to have Noah inside her earlier, but it hadn't really registered then. Now she felt a trickle of unease. It was silly. She trusted these men—trusted them at a soul deep level. Besides, if they'd wanted to hurt her, they'd had plenty of opportunity to do so long before now. The only thing she really needed to worry about was appeasing the carnal need that shook her from the inside out.

Noah placed a tender kiss in the center of her back. "If you aren't okay with this, we don't have to do it."

She dropped her head, unable to continue looking Lucas and Quinn in the eyes. "I want to."

"Thank God," Lucas said. "I was afraid I'd have to spend some alone time with my hand."

She snorted and met his gaze. "I'd *hate* to be the cause of that." Her smile faded. She watched mesmerized as he rolled the condom over his thick length. The latex clung to the steel balls on either side of his piercings. He laid next to her on the edge of the bed and urged her straddle him.

Noah removed his fingers as she lifted her leg over Lucas' prone body and settled herself over the wide head of his cock. Reaching between her legs, she positioned him where she wanted him before easing down his engorged shaft. Each of the metal studs dragged deliciously along her sensitized channel, sending unbelievable striations of pleasure shooting through her.

Lucas groaned. "So. Damn. Tight."

She shuddered at the savage rapture in his voice as she took him to the hilt.

Splaying his hands over her hips, he lifted her, sliding her up the length of his cock before yanking her back down. The sensation of the piercings was no less intense this time. She wanted more.

Noah slid his fingers along the cleft of her ass until he caressed the tender tissues that engulfed the other man's cock. "You're so beautiful," he murmured. "So tight around him. I love the way your pussy stretches to take all of him."

"Not as much as I do," Lucas groaned.

As if jealous, Noah growled. Lucas simply thrust harder. Every pass of the steel studs through her channel caused her to ripple and clench around him.

"That's right," Noah said. "Let him fill you. Let him make you come." He continued to

stroke the outside of her quivering pussy, speeding up to match Lucas' frenzied lunges.

Noah's gentle touch along with his roughly whispered words pushed her over the edge and she clamped around Lucas' cock as an earth-shattering release rolled through her. Shaking, she slumped onto Lucas' chest. He ran soothing hands over her back as she caught her breath.

"That was amazing," he whispered in her ear.

Behind her, she heard the sound of tearing foil and the snap of latex. Noah's heavily lubed cock prodded her rear entrance. Nervousness coiled in her belly as he dropped tender kisses along the line of her spine.

"Just breathe," Noah said. "We'll take care of the rest."

She melted against Lucas while Noah slowly pushed past the tight ring of muscles. The pressure increased until she thought she'd split apart, but her body relaxed, quickly growing accustomed to the double penetration. She squirmed between them, wishing someone would move besides her.

If she could have caught her breath, she might have laughed. Before last night, she'd quietly lusted for Noah, never imagining she have more than a five minute conversation with him let alone experience him fucking her until she came sobbing his name. Never in her wildest dreams did she ever conceive of Noah and another man filling her at the same time. And she'd certainly never envisioned a third man watching them while he eagerly stroked his cock.

Quinn climbed on the bed and knelt before them. His cock tented his pants and the wet spot that had been there before was larger. Cupping her face, he bent to kiss her, capturing her lips with a desperate kind of urgency. He delved into her mouth at the same time Lucas lifted his hips, pushing his cock deeper inside her.

A starburst of sensation tingled to life within her and she moaned. Quinn caught the sound in his mouth as he kissed her harder. Lucas settled his hands on her hips and gently slid her forward up the length of his cock, the piercings catching and stroking along her snug channel. The compulsion to move with him gripped her and she pushed against his shoulders, slamming herself down his thick shaft.

Her breath fled from her lungs as Noah began to move in counterpoint to Lucas' measured thrusts. The satiny glide of their hard, muscular bodies against her softness sent every nerve ending she had into hyper-awareness. Each brush of Noah's hair across her shoulders, each heated puff of Lucas' breath on her neck wound her arousal tighter as slick skin slid against slick

skin.

