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CAN'T SEE THE FOREST FOR THE TEASE

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To Von for being there. To Rolanda for being Rolanda.
To Novellette just because. To Analosa for putting up
with The Jeanie.
-Jeanie and Jayha

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This work of erotica contains adult language and sexually explicit scenes, which are smoking hot. This book is intended only for adults, as it is defined by the laws of the country in which the purchase is made. Keep this book out of the hands of under-aged readers.

Chapter One

Introductions

The five men in the bar looked on in interest at the spectacle that was taking place outside. While the bar was usually witness to a lot of strange things, the spectacle unfolding before them was a new kind of strange. Well, at least to these parts. It wasn't the sight of the woman, or what she drove that was strange. It was the sight of *this* particular woman coming to *this* particular bar. The Mad Clatter wasn't just any bar...it was a straight-up, bona fide, died-in-the-wool biker bar that blasted rock and roll, country and western, and football. And the bikers didn't just ride any bikes...but monster bikes. The bikers who rode them weren't just any bikers...but rough, tough, just-came-from-a-rumble-and-always-ready-to-rumble bikers. It wasn't Patrick Swayze's *Road House* (most of the time), but there were days when the locals tried their best to make it Road Palace. Thankfully, those days were few and far between because Diarmad "Mad" Bruce was a badazz, as were two of his best customers—Cannon Cascade and Gage Holden. The presence of them was usually enough to squash most shit before it even started. Cannon and Gage's motto was: whip someone's ass at the beginning of the night

just to let the locals know ass-whippings were still free. They even had cards that offered free ass-whippings for you or a friend.

Nice guys if you didn't fuck with them, fuck with anything that belonged to them, fuck with anyone they loved, look like you were going to fuck with them, were rumored that you rolled with someone who was going to fuck with them. Actually, most of the people who frequented the bar were good guys. And apart from a handful of females who hung out at the bar, most of the patrons were male...and rough hewn...and white.

So when the battered SUV tore ass into the parking lot and came to an Ace Ventura-like stop, Mad didn't even blink. It was obvious the driver definitely knew how to handle the vehicle. Too bad no one in the bar knew how to handle the driver.

About five and a half feet tall and wearing a tailored business suit, she jumped down from the driver's seat and stomped around to the back of it. Opening the barn-style doors, she slid out of her pumps and tossed them in before climbing in behind them. When she next emerged, she was dressed in jeans, a Gwinnett Braves t-shirt, and shit-kicker boots. Taking a moment to twist her mass of braids into a haphazard ponytail, she slammed the doors shut. Slicking her lips with gloss, the little lady strutted to the entrance with purpose in her stride, determination

in her eyes, and her résumé in her hand. The door clattered behind her grand entrance. Two things were immediately obvious: one, she was not in a good mood, and two, “no” no one should try and stop her...from whatever it was she was trying to do.

“It looks like it’s going to be an interesting afternoon,” Mad remarked with a chuckle.

“It got interesting the moment she swerved into the parking lot, nearly taking a whole line of bikes out.” Gage smiled.

Cannon didn’t say anything. He simply grunted.

Chapter Two

History

Evergreen Archean was so not amused. She was fucking hot, hungry, and tired. And more than that she was tired of hearing the word “no.” In the past two weeks she’d heard “no” every which way it could be said. She’d had it served to her with polite indifference. She’d had it dropped on her like a punch from the heavyweight boxing champ. She’d had it delivered with an arched eyebrow and a side of “as if.” She’d had it sing-songed to her by a perky brunette who had an eighties soundtrack looping in her head or bobble-head doll syndrome. No. No. No. She was sick and tired of hearing that one word.

All she was doing was looking for a job. She wouldn’t need a fucking job if Timber would just stop riding her ass for two fucking seconds. Cousins, they’d gone off to the big city of Atlanta after graduating from high school. Timber went to Atlanta because he got a partial scholarship to the prestigious Morehouse. She went to Atlanta because she had no intention of working on the family tree farm.

It wasn’t that she didn’t like trees; it was that until someone spent their fucking youth up to their ass in trees, they could shut the hell up and kiss her entire

ass. Her family had never met a tree they didn't like. An operation that spanned multiple counties and states, Archean Orchards took up a large portion of Northeast Georgia. Though the headquarters was located in the northeast corner of Georgia, they had orchards in mid-Georgia, the southwest corner of North Carolina, the southeast corner of Tennessee, and the northwest area of South Carolina. Their North Carolina property specialized in Christmas trees; their Tennessee property specialized in apples; their South Carolina orchard specialized in peaches. Their North Georgia orchards grew apples, and their mid-Georgia properties grew peaches, pears, and pecans. Each farm averaged thirteen hundred acres (a smidge over two miles), and while that might not seem like a lot of land, until you spent time harvesting, seeding, plowing, and pruning thirteen hundred fucking acres of trees, shut it.

Though she called Georgia home, she'd pulled time on every one of the damn farms—and she meant “pulled time.” Everyone in the family was expected to put in time at the job that put food on their tables, wood in their fireplaces, gas in their trucks, and Archean progeny in college. She'd had a job at Archean Farms since she was old enough to close her hand around an object and pick it up. Don't think that because she had the last name “Archean” she got a

pass and thereby some cutesy desk job. A—there were no cutesy desk jobs at Archean Farms. B—her momma, grandmomma, and aunts' primary goal in life was to make sure they didn't raise any shithead kids. If she and her cousins wanted something, they got fucking jobs and earned money to get it. While she'd spent a few hours of every day working at the farms, she'd also spent summers hitting someone's time clock to earn money.

She wasn't mad about having to work (and if she had been, that'd be a category in *Jeopardy* titled "Ask My Momma if She Gives a Damn"). Hard work wasn't nothing new to her. Even the sneering looks she got from potential employers weren't new to her. What was new to her was coming up empty...so many times. "The economy," all and sundry had said.

She wouldn't be going through this bullshit if not for Timber. If not for him, she'd still be doing what she loved: construction. When they'd come to Atlanta, they'd gotten an apartment together and jobs in construction. In the fall Timber enrolled at Morehouse; she'd kept doing construction...much to his great displeasure. It wasn't that she didn't want to go to college; it was simply that she didn't want to go to college *yet*. Why pay all that money to study something she didn't give a shit about? She'd spent K-

12 studying shit she didn't care about, but at least it'd been free.

Being the overachiever he was, Timber graduated from Morehouse with a double major. Being the adventurist that she was, she'd enrolled in martial arts and gotten her brown belt. Yeah, yeah, yeah, it was brown and not black, but a brown belt bestowed by Calm Slayer was like a fifth degree black belt from anybody else.

Sometime during his junior year, Timber got a bee in his bonnet about her going to college. He wasn't the boss of her, which she let him know, so he couldn't make her do shit. His response to that was a promise to drop out of college if she didn't enroll. Bastard. Timber didn't make threats, he made promises, and if he said he'd do something, it was as good as done. Just like he knew she would, she enrolled in school...bartending school. Timber was so not amused, but being that she'd paid the money, he didn't say anything. But she knew his silence wouldn't last forever. As soon as she'd graduated and gotten some experience under her belt, he was on her ass again all but bombarding her with college applications. Finally, she gave in to his demands.