Gwen's nipples had tightened into aching peaks that scraped across Lucas' chest with every merciless thrust. Both cocks throbbed inside her as they pistoned in and out of her eager body. She whimpered for more. Breaking the kiss with Quinn, she urged him to his knees as lifted a hand from Lucas' shoulder and tugged at the drawstring of his brother's pants. Freeing his erection, she grasped the base and pulled him to her lips. He pushed the fabric further down his thighs. Huge purple and blue bruises stood out against his skin. Guilt swamped her. She'd caused that damage. Pulling him closer, she placed gentle kisses over the injured area. His cock jerked every time her lips touched him.

He slid his fingers through her hair, shoving the loose strands out of her face. Whether it was to make sucking his cock easier for her or make watching her easier for him, she didn't know. She swirled her tongue around the damp head as he tightened his grip in her hair.

Noah groaned above her, his lips at her ear. "Take him deeper. Take him all the way."

She lifted her chest to get a better grip on Quinn. Lucas took that opportunity to pinch her nipples, twisting them sharply between his thumbs and forefingers. Her keening cry was muffled by Quinn's cock.

"I'm not going to last," he groaned. "You feel too good."

She stroked the base of his shaft, keeping time with the rhythmic pull of her lips. His fingers spasmed in her hair as he thrust faster, fucking her mouth.

"Oh God, Gwen. I—" Whatever he'd planned to say was lost. His head tipped back, exposing his tightly corded neck. His Adam's apple bobbed fiercely as he tried to hold on, but he couldn't. With a hoarse shout, he spilled hot and thick down her throat.

Both Noah and Lucas drove deeper and harder. Any sense of rhythm they'd had, of give and take, evaporated when Quinn came. They clung to her as they pounded into her, their hands rough on her body, their breath hot against her skin. She didn't care. Reckless and needy, she loved the way they fucked her breathless. She wanted it to go on forever.

Her clit ground against Lucas' pubis with every stroke to her ass. Electric shivers shot through her pussy. She tried to prolong the contact. Lucas tugged at her nipples, and she rode the sharp edge between pleasure and pain.

Noah wrapped her hair around his fist and tugged her head back. "Make this good for her," he said to the other man. "Pinch her nipples. Twist them."

His lips coasted across her ear. “I want you to come harder than you’ve ever come before. Can you do that for me?”

She nodded drunkenly. She was drowning in a sea of sensation. Every thrust, every counterthrust, blurred together to create a kaleidoscope of overwhelming pleasure. The spiral of need that twisted in her abdomen knotted, the ends fraying.

Noah skimmed kisses over her back and shoulder, along the side of her neck. Without warning, he sank his teeth into the curve where her neck and shoulder joined. That was all she needed. The knot snapped and spun frantically. The release that had shimmered just out of reach burst and pulled her under.

She was vaguely aware of both Noah and Lucas powering through her clenching, rippling muscles, riding her through the orgasm. Lucas grabbed her ass and held her tight to him as he stiffened, coming hard. Noah followed him several seconds later with a few more wild thrusts into her ass.

The only sound in the room was the crackle of the dying embers and the rasp of heavy breathing as they all collapsed on the bed in a tangle of limbs like sleepy puppies. Or cubs, she supposed with a muffled laugh.

Noah kissed the damp skin of her back. “Something funny?”

She shook her head. “Not really.”

He’d give anything to know what she was thinking, but he suspected she wasn’t ready to talk right now. “Are you okay?”

“Oh yeah. That was...amazing.”

Lucas and Quinn mumbled their agreement.

Noah stared at where Lucas was still lodged inside his woman and felt a twinge of jealousy. More like a stab, really. He buried his face in Gwen’s hair, wondering when he’d started thinking of her as his. He supposed the question of when didn’t really matter. He couldn’t deny the overwhelming feeling of connection he experienced with her.

“Hey Lucas, will you go grab a warm washcloth? And Quinn will you get a glass of water?”

Quinn brushed a soft kiss across her forehead before pushing off the bed and stumbling for the door. Lucas groaned, but carefully withdrew from her body. Noah didn’t miss her shiver

of enjoyment as his cousin's piercings teased her swollen flesh and he wondered how much getting them would hurt.