Three years later, she was strutting across the stage getting her Associate of Arts in Building Construction from Azod Community College. It'd

taken her three years of going to school year round (including the hot-ass summers) to graduate because she was still working her construction job. She was so proud to get her degree, but Timber was prouder even though he'd just gotten his MBA from the prestigious Emory University. As a reward for her graduating he'd taken her to Cedar Point Amusement Park in Ohio. As a reward to him for graduating, she'd let him. Hey, she didn't let just any man spend money on her.

The next year she'd had a grand old time. Without the demands of a college curriculum intruding upon her time, she'd been able to dedicate more time to her karate. Finally, after four and a half years, she'd earned that elusive black belt. Yay her! She'd celebrated her accomplishment by putting Timber on his ass. Yessssssssssss! She'd been trying to kick his ass since they were running around in diapers. Of course, she'd had to sneak attack him, but she didn't care. Timber was flat on his back, so she took full advantage of the opportunity. Getting him in a headlock, she made demands.

"I want cotton candy, caramel apples, and a tenderloin biscuit."

Two seconds later, Timber had escaped her headlock and had her in the fucking figure four. *Da hell?* Maybe if she hadn't been so busy gloating she wouldn't have forgotten the fact that though Timber

played baseball, he'd wrestled all throughout high school and had the state championships to prove it.

"You know what *I* want?" he asked.

And before she got a chance to respond, the bastard answered. "I want you to get your bachelor's degree."

"You're like a blushing bride, except instead of wanting everyone to be in love you want everyone to have a big time degree."

"That's the first time someone has compared my MBA to a wedding gown, but I still want you to get your bachelor's degree."

"Don't wanna," she said.

And being the bastard he was, he ignored her. "Georgia Tech has a great program in Building Construction."

"Yeah, well maybe one day I'll apply," she said as she tried unsuccessfully to extract herself from his wrestling hold. Despite her struggles, he wasn't even breathing hard. He was talking all casual like she wasn't two seconds away from beating his ass.

"Good thing one day was a few months ago," he said. "And it's even better that I know you so well I didn't need your help at all when I applied to the program for you. What's even better than that is that you can't weasel out of it."

“Can too. I simply won’t go. You can’t make me. Ha ha!” she said as she finally extracted herself from his hold and jumped on him. “Concede defeat, mortal,” she demanded.

Rolling her over into some new kind of fucked-up wrestling hold, he simply laughed. “Never. You don’t have to go, but being that I’ve already paid your tuition and all, I expect you to be there bright and early. You could weasel out of it, and I understand you might be scared. Georgia Tech is a top school and all, and if you feel you can’t hang, I won’t push you...” He trailed off.

That bastard knew good and damn well she wasn’t scared of shit. He also knew she knew what he was doing. He was baiting her...and they both knew that regardless of what she wanted, when the semester started she was going to have her ass in a seat in class on the campus of Georgia Tech. Being stubborn, she still tried one last time to get out of it.

“I can’t go to school full time and work,” she said.

“Luckily, I have not just one job but two,” he said.

Having interned with a brother-sister partnership and gotten on real well with them, Timber had been offered a permanent job with the St. Augustines during his second year in the MBA

program. The job had such a flexible schedule, he was able to pursue his baseball career (he played with the Gwinnett Braves) *and* make good use of his MBA.

"You're lucky I like you," she huffed. "And you'd better be glad I want Thesis as my official big sister, or I'd do something bad to you."

Kissing her forehead, he rose to his feet and pulled her up. "I am, and I'll be sure to pick up some ridiculously sweet confection for Thesis for saving my life and all. And being that you're being all benevolent and all, I'm going to let you take me to the amusement park and buy me some cotton candy."

They went to Six Flags and spent all morning riding every one of their coasters rated "Max." Knowing that Georgia Tech was going to demand more of her time, she worked out her week's notice, and then for the first time since she could remember, she didn't have to punch anybody's time clock. It was a good thing she was good at saving money so she had a nice little nest egg. She paid her share of the bills, but Timber deposited the rent portion right back into her account every month. A pseudo-chauvinist, he didn't feel right about letting a woman pay for his lodging.

It'd taken her a full year to get her "classroom" legs, as it'd been a hot minute since she'd been a full-time student. Still, she sucked it up, buckled down

and tackled the heavy course load head-on. Finding that the classes were much easier for her being that she had so much real-life experience, she'd even overloaded on classes the second semester. By the time summer got around she was more than ready for a break, but Timber suggested she go full time. Timber's "suggestions" weren't really suggestions at all; they were politely phrased demands. She went and grumbled the whole damn time, but in the end she was glad she did, because it meant she'd only have one class in her final semester—and that was a bullshit elective that didn't even require a textbook.

Having fully gotten into the groove, she was itching to work somewhere at least part time. Though Timber made more than enough money to keep them clothed, fed and living inside (and she still had her nest egg), she'd never sat on her ass and let someone else take care of her. So she'd started applying for jobs...and being told "no." The problem wasn't her qualifications; the problem was the jobs she was applying for. Knowing most bartenders wanted jobs at places where the tips were big, she turned her attentions to mid-level restaurants and smaller bars. That was when she'd started collecting no's.

By now, she had about twenty no's in her pocket, but that didn't stop her. Every day after class, she hit the pavement looking. So far this week, she'd been

laughed out of or straight-out ignored out of seven establishments. It was damn frustrating, but she had determination and humility and good hearing. That was how she'd overheard about the sudden vacancy at the Mad Clatter. Having driven by it, she'd noted it looked like any other biker bar. From the public records she'd poured over, she knew it was well run. And it was the place where she was going to work. Busting through the door, she walked straight up to the bar and asked to see the owner.

"May I see the proprietor?"

A voice that sounded like it belonged in thirteenth-century Scotland spoke from behind her. "I believe I'm the man you're looking for, lass."

Turning, she watched the man approach. It wasn't how big he was that caused her to blink a couple of times: it was what he wore. The very top and very bottom of his outfit was almost identical to hers: t-shirt and motorcycle boots. It was what he wore in between the t-shirt and boots that caused her to do a double-take: a kilt.

It wasn't every day that one spied a man rocking a kilt in the southern U.S. She didn't know a damn thing about this man, but she knew one thing: a man who'd rock a kilt in a biker bar was either a man who could withstand a lot of remarks or a man who could

dish out a lot of hell. From his swagger, she was betting it was a whole lot more of the second one.

He rocked his kilt like Angela Davis rocked her fro back in the day: with a whole lot of pride. She'd seen men in kilts before, but the man walking towards her didn't simply wear the kilt, he wore the shit out of it. He might be an older man, but there was no doubt that wherever he hailed from he'd left a trail of broken hearts in his wake. Spying the thick gold band on his finger, she could only think that the woman who'd put it there had to be the fucking shit. She had to be because the man before her certainly was.

Standing way over six and a half feet, he was a big mountain of a man with a thick neck, meaty hands and arrogance wafting off him in great waves. Normally a man like that would give her pause, but she had a clear view of his eyes, and within the blue-green depths was laughter. Something told her that this man enjoyed a good joke as much as he enjoyed a tall, cold one. Something also told her that the safest place in this establishment was in front of him or behind him. Yep, she was definitely going to work here.

"Hi. I see that you're in need of a bartender," she said as she shoved her résumé in his big paw.

"Well, miss, I appreciate you coming and all, but you see the reason I'm in need of a new bartender is

because the last bartender—" he began right before a ruckus on the side started.

Maybe if she'd been raised different, by women who were a whole lot less kickass, she would've hid behind his bulk, but she was who she was. Thus, when a burly man came flying in their direction, she simply grabbed a beer pitcher, smashed it into his face and kicked him in the nuts before shoving him in the direction of some guys who looked like they knew what they were about.

"Yeah, so I'm ready to start today," she said as she made her way behind the bar.

She knew the proprietor was in the process of telling her this was too dangerous a place for a woman like her, but she wasn't trying to hear that. Grabbing a towel and drying the remnants of beer off of her person, she washed her hands and poured a tall one for the proprietor. Handing it to him, she paused and poured a tall Coke for herself.

"I was saying that the last bartender came to a bad end," he said as he took a pull of beer.

Raising her brow, she looked at him and replied. "Well, obviously the silly man brought that on himself, and the fool's loss is my gain."

"You have no misgivings about working here, lass?"

“Not at all—unlike your idiot ex-bartender, I know not to make an enemy out of a Scotsman. Besides, with you and the two big dudes over there giving those ruffians an unexpected encounter with unconsciousness looking out for me, I’m feeling pretty good about my safety.”

“As you should, darlin’. By the way, I’m Diarmad Bruce.”

“I’m Evergreen Archean.”

“Evergreen, like the trees?” he asked.

“Yes sir, but my friends call me ‘Ever.’”

“That’s a damn fine name if you ask me. And by the way, my friends call me ‘Mad.’”

“That’s a great nickname. What do your enemies call you?”

“Ah, lass, they’re too busy calling God to bother with calling me. What do your enemies call you?”

“Well, Mr. Mad, it’s kind of hard to talk around a mouthful of fist, so you know, I really have no idea what they call me.”

“I wasn’t looking for you, Evergreen, but it appears you were fated to walk into my bar. Welcome to the Mad Clatter,” he said as he held out his glass to her.

Thanks for having me,” she said as she clinked her glass against his.

“And if I ever see you jumping into another scuffle, I’m going to give you a good spanking.”

“Ah, you’re so cute, Mr. Mad. First, I know you wouldn’t harm a hair on my head, mad at me or not. I like you, Mr. Mad, and because I don’t want you getting in trouble with Mrs. Mad, I’m going to let you in on a little secret. A good-looking, virile, daring man threatening to give a woman a spanking isn’t a threat; it’s a turn-on.”

“What makes you think that’d get me in trouble with the missus?”

“Because if you were *my* stuff, I’d march in here and mack you down in the center of the floor just to let bitches know. And then I’d smack your ass, pull your hair back and ravage your mouth just to remind you.”

If she hadn’t been so busy giving her little impassioned speech, she might’ve noticed that the bar had grown quiet. But she had been busy giving her little speech, and she didn’t notice they had the ear of every patron in the bar until a cat whistle split the air, followed by the sound of applause.

Turning, she looked in the direction of the cacophony and was surprised at the woman making her way towards them. “Beautiful” wasn’t an adequate word to describe her. Mesmerizing. The woman was simply mesmerizing...and so were the boots she was rocking. The body rocking those boots wasn’t half bad

either. Her dark-wash jeans molded to her body, showing off ample ass and hips. The black v-neck shirt displayed matching cleavage. And then there was her hair. If Evergreen didn't have a head full of thick hair herself, she would've been all kinds of envious of the thick, jet black hair that fell to the woman's waist.

Judging from the whistling, catcalls and clapping the mesmerizing woman was emitting, apparently she was a one-woman Amen corner. Walking—no, scratch that—strutting up to the bar, she set her glass down and put on a show. By show, Evergreen didn't mean the woman jumped up on the bar and went all Coyote Ugly. She meant that the woman dragged Mr. Mad to the nearest table, threw him down, straddled him and laid a kiss on him that had her wanting to fan herself even though the air conditioner was set on "arctic."

Damn, that woman knew what she was about, but unless that ring on her finger was placed there by Mr. Mad, she was about to get a whole lot of Doc Martens up her ass, courtesy of Evergreen...and Timber, who'd bought them for her. Rounding the bar, she marched straight up to the couple and cleared her throat...loudly.

"Excuse me, ma'am, you're hot and all, but unless Mr. Mad belongs to you, I'm going to have to insist that you get off of him."

She didn't know how either the woman or Mr. Mad would react to her decree, but being that the rules that governed the rest of the universe apparently didn't apply inside the Mad Clatter, both of them reacted in a wholly unexpected way. She laughed; he growled. Reluctantly pulling away from Mr. Mad, she reached down and pulled him to his feet...and then smacked his ass.

"Don't worry, Mad belongs to me," she said before turning back to him. "Don't you?"

"Damn right, woman," Mr. Mad growled before swooping down and retaking her lips.

Pulling back, Mrs. Mad looked at her and held out her fist. "I'm Columba Bruce. If Mad ever gets out of line, you let me know and I'll handle him."

"I'm Evergreen Archean, and I definitely will," she said, returning the fist knock.

"Good. And while Mad might not spank you for jumping into a fight, I won't hesitate. Understand me, Evergreen?"

Being that Ms. Columba used that same tone her momma did when she meant business, Evergreen found herself nodding her agreement. "Yes ma'am."

"Good," she said before strutting off towards the back. Ms. Columba got about ten feet before turning around and addressing Mr. Mad. "Get a move on, Scotsman. We have a lunch meeting to get to."

Chapter Three

Making Friends

Evergreen couldn't help but smile as she prepped the bar. She enjoyed the few minutes before the bar opened to the general public. With just a smattering of regulars and the ever present Gage and Cannon, it was almost library like. Though she wasn't a barhopper or clubgoer, she bet most bars didn't have rules nearly as stringent as the Mad Clatter's. First, Mad didn't allow smoking in the bar. Second, he didn't stay open nearly as long as most bars. The Mad Clatter didn't open until one p.m. (twelve noon for a handful of longstanding regulars), and it shut the doors at eleven p.m. on weekdays (except for on Monday night during football season) and one a.m. on weekends. Judging from the crush of people who frequented the place neither, the no-smoking rule nor condensed hours seemed to bother them...or maybe they did, but they'd learned that Mad Bruce didn't give a shit. She liked that about him.

Enjoying being outdoors a whole lot more than being cooped up inside, Evergreen hadn't particularly cared for bartending, but that was because she'd never worked at the Mad Clatter. The Mad Clatter was one damn crazy place...and she fit right in. She enjoyed

the motley crush of people who frequented the bar. The customers were your typical, rowdy biker guys—meaning they liked to drink, cuss and talk shit.