Lucas pressed a tender kiss to her lips before heading toward the bathroom, and Noah felt another stab of jealousy. Gently, he eased from her body to her sleepy murmur of protest. He tightened his arms around Gwen's waist and nuzzled her neck. He'd never experienced this kind of intensity before. She roused feelings in him he would have sworn he wasn't capable of. He'd known from the moment he'd met her that she was different. If he was honest with himself, that had been part of the reason he'd avoided her for so long. But now that he knew how accepting, how giving she was, he had no intention of letting her go. The question was, would she be interested in only him?

Though Lucas and Quinn had shared plenty of women, he never had. But he'd sensed it would bring her pleasure, so he'd initiated it. He never would have believed how arousing it would be to see another man plunging his cock into Gwen. Even now, his dick rose slightly at the thought. Although, he had to admit, he couldn't imagine sharing her with anyone but his cousins. Not that he foresaw it being an everyday occurrence. The instincts she stirred in him were far too possessive for that. She was his.

Gwen stifled a yawn as Quinn returned with the glass of water. She covered her breasts as if suddenly shy after everything they'd just shared and reached for the cup with her other hand.

"Thanks," she murmured before downing the liquid in several swallows. With another yawn, she snuggled against Noah as the other man left the room.

It wasn't difficult to imagine keeping her close to his side indefinitely. He wasn't sure if he was ready for something permanent, but he knew he had no intention of letting things return to the way they had been before last night. Was it only last night? It seemed as if a far greater length of time had passed.

Lucas entered the room with a wet washcloth and moved toward Gwen, but Noah held out his hand. As much as he'd enjoyed their time together, he wanted to be alone with her now. A small smirk lifted the corner of Lucas' mouth and he tossed the damp fabric to Noah before exiting.

Urging her to her back, he gently swiped the warm cloth over her pussy.

Her cheeks flushed with color. "You don't have to—I can do that."

He dropped a tender kiss on her lips. "I want to."

Her blush deepened and she closed her eyes.

After he finished seeing to her needs, he urged her toward the middle of the bed and dragged the covers over them. She drifted off almost immediately—not that he was surprised. After everything she'd experienced, she had to be exhausted. He knew he was.

Lucas and Quinn hovered near the doorway. "We're going out," Quinn whispered.

"To shift?" he asked.

Both men nodded.

"Not by yourselves—not after last night." They needed to work on their communication techniques. While in shifted form, they didn't have the luxury of spoken language, and grunts and growls only expressed so much—as evidenced by Quinn running out in front of Gwen's car.

"We'll wait for you out front."

Over time and prolonged exposure to the natural bears, they might learn a portion of the language. For now, they'd need to rely on the other forms of communication. Gestures were helpful, but more often than not, they turned into an inept game of charades. Sending thoughts to one another was far more useful. Their bear brains couldn't process their human words, but by projecting images, they could at least engage in a basic communication process. Unfortunately, the practice of sending and receiving images took time to master, and neither Lucas nor Quinn was very far along in the process.

Not wanting to leave the warmth of Gwen's lush body, he lingered a few moments more. He knew he needed to get out there soon. Quinn would wait for him, but Lucas had the patience of an overtired toddler. Sighing, he slipped from the bed. Gwen frowned in her sleep and reached for him. He smoothed her hair from her face and pressed a tender kiss to her forehead. He'd make it up to her later.

* * * *

Gwen wasn't sure what woke her, but stark winter sunlight shown through the curtains in Noah's bedroom and the bed was cold beside her. He'd left her now dry clothes folded in a pile at the foot of the bed. He couldn't have given her a clearer message about overstaying her welcome. An empty bed and folded clothes was guy shorthand for 'don't let the door hit you in the ass on the way out.'

Taking the pile, she scooted into the bathroom across the hall and took a quick shower.

Hot water sluiced over her body and she got a good look at the bruises marring her skin. There were a few she was sure were from the accident. Then there were those other marks—fingertip shaped bruises on her hips and whisker burn over her breasts and on the insides of her thighs. She leaned her head against the shower wall in mortification as the memories came rushing back.

Had she actually done that—had sex with three men? Even if the marks on her body hadn't been proof enough, her pleasantly aching muscles certainly were. Quickly, she soaped her body, wanting to dress and hide the evidence of what she'd done. She didn't regret it—not really. It had been an amazing experience, but it was probably the end of any chance she'd had with Noah.