Having grown up with Perennial as a sister and Ash and Timber as cousins, she could handle all the shit-talking and cussing they could dish out. Having Calm Slayer as a *sensei*, she could even handle the fights that broke off on weekends. She could...if Cannon and Gage would give her a chance to get some action. Between the two of them they had a fucking monopoly on ass-whipping. They didn't even let Mad get any action...then again, Mad got all the action he could handle from Mrs. Mad.

She'd only been there for three days when she realized that Mad and Mrs. Mad had a lunch meeting *every damn day*. She didn't know what Mrs. Mad did to Mr. Mad, but whatever it was, Mr. Mad sure as shit liked it. Everyday Mrs. Mad strolled out of their office (their office that had a shower and a foldout couch) with a smile in her eyes, a song on her lips and a swing in her hips. And ten minutes later, Mr. Mad stumbled out needing an ice water and some more of Mrs. Mad. Sister was bad...and she knew it. Mr. Mad might be the big dog inside the Mad Clatter, but it was Mrs. Mad who ran things. And besides her scalpel (she was a pediatric surgeon), the thing she ran best was one Mad Bruce.

Timber hadn't been thrilled with her working there until he met Mad. Mad had told him he she was going to be safe, and then he'd showed her why. The why ,of course, was Cannon, Gage and himself. Mad walked her into the bar in the afternoon, and Cannon and Gage walked her out each night...*and* followed her home. She'd told them time and time again that she was perfectly capable of getting herself home all by herself, and time and time again they'd ignored her. Despite their predilection for handing out beat downs and patting her on the top of her head and then ignoring the cuss=out she gave them for it, she liked the roughhewn bikers who served as bouncers, bartenders and general help when needed. Of course she didn't tell them that. Nope, she simply greeted them with her customary punch in the stomach and a "there's more where that came from, so watch it." Gage always smiled when she did that; Cannon always looked hopeful, like maybe she had a group of rogues somewhere just ready to start some shit so he could finish it. They were just too cute. Gage was all undercover OCD, and Cannon was all silent like there was an embargo against speech.

Evergreen was topping off the peanuts when the door opened and in walked one of the most elegant men she'd ever laid eyes on. Though he had on a simple white dress shirt and dark, pinstriped dress

pants, she had no doubt that both garments were hand tailored. They fit him too good not to be. He didn't wear jewelry, but the simple watch and cufflinks he wore spoke volumes about him: he was a man with understated but expensive tastes. And from his ride, he didn't belong in *this* bar. *Who the hell drove a ninety-thousand dollar car to a country bar with a gravel parking lot?* And she knew his ride cost that much because the guy Timber worked for was an automobile aficionado.

Though they didn't open for another eight minutes, she decided to play nice...and no, her benevolence didn't have anything to do with how good he looked. And he looked good. The closer he got, the more evident his fine was. Damn.

"Welcome to the Mad Clatter. What may I get you?" she asked.

"Nothing—I'm simply here to see the owner," he said as he walked past the bar in the direction of the offices where Mr. Mad and Mrs. Mad were having their daily "lunch meeting."

Quickly rounding the bar, she intercepted him before he could get any further.

"You can't go back there," she said.

"I'm—" he began.

"I don't care who you are. You're not going back there. If you have business with Mr. Mad, you'll have

to wait until he finishes or...you know what, there is no 'or.' If you want to see Mr. Mad, you're going to wait."

"Look, whoever you are, obviously you don't know who I am—" he began.

Evergreen had grown up her whole life hearing men like him try and talk down to her. Just because her family were farmers, just because she spent her summers knee deep in dirt didn't mean she was nobody. Even if she was, she knew enough to not allow anybody to treat her like one. Her momma had seen to that. Nobody put someone in their place better than Spruce Archean...except maybe her Uncle Cedar.

Squaring her shoulders and sticking out her chest, she got all up in Mr.-Straight-From-Between-the-Pages-of-a-Men's-Fashion-Magazine's face.

"Maybe where you're from it's okay to talk to people like they're trash, but where I'm from it's okay to tell people they're assholes. Just because you drive a prissy little car and have your school clothes on doesn't mean you're better than any of us. You might've just walked through the door, but you've already surpassed your quota of dumb shit you can say, so don't fix your mouth to say nothing else but an apology. Like I said before, Mr. Mad is busy and you ain't going to see him until he gets un-busy, so you got two choices: you can take a seat or you can get the fuck out."

"Perhaps—" he started.

"Hey, I said you had two choices, and neither of them involved talking. I might not be outside linebacker size like you, but I won't hesitate to put you on your ass. Now which choice are you going to take?"

"Choice c," he said as he literally picked her up, set her aside and made to walk off.

Oh, no he didn't. She was a nice person—most of the time—but this motherfucker had gone too far. Before she could stop herself she found herself grabbing the back of his belt. Shoving him back a few feet, she gave him a good kick in the knee and swept his legs out from under him. He was a more workable size on his knees, and as soon as he got there she cold-cocked his ass with a waiting tray. She was going to do more, but being he was on the brink of unconsciousness, she did the sporting thing and dragged his ass out of the path of traffic. He was too big to lift up, so she left his ass on the floor and went back to her station behind the bar. Gage and Cannon would do something with him when they finished unloading the truck.

Keeping one eye on Mr. Fine-But-Now-Unconscious, she finished topping off the peanuts on the tables. She'd just closed the bag when Cannon and Gage entered. As always, she smiled when she saw them.

“Hey, Mr. Congeniality and Mr. Loquacious,” she teased as she poured them both a soda. They didn’t drink during work hours, although they could put the brews away when they were just hanging. She was in the process of handing them some peanuts when an unusual sound drew her attention—Cannon talking.

“Evergreen?”

“Oh my goodness, your vocal cords really do work. Finding Big Foot and the Loch Ness Monster should be a piece of cake now that I’ve discovered you can actually talk,” she teased.

“Why is there an unconscious man on the floor?”

“Oh yeah, I almost forgot about him. Can you drag him into a chair or something?”

“Do you know who this is?” Gage asked.

“Um, no,” she said.

“That would be Mad’s son—his firstborn. Fruit of his loins and all that,” Gage finished.

“Oh,” she said. As realization finally dawned on her, she panicked. “Oh, shit.”

“Exactly,” Gage said as he straightened unconscious dude out a little bit.

“It’s your fault,” she blamed the two of them as she pressed an icepack to his head. “You should’ve unloaded the truck faster so I would’ve known and stuff.”

"How about you shouldn't have hit me?" Mr. Hottie slurred.

"How about you just shut up?" she said.

The jingling of the chime on the door stopped their argument. Looking up, she couldn't help but groan. Two uniformed officers was the last damn thing any of them needed at the moment. Thinking quick on her feet, she laid her body atop his.

"Now you're taking advantage of me?" he whispered in her ear.

"You freaking wish," she whispered back in his. "Be quiet before you get us in trouble."

"I don't really think I have an incentive to do that," he said.

"How about me, Gage and Cannon beating your ass?" she asked as she subtly punched him in the ribs. "Is that incentive enough?"

He emitted a groan at her actions.