Even if he had been interested in her, he couldn't be now. Not after she'd fucked two other men right in front of him. Granted, they'd all been in it together, but who wanted to date someone who would do everybody in the room? Shame slithered through her. No wonder he hadn't been there when she'd woken up. Any interest he might have had in her had likely lessened with every cock she'd taken.

Rinsing and drying, she dressed as fast as she could. Her underwear were missing, but she didn't waste time looking for them. She needed to get out of here and put as much distance as possible between her and her biggest mistake ever. Though she was embarrassed to face them, she couldn't call for a tow truck from the bathroom. Brushing and braiding her hair, she made her way to the kitchen. The room was empty. She was pretty sure the entire cabin was empty. The only sounds she heard anywhere in the house were the crackling of the fire in the living room and the hum of the refrigerator.

Looking around for a phone book, she caught sight of the kitchen table. Embarrassment flooded through her at the memory of what had taken place on it a few hours earlier. She really needed to get out of here before the guys came back. She wasn't sure she could manage to be in the same room with them—and the table. Besides, the fact that they'd all taken off was a clear indication that it was time to move on.

Gwen spotted an ancient rotary dial phone mounted to the wall next to the pine wood cabinet. She pulled open the drawer beneath the phone to find a familiar yellow and white phonebook. Flipping through it, she dialed the number for the garage that was down the road from the motel where she was staying.

After giving the driver the approximate location of her Jeep, she scratched a quick note to

Noah and stuck it on the fridge with a magnet. Putting on her winter gear and gathering her belongings, she set out through the lightly falling snow. Bear tracks were visible in the snow surrounding the house. Luckily, they headed off in the opposite direction that she needed to go.

A pang of regret stabbed at her as she turned to look at the cozy cabin. As much as she was beginning to care for Noah, she couldn't stay. It was too complicated. The sex had been fantastic—both one on one and with the other guys. Even now, her body tightened eagerly at the memory of their hands and mouths on her, their cocks inside her. She'd enjoyed it, but it was Noah she truly wanted. She couldn't see that happening now. Her heart sank a little further. No matter what, she'd made the choice to have that experience, and now she'd need to live with the consequences of that choice.

She nearly groaned when she thought of returning to work Monday. Awkward wouldn't begin to cover their working relationship. Perhaps she'd be best off requesting that transfer after all. It would be easier than working day to day with Noah, wondering what a relationship with him would have been like. She already knew what falling in love with him would be like. She'd been well on her way there for a while now.

* * * *

As soon as Noah had entered the house, he'd known she was gone. A damp towel had been hung on the rack in the bathroom and his bed had been neatly made. The lingering scent of her skin had faded and a single sheet of paper hung on the fridge. He glanced at the note that lay crumpled on the seat of his truck.

See you Monday. Gwen

That was it? After everything they'd shared, he couldn't believe she'd take off without saying goodbye. He thought they'd made a connection. He certainly felt one, anyway. Foolishly, he thought she had, too.

He'd called her cell and left numerous messages on her voice mail. She hadn't called back. He supposed it could be that her battery was dead, or she just had a bad signal, but more likely, she was avoiding him.

Now he drove the slick curves of highway forty-one in the snowy darkness. The roads weren't as bad as they had been the night before, but they weren't good. He assumed Gwen had hitched a ride with whatever driver she'd hired to pull her vehicle from the ditch.

He knew that she was staying in a little mom and pop place somewhere along Lake

Superior, about twenty miles from the field office, but that was all he had to go on. He'd considered driving back to the office, but the secretary kept the personnel files on her computer. Her passworded computer.

With no other options, he stopped by the office of every motel he could find. Either she wasn't staying at any of them, or the managers were trying to protect her from unwanted company. It made sense, he grudgingly admitted to himself. She was a woman staying alone—he could be an ax murderer for all these people knew.

Having checked every motel between his place and the next three towns, he admitted defeat and headed home. He looked at his phone. She hadn't called.

* * * *

The rest of the weekend had been hellishly long. He'd left another message, but as he'd expected, she hadn't returned his call. When he arrived at work that morning, she was already there. A sliver of light in her office shown under her closed door. Not wasting any time, he bypassed his own office and knocked on the door. All sounds within the room ceased.