"Is everything okay?" one of the cops asked.

"Yep, just fine," she said as she subtly dug her knee into his chest. "We just got a little carried away. He couldn't keep his hands off me."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course, I'm sure he couldn't keep his hands off of me. Are you saying I'm not hot?" she asked all incensed.

“No ma’am, I’m not implying any such thing. It’s just that, well, he seems a tad out of it. And there appears to be a bruise on his cheek.”

She didn’t have a comeback for that, but luckily she didn’t need one because Prissy Boy rolled her over and shoved his tongue down her throat. He kissed her good and proper...and he kept kissing her. Oh shit that motherfucker could kiss. Before she could stop herself, she arched her hips up into his and moaned.

“That’s all my doing, Officer. It’s as she said—I simply got carried away. It’s been so long since I saw her.”

“Okay then.”

“Can I help you Officers?” he asked, not even bothering to get up off of her.

“We’re just here to pick up the donation your father left for the injured officer’s fund.”

“I’ve got that outside. If you just walk out with me, I’ll get that for you,” Mrs. Mad’s voice cut through the room.

Oh shit. This was not good, but at least the cops were gone. Pushing at his chest, she scrambled out from beneath him and got to her feet.

“Why are you two on the floor?” Mr. Mad asked. “And further, why does my son have bruises on his face?”

"I didn't do it," she immediately said. "He was already fucked up before."

"My son walked into the bar all beat up?" Mrs. Mad asked.

"Maybe," she hedged, not liking to lie to Mr. and Mrs. Mad but not exactly wanting to fess up to beating their son.

"He started it."

"Well, from the looks of things, you certainly finished it," Mrs. Mad said as she checked her son over.

"I really like working here," she wailed.

"And we like having you here," Mr. Mad said as he caught her in his arms and hugged her.

"He was being asshole, and I told him he couldn't go back there because you and Mrs. Mad were having your customary lunch meeting, but he didn't listen. And then he was mean to me," she confessed.

"And then she attacked me for no good reason," his deep voice added.

"You shut up. It was a good reason. You tried to act better than me."

"I don't have to act. I *am* better than you," he said.

"Well, that's why you're on the floor and I'm standing over you like the champ, so ha-ha, motherfucker," she gloated.

“Alpine, you stop acting like you didn’t have good rearing. Apologize to Evergreen,” Mrs. Mad said.

“Why do I have to apologize to her when she’s the one who hit me?” he asked as he got to his feet.

“Because your mother said so,” Mr. Mad said. “You know better than to treat females like that. Look how upset Evergreen is.”

Sneaking a peek at Mr. Mad’s spawn, she stuck out her tongue at him before hiding her face back in Mr. Mad’s chest. He was a good sturdy man.

“Fine. I apologize that you got so upset over sucker punching me, Evergreen,” he said.

“Hey, I didn’t sucker punch you. I looked you right in your face before I kicked your butt!” she yelled. “And if you keep messing with me I’m going to kick your butt some more.”

“See, Da. I told you she started it, and she just admitted it.”

“I see you riled her up, Alpine,” his mother said as she handed him an ice pack. “You’ll live; now leave Evergreen alone. I’m not going to tell you again.”

Turning to Mr. Mad, she said, “Get Evergreen a helmet—I’m going to take her for a ride on my bike.”

“You’ve got a bike?” she asked.

“Of course. I am, after all, married to a biker. Now come on,” she said.

Evergreen wanted to go, especially when she got a glimpse of Mrs. Mad's bike. Still, she hesitated. Knowing how her momma was about her kids, she didn't know what Mrs. Mad's intentions were. "Is this like a regular ride or a country ride?"

"What's the difference?" Mrs. Mad asked as she put on her helmet.

"The first is where we both have a good time. The second is where you ride me deep into the country, kick my ass and leave me for dead."

"You've been watching too many movies. If I wanted to kick your ass and leave you for dead, I'd do it right here."

"I appreciate your honesty, but I have to let you know if I came up missing my momma would be down here, and I don't know who'd win between you and my momma, but Vegas should host that if it ever comes to that."

"Really, Evergreen, I'm a mother and a pediatric surgeon. I help children, not hurt them."

"Yeah, but I did hit *your* son...under great duress," she added.

"Yeah, and being his mother for thirty years, I'm betting he deserved to be put on his ass a long time ago. You're simply the only woman who's had the balls to do it."

“And the skill,” she said as she climbed on the back of Mrs. Mad big-ass Harley. “I’ve got a black belt, you know.”

“I didn’t know, but I tell you one person who does know is in the bar getting laughed at right about now. Hold on!” she advised before taking off.

An avid biker like his parents, Alpine was normally a jeans and boots man. Today was different, though. He was officially an employee of the prestigious Bruce Clinic. There were many good medical facilities to work at, but only the Bruce Clinic had his mother on staff.

As much as he admired his father and took after him, he’d always had a dream of working with his mother. He’d had that dream since he was eight and saw his mother in action. Since that moment, he’d dedicated himself to his studies, graduating high school at sixteen, undergrad at eighteen and medical school at twenty. Finished with his residency by twenty-two and his fellowship by twenty-four, he’d enlisted in the Army. He might be his mother’s oldest son, but having the last name Bruce didn’t give him automatic entrance into a job at her clinic. He didn’t have to be told to come correct or not come at all. So

he'd done what he'd needed to, and after six years of repairing his fellow soldiers, he was ready. His mother had made him apply and go through the interview process and everything, but he expected no less. But what he hadn't expected was her "I'll look over your application and get back with you." He'd been on pins and needles until last week, when she'd called and welcomed him aboard.

On the way to turn in the car he'd been borrowing from his friend Oceania, he'd stopped by his da's bar to remind him about their weekend bike ride. Amped about the thought of being back on his bike riding the Georgia mountains, he'd run straight into the little menace his father had hired...probably under some kind of duress from his mother.

He'd tried telling her who he was. He'd tried being polite. He'd tried being charming. All of that had failed, so he'd simply moved her out of the way and gotten cussed out and battered for his efforts. And though he'd been the one on the floor with an aching knee and a bruised jaw, he'd been saturated with threats. He'd been threatened by her, then by the dynamic duo of free ass-whippings, then by his own mother, and finally his da. And now he was being laughed at by the entire fucking bar while his attacker was out being mothered by *his* mother.

“So how long were you here before she beat you up?” Gage asked.

Cannon grimaced/smiled, but he’d known the man long enough to know it was full of mocking. The smile was at his predicament; the grimace was probably due to the fact he didn’t get a chance to smack him around.

“Ah, that’s just the good Bruce genes. Seeing that I was already taken, she settled for second best. Beat him to the floor, knocked some sense into him and had her way with him,” his da laughed.

“She sucker punched me, and while I was unconscious she dragged me across the floor. To save her own hide she made like we were making out, and then she ran crying to you afterwards,” he reiterated for the millionth time.

“Sounds like she beat your ass,” Cadillac chimed in before going over to his old man.

He didn’t have to take this, and seeing that his da was deep in conversation with his road dog, Cadillac, there was no reason for him to stay here and be the brunt of everyone’s jokes. Draining the rest of his soda, he paid for his drink (yes, paid for his drink in his own da’s bar) and made his way to the door.

He was almost out of the place when his da called out to him. “Did you leave Evergreen a tip, son?”

"No, because she didn't serve me," he grumbled.

"Yeah, she did. She served you a face full of knuckle sandwich," Gage tossed out.

"You were raised better than that, boy. Leave that little lass a tip," his da decreed.

Knowing it was pointless to argue, he trekked back to the bar and left her a tip for a drink she didn't serve him. Obviously, she had some kind of alien influence on his parents. Making his way to his borrowed ride, he called Oceania and let her know he was on his way over. Two years older, she'd taken him under her wing during undergrad. They had a grand old time haunting the university's library and Boulder's coffeehouses. They'd continued to stay in touch when she'd gone onto Atlanta for law school and he'd enlisted.

His unofficial big sister, she'd show him some sympathy. And maybe, just maybe she'd get one of her sisters to take out Evergreen. Smiling at the thought, he completely ignored the way his body hardened at the memory of how good little miss Evergreen had felt under him when he'd turned her under him and kissed her.

Chapter Four

Scheming

Back in Atlanta for nine months, Alpine was enjoying another lunch with Oceania.

“Not that I’m complaining about being taken out to lunch, but you know it’s not going to get me to change my mind. I’m still not going to arrange for Evergreen to go missing. Besides, she’s cute.”

“I thought I was your unofficial little brother,” he whined.

“You are,” she said as she dug into her roast chicken.

“Then why won’t you do this one thing for me?”

“Because it wouldn’t be sporting or smart to beat down the woman who has a good chance of becoming my unofficial sister-in-law,” she said.

That was the last thing he’d expected out of Oceania’s mouth. Setting down his fork, he turned to her and hunted for words that didn’t involve degrees of insanity. Finding none, he went with what he had.

“Are you insane?”

“Nope, I’m observant, which is why I’m such a kickass attorney. Admit it. You like Evergreen,” she sing-songed.

“I’d like to push her into—” he started.

“Your bed, and then you’d like to push yourself into her hot little body.”

She just put it all out there like her words didn’t cause his body to react...didn’t cause his mind to fill with images of him doing just that. He wouldn’t even need a bed. There was no end of places he could take her.

His thoughts were interrupted by Oceania’s sultry voice. “You know, you should take her for a ride on your bike. You’re a good rider—imagine her straddling you as you drove. The friction of the bike and all that pent-up desire you have for her would have you at a boiling point before you got her home. Once you got there, you could—”

“Stop,” he said. He meant it to come out as a command, but he had ears, and thus he knew it’d come out as a plea.

“Nope, not until you go ahead and stake your claim on that woman. If you don’t, I have two brothers who’d jump at the chance to take her out.”

“You are so mean,” he said.

“Yeah, I am,” she said and had the nerve to smile while admitting it.

“Well, if you like your brothers, I wouldn’t advise suggesting that they make a move on Evergreen,” he said.

“Then I guess you’d better. Andes and Everest can take care of themselves, so I’m not worried about how they’d fare in a smack down. I am worried, however, that I’m not being entertained nearly enough. So step it up, Alpine. We could use a chick like Evergreen in our family. Besides, her name fits so nicely with ours. Oceania, Pacifica, Everest, Andes, Alpine, and Evergreen. We could be like the Geologic Posse.”

Alpine spent the next week thinking of Oceania’s words. He wasn’t hiding shit from anybody. He wanted the little menace, who of course paid him absolutely no attention if one didn’t count the number of times she flipped him off as she passed him. She was the reason he’d stopped going to the bar. She’d flip him off and he’d get aroused. She’d ignore him and he’d get turned on. She’d talk to other males and he wanted to go all Cannon and Gage on them. She was a spitfire, which was why it took the combined efforts of Cannon, Gage, and his da to keep her out of trouble. Still, he wanted to be the one to keep her out of trouble.

Knowing she was off, he walked into the Mad Clatter and took a seat. Being that it was only 12:02

p.m., only Gage and Cannon occupied the place. Knowing his parents had a “lunch meeting” every day from eleven thirty a.m. until..., he poured himself a soda and waited...and waited...and waited some more. Finally, at ten minutes before one, his father came strutting out.

Spying him, he took a seat next to him on the bar.

“Ah, son, what brings you here? Long time, no see.”

“You summoned me,” he said.

“Ah yes, this is true. I wanted to remind you to present yourself this weekend. Evergreen is graduating from college, and we’re throwing her a party.”

“Someone let her in college? Around regular people?” he asked.

That smart-assed remark earned him a smack on the back of the head.

“That’s why Evergreen isn’t nice to you. You act all surly.”

“And yet she’s nice to the dynamic duo. Gage’s dominant emotion is ‘whipping someone’s ass’ and Cannon’s dominant emotion is...oh, that’s right. He doesn’t have any.”

“She sees the goodness in them,” his da defended.

“You should take Gage and Cannon to an eye doctor because it’s obvious they don’t see the evil in her.”

“You’re being a hater, son.”

“And where did you learn that particular bit of slang?”

“Evergreen. She’s been teaching me how to be down. I’m well on my way to having street cred, and if you were down, you’d know that.”

“Wow. I don’t even have any words for that.”

“I do. Don’t hate the player, hate the game,” his da said. “This Friday. Be here. And don’t be a cheap bastard. Bring her a gift to celebrate her accomplishment.”

“Don’t we normally bring along a priest when someone gains a level in evil?” he asked.

“Keep it up and I’m telling your mother to reconsider taking you on as an employee. I’ve got sway with that woman, you know.” He smirked and walked off.

Evergreen was so amped to finally be graduating. Now Timber could get off of her ass. Damn. Though she hadn’t planned on participating in commencement exercises, her momma apparently had

the skinny on everything and called to “remind” her to RSVP the commencement committee and to inform her of her room number at the Omni. Her momma might make a living by being in the dirt all day, but she was also a five-star hotel whore.

As the week loomed, there was nothing for her to do but stay cute and mess with Gage and Cannon. At least that was her plan until she was accosted by Mrs. Mad.

“Evergreen, glad you’re here. Get your helmet and come on,” she said as she dragged her outside.

“Um, where are we going?”

“Out, so come on, chica.”

Climbing on the back of Mrs. Mad’s cycle, she held on, knowing wherever they were going, they were going to get there fast. Mrs. Mad knew how to handle a bike, so she wasn’t scared at all...well, at least of the bike ride. She’d known Mrs. Mad long enough to recognize that “start some shit” gleam in her eye.

Her theory was proven correct twenty minutes later when they pulled up to a leather shop. She’d barely had a chance to take off her helmet when it was snatched from her and a pile of leather was thrust in her hands.

“Come,” Mrs. Mad demanded as she led her to a dressing room.

Sighing, she followed her, knowing “no” wasn’t a word she was going to say because Mrs. Mad sure as shit wasn’t going to listen to it. At least that was her intention—until she realized what she held in her hand.

“No,” she said, looking at the black leather corset corset that laced up the front.

“Yes,” Mrs. Mad said as she stripped her out of her t-shirt and began lacing her into it.

Maybe Mrs. Mad was a dominatrix in another life, because before she knew it she was having her cleavage plumped and paraded out before the shop owner.

“She looks good, yes?” Mrs. Mad asked.

“Yep, but she needs the rest of the outfit to completely set it off.”

The rest of the outfit consisted of hip-hugger black jeans and black boots with a silver heel and a kickass rhinestone-studded harness.

“Um, I’m not going to be able to breathe in this, much less bartend,” she said.

“Who said you’re going to do anything but look hot, youngin’?” Mrs. Mad said as she snapped a picture with her camera phone.

“A, should I be worried what you’re going to do with my photo, and b, who exactly am I looking hot for?” she asked.

"Ignoring the first question, and as far as the second one goes, who knows? Maybe some hot man will walk in and see you."

"I'm not in the market for a hot man," she said.

"Well, then maybe a hot lady will walk in and see you."

Realizing this conversation was going nowhere in a hurry, she just kept quiet.

"See, you're learning. Put this on my tab. Mad will be over later to collect everything."

Evergreen couldn't hold back the question on her lips. "You have a tab at a leather shop?"

"Of course. How do you think I keep Mad in line?"

"Being that Mr. Mad is one of the few males who is never out of line, I'm going to say you just like leather."

"No wonder Mad likes you so much. You are his personal apologist."

"Am not—I just think he's nice."

"You also think Gage and Cannon are nice," she said.

"Because they are. Under all those layers of meanness and silence is all marshmallow."

"I'm going to take you to lunch because obviously you are suffering from delusions. Get on, little girl," she ordered.

Because she was hungry (and had no ride back), she did.

Spruce Archean looked at the photo of her baby girl and smiled. Columba was right. She looked good in black leather. Holding up the photo of Alpine Archean, she smiled, thinking Mad Bruce was right too. Alpine and Evergreen would make some beautiful babies. Now they just had to make sure he saw Evergreen in all that black leather. Bringing her phone's keyboard up, she fired off a text: *Dibs on holding the grandbaby first.*

She smiled when she saw Mad's responding text. *You'll have to fight Columba first. Wait a minute, that could be kind of hot, especially if both of you are wearing leather.*

She smiled bigger when she saw Columba's response. *You are such a dirty old man. And if I'm going to be doing any fighting, then I'll be the one holding the grandbaby first.*

Chuckling, she entered a reply. *If he don't act right, remember I got plenty of space to hide a body...even a fine body like his.*

If he sees Evergreen and don't act right, that boy don't like girls, Mad texted back.

Now you know, Spruce, that when my son sees your daughter in that outfit, he ain't going to remember how to act. He'll be too busy drooling...just like his daddy's still drooling over me. Of course, once he regains his senses, if he loses his damn mind, I'll help you hide his body.

Her daughter was right. Columba didn't have good sense. Neither did Mad. But damn, if they weren't fun.

It was a good damn thing Evergreen was used to her family. Too bad the rest of the state of Georgia wasn't. There was a reason the Archean clan tended to gather in places way off the beaten path. Though her family behaved well enough to not get thrown out of commencement, she was sure Alexander Memorial Coliseum would never be the same. For that matter, whole parts of Atlanta might never be the same...starting with Obsession. Accustomed to the tailored-suit crowd, the owner didn't even blink an eye when the horde of jean-clad bikers pulled up. You would have thought they were royalty the way the staff treated them. After a savory meal at Obsession (she was definitely going to have to get Timber to take her there on the regular), they made their way back to the

Mad Clatter, where she was carried into the bar...on a litter. Oh yes, she could get used to this.

Though she was offered all manner of congratulations, no one got too close. Why? Because once Timber saw her getup, he spent the rest of the afternoon cock-blocking. And Mad, Cannon, and Gage backed him up.

And then there was Alpine. She couldn't help but look at him. She thought he looked good in his school clothes, but that was before she saw him in his play clothes. Tonight he was rocking all black: black leather cap, black t-shirt, black jeans, black cowboy boots. If he wasn't such an asshole, he could be rocking something else black: her. Who was she kidding? He could set the world record for being an asshole, and she'd still give him a chance to rock her.

Timber's voice interrupted her fantasies. "That boy is looking at you again."

"It's because I'm hot," she said as she laid her head on his shoulder.

"You are not funny," he said as he put his arm around her.

"But I'm hot, right?"

"Of course you are, being you look like a female version of me."

"Yep, but my balls are a lot bigger...and so is my batting average."

“Your balls might be, but you can’t come close to touching my batting average.”

“Look who’s all conceited,” she joked...kinda, because Timber *was* a smidge conceited. It was an Archean male trait.

“Well, I have every right to be. I’m an Archean male, a Morehouse grad, and I have you as a cousin. I’m so proud of you, Evergreen.”

“Thank you, Timber. You’re the best cousin a chick could have.”

“Of course I am.”

“Why didn’t you tell the family you’ve been called up to the majors?”

“Because this day is all about you. You worked hard for this.”

“I did, but thank you, especially being that you paid for it and all.”

“It was my pleasure. After all, you did move to Atlanta with me and keep me company. Of course that’s balanced out by the fact that you put our starting pitcher on the DL for a week.”

“Let it go, dude,” she interrupted before he trotted out her list of little mishaps that left people twitching in pain. “And just to let you know, when you move into your pimped-out digs, now that you’re all big time, I’m coming with.”

“Of course you are. I need to keep an eye on you.”

“Why does everyone think they need to keep an eye on me?” she whined.

“Because we know you.”

“Whatever. While you’re over there gloating, think about all the free time I’m going to have now that I’m through with school. I’m going to use that time to beat the groupies off. I got a big stick and everything.”

“You’re going to need more than one stick to chase off all of the women who want me, Evergreen.”

“Again with the conceit.”
“You call it conceit. I call it the truth.”

“Hey, can we get a dog?”

“We don’t need a dog. You’ve got that dude over there panting after you.”

“More likely, he’s panting after *you*. In all the time I’ve known him, I’ve never seen him with a woman except for that one chick who bosses him around. I like her.”

“Of course you do. You like anyone who bosses men around. And that dude is not panting after me, although if he was I wouldn’t fault him. If I were any other man then me, I’d be gay for a chance to date myself.”

Timber didn't know how a woman so detail-oriented could be so blatantly unaware that a man liked her. Alpine Bruce might not be much of a talker, but he definitely had a thing for her. If he hadn't had Thesis check him out, he might've been concerned by that, but he'd come up clean. From all indications Alpine was a righteous dude. Still, if he wanted his cousin, he was going to have to man up and take her. There were two things Archean women didn't abide: weak men...and weak women.

Alpine wasn't a man who was easily moved to violence, but then he wasn't accustomed to seeing some man paw all over Evergreen. He didn't know his anger was palpable until his da spoke up.

"What seems to be the problem, son?"

"Why is that guy pawing all over Evergreen?"

"Maybe he likes her," Cadillac said helpfully.

"He doesn't appear to be pawing her," he said.

"So if some guy was touching Mom like that—" he began.

"I'd kill him, son. You know I don't tolerate any man touching my woman," his da said in that tone that

always made him and his brother immediately cease their bullshit.

“But I’m supposed to sit here and play nice when he’s touching her?”

“The way I see it, son, you don’t have a right to say who touches her, being she’s not your woman.”

“She might not be my woman, but damn if I’m going to let her be his woman,” he said as he pushed away from the table.

“You could’ve avoided all that if you’d just told Alpine that Timber is her cousin.”

“Yeah, but where’s the fun in that? I’m wanting some grandbabies, Cadillac.”

Timber saw the moment when Alpine got up. Being a male, he recognized that walk. He was coming over here to confront him about Evergreen, who was about two blinks away from sleep even though it wasn’t even five o’clock yet. Cuddling her closer, he pretended not to notice him. He wondered if Alpine would go for subtle or hell-raising. His musings were answered a moment later.

“Get your fucking hands off of her,” Alpine demanded.

He didn’t raise his voice, but he didn’t have to. Everyone in the place had started shushing as soon as they’d seen him get up. By the time he reached the table, the Mad Clatter had gone quiet.

“Make me,” he said in a similarly low timbre.

While they had the attention of everyone else in the bar, Evergreen remained blissfully asleep.

“Gladly,” Alpine said.

Mad’s voice cut across the bar. “If that lassie gets hurt because you two are acting the fool, you’re both going to need medical attention.”

“Lots of it,” his wife threw in.

“Medical attention isn’t necessary when I’ve got a couple thousand acres of land to hide their bodies,” his Aunt Spruce said.

Evergreen chose that moment to wake up. Popping up off of his shoulder, she pushed her braids out of her eyes and exclaimed, “I didn’t do it.”

Chapter Five

The Claiming

After the almost smack down, Alpine found himself alone at a table filled with Archean males. If he hadn't been so damned jealous, he would've considered that Timber was likely related to Evergreen, being that her family was in town for her graduation. But he wasn't able to think clearly where it concerned Evergreen. And where was the woman of the hour? Smashed between his da and Cadillac, snoring her beautiful ass off. He was tempted to wake her, but he wanted her to get her sleep because he had plans for her. Plans that involved him having her every way he could think of. She might think he was prissy, but he was all man...and not just any man but a half Scots, one quarter African-American, one quarter Navajo one. In his book that was one damn impressive combination, and soon she'd know it too.

His thoughts were interrupted by Timber. Rising, he slid into his jacket. While it's still a decent hour, me and the guys are going out for dessert. I don't expect Evergreen will be home tonight, and if that's the case, I do expect her to come home with a ring on her finger."

“A big ring,” her mother corrected as she came to stop before him.

“And matching earrings and bracelet,” his da said.

“And red leather stiletto boots with,” his mother said.

Gage’s voice filtered across the room. “You should get her a Harley to go with her helmet.”

That kicked off a round of “what he should get her.” By the time everyone threw in their suggestions, he was already in for a couple million. There was the villa in the south of France that her cousin Ash suggested, the jet her sister Perennial suggested, the Bugatti Antithesis suggested, and oh yeah, the private island in the Caribbean Oceania had suggested. He’d definitely get her the ring, and the matching earrings and bracelets. He’d get her the boots too. He’d work on the rest, but while he was working on that he’d give her six feet six inches of Alpine Bruce.

Evergreen was gently awakened by Alpine. *Da hell?* she wondered.

“Where is everyone?” she asked, looking around and spotting Cannon, Gage and Alpine.

“They left.”

“What do you mean they just left? What’d you do to them? You probably pissed them off and they left to get away from your prissy behind,” she accused.

“Mom wanted ice cream, so Da closed the bar early.”

“He is so whipped.”

“And proud to be so.”

“Well, he does have Mr. Mad as a woman, so I can understand that,” she said as she looked around for Gage and Cannon.

“Gage, can you or Cannon give me a ride home? And then help me beat Timber’s ass for just up and leaving me once we get there?”

Seeing the hopeful look on Cannon’s face, she smiled even though she knew that look was directed at the possibility of whipping someone’s ass more so than the pleasure of taking her home. Alpine’s voice interrupted her.

“No, they cannot give you a ride home.”

“I know you’re an asshole and all, but surely you don’t expect me to freaking walk home,” she said as she poked him in the chest.

Catching her hand, he leaned down and whispered in her ear, “No, I don’t expect you to walk home.”

“Okay so how am I supposed to get there?”

"I'll be taking you," he said as he placed her helmet in her hands.

Sighing because she knew she really had no other alternative unless she wanted to cause trouble for Cannon and Gage, she got in one more dig. "I'm only going because I want to ride on your bike."

"That might be true, but I also suspect from the hardening of your nipples that as much as you want to ride on my bike, you'd rather ride on my big, hard cock."

Fuck, how rude of that motherfucker to point out the obvious.

Evergreen had never been so wound up in her life. She enjoyed the feel of being on the back of Alpine's bike. She especially enjoyed the feel of his ripped body beneath her hands. Knowing she was safe with him, she rested her head against him and enjoyed the ride...and anticipated the ride she was going to get when she got to his place.

Though they were zipping by at a good clip, she couldn't fail to note how beautiful it was in this part of Georgia. Preferring open spaces, she appreciated the fact Alpine lived in the countryside outside of the Atlanta city limits. The Atlanta skyline was hot, but it

didn't compare to uninterrupted sky, miles of green and a horizon filled with trees. She might bitch about having spent a life farming trees, but she loved living out in the country.

Turning onto a gravel road, she was surprised when Alpine slowed his bike to a stop. Removing his helmet, he growled a command. "Get off."

Something about the way Alpine said those two words got to her. If any other man had driven her out to the middle of nowhere and told her to get off, she'd be beating his ass. But Alpine wasn't any other man. He was one of the few she could trust. She knew because there was no way in anybody's hell her family would've left her alone in his company otherwise. Plus, his parents would beat his ass if he hurt her. Alpine might vacillate between being an asshole and five kinds of bastard, but he wasn't an asshole-bastard with a death wish.

Disembarking, she removed her helmet and waited silently while he too disembarked. Unlocking his left saddlebag, he stored his helmet and leather vest before holding out his hand for hers. Silently, she handed it over and watched as he stored it. Climbing back onto the big Harley, he held out his hand to her.

"Come here."

She didn't hesitate. When she was within arm's length, he snagged her to him. Tangling one of his

beautiful, strong hands in her mass of twists, he took her mouth. Evergreen had been kissed before, but until that moment, she'd never experienced a kiss that left her feeling consumed. Alpine feasted from her lips like her mouth was the best thing he'd ever tasted. In return, she feasted on him like he was everything she'd ever hungered for. Savoring the sweetness of his mouth, she knew that he was.

When the need for air finally forced them apart, she fell against his chest and choked out the only word that came to mind. "Damn."

Though the kiss had emotionally blown her away, she took comfort in the steady thumping of his heart.

Alpine's need-laced voice cut through the still night. "Get on."

From habit she went around to the back, but his hand on her waist stopped