"C'mon, Goldilocks, I know you're in there. Let me in"

A shadow interrupted the light shining under the door and he heard a distinct thud.

"Not by the hair on my chinny chin chin," she said softly.

"Wrong story." He tossed her panties in his hand. "I've got some stuff that belongs to you." *Like my heart.*

"Just leave whatever it is outside the door. I'll get it later."

"For a woman who's brave enough to face down a full sized black bear to save a stranger, you're a chickenshit. Besides, I don't think you're going to want me to leave this in the hallway."

"Fuck you," she muttered.

"Maybe later. I need to talk to you."

After what seemed like an endless pause, she asked, "Are you alone?"

Anger flared low in his gut. "Yes. Is that a problem?" Lucas and Quinn were both worried about her—that they'd pushed her too far, but he wasn't about to mention that right now.

The thinking of the lock tumbling over tightened the knot of frustration in his gut. Finally, the door opened, and she stood there staring at him, the glow from the overhead light haloing her head.

"No." She scowled. "It's not a problem." Her expression faltered, but she met his gaze.

Dark circles marred the pale skin beneath her eyes. She looked like she hadn't slept in days. She glanced furtively down the hallway before looking back to him. "Look, the other night was an aberration. Just because I did what I did—and enjoyed it—doesn't mean that you can drop in any old time and expect that I'm going to bend over backwards for you."

His lips twitched and he tried not to chuckle. "I prefer it when you bend over forward."

Her eyes narrowed and she crossed her arms over her chest.

The laugh escaped. "That's not why I'm here, Gwen."

"Then why?"

"Can I come in?"

She stepped aside, and he placed her underwear in her hand.

With seeming reluctance, she shut the door behind him. "Thanks. I was wondering where these had gone."

"Actually, the panties are just a convenient excuse." He tossed her the wadded up note. "This is the real reason I'm here."

She caught it and smoothed out the paper, frowning. "What about it?"

"Why did you leave so suddenly—without even saying goodbye?"

Her eyes darted to the note in her hand, uncertainty in her gaze. "I thought this was goodbye. Besides, it was pretty clear you guys were ready for me to move on."

"What are you talking about?"

Color brightened her cheeks. "Usually a guy doesn't let you know he wants you to stay by leaving you in an empty bed with your clothes folded and ready to go."

He tugged on her braid, urging her closer. "Did it ever occur to you that I didn't want you to have to wander around the house naked to search for your clothes?"

"Not so much."

"And you didn't return my calls, because...?"

She sighed and looked away. "Because I was afraid it would be awkward."

"More awkward than us having to work together today when all I can think about is how good you taste and how beautiful you are when you come?"

She swallowed. "I was hoping we could do the adult thing and carry on like nothing happened."

He snorted. "Not likely."

“And I was afraid that if I talked to you, you’d do something like apologize for what happened.”

“Apologize for being with the most fascinating woman I’ve ever met? I don’t think so.”

She rolled her eyes and started to turn away, but he held tight to her braid and cupped her cheek with his free hand.

“About the other night,” he began.

“It was great. Amazing, even.” Her voice wavered slightly, but she still raised her clear green eyes to meet his gaze.

“Do you regret it?” Waiting for her answer was like teetering on the edge of a cliff.

“No,” she finally said, her voice quiet. “But I don’t want you to think that fucking you and your cousins left, right and sideways is going happen all the time.”

He brushed his thumb across her lower lip. “I don’t care if you never fuck them again.”

Her eyes widened.

“I’m not going to lie,” he continued. “It was one of the hottest things I’ve ever seen, but I’m much more interested in you fucking me.”

Her breath caught and her nipples peaked against the knit shirt she wore.

Her lips pursed in annoyance, and it was all he could do not to kiss her. “Just because we had fantastic sex doesn’t mean I’m your designated fuck buddy.”

The urge overwhelmed him and he lowered his mouth to hers, capturing her lips. She stiffened for a moment, then parted beneath him, inviting him in. Slipping his arms around her body, he drew her to him, reveling in her sweet warmth. Breathless, she melted against him, lifting her arms to lock around his neck. Eventually, he broke the kiss.

“I don’t want a fuck buddy.” He stared into her eyes. “I want you.”

Her mouth opened and closed again just as suddenly. The surprise in her eyes was unmistakable.

“Can we start again? You? Me? Maybe a dinner date?” She glanced at the clock on the wall. He shrugged. “Or breakfast?”

“Or...” She looked meaningfully toward the couch in the corner of her office. “We could order in.”

Laughing, he tightened his arms around her. “I like the way you think, Goldilocks.”

She dragged her fingers through his hair at the nape of his neck, a smile curving her soft

pink lips. “It’s been a while since I’ve read it, but I don’t think the story is supposed to end this way.”

“What way?”

“With Goldilocks well on her way to falling in love with one of the three bears.”

His heart lightened at her admission.

She unzipped his coat and shoved it off his body onto the floor before trailing kisses along the side of his neck. “But,” she continued. “She’s pretty clever about figuring out which one is just right.”

He slid a hand under her shirt and slipped his hand inside her bra to cup her breast. Her eyes closed and she arched against him, her lips parted.

“And the bear,” he said, rolling her nipple, “is smart enough to recognize the beginning of happily ever after when he sees it.”

About the Author

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

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Alister Baban overheard a business discussion that netted him and his Uncle Cassimer a lot of money. When the Simsim Group stock crashes and declares bankruptcy within weeks, the owners immediately suspect the Babans of playing dirty.

Oz Adamo, one of four brothers who owned Simsim Group, agrees to abduct Alister to obtain information and win back the lost pensions of former employees.

Tied to a bed and lusting after his captor, Alister fights the sexual attraction he has for Oz. They want information and he isn't about to give it. But Oz loves a good challenge, and shrewd, serious, sexy Alister is naked and his—at least for now.

***Heart of Ice* by Brynn Paulin**

Kai is perfectly unhappy with his life. Cast into a role as shop boy and forced into marriage to save his family, he sees nothing good in his future. In fact, his betrothed, Gerda, seems to hate everything he enjoys. Especially winter and his attraction to dominating his partners. His prospects look grim...until the Snow Queen arrives.

Wyn has spent her life alone, living vicariously through those who love winter. When she learns of Kai's predicament, she knows she must save him. If only she could save herself. She craves his dominance, but there's one tiny thing standing in their way. No human can touch her without experiencing chilly agony. And that might bring any relationship to an icy death.

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***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 and 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.

Handcuffs and Lace

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Cuffed and Dangerous by Bronwyn Green

When a bounty claim becomes a fight of five against one, Jude Caulfield and Gideon Wells step in to help hunter, Wrenn Saunders, before she's mortally injured. Wrenn soon learns that three is a good number whether in a fight or in the bedroom. Especially in the bedroom—and that's just where Jude and Gideon want to keep her.

What the Cuff? By Celia Kyle

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

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

Primed Suspect by Ann Cory

Cassidy Valance is one part woman, one part Kitsune—a rare shape-shifting fox. She finds solace inside an estate, away from the hunters who have invaded her home in the forest. As a woman, she finds the nights unsatisfying with her insatiable appetite for sex. Tired of prowling for men to slake her relentless desires, Cassidy yearns for one man who can tame her wild ways, and love her despite what she is.

Officer Ian Valenti is assigned to investigate an abandoned estate after reports of unusual activity are called into the station. Since the death of his wife, he has fully devoted himself to his job. When he goes to inspect the house, he finds the suspect inside, naked and alluring.

Ian's instincts and years serving on the force tell him to cuff Cassidy and haul her in for breaking and entering. But she would rather he cuff her and treat her like the submissive she longs to be. With her restrained and primed, Ian brings Cassidy's fantasies of a Master to life. And willingly

lets down the guard around his heart.

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

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

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

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

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

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

***Handcuffs and Lies* by Bronwyn Green**

Sometimes promises to friends are the hardest to keep. Undercover police officer, Michael Tanner, promised his dying partner that he’d take care of the man’s little sister. Trouble is, after her brother’s death, Doctor Tori Spinelli wants nothing to do with Michael—or any other cop for that matter.

Tori has always fought against overprotective men and deception. Forced into protective custody with Michael, she’s now faced with both in the same package. Despite their differences, Tori falls in love with him, but how can she trust a man who lies for a living?

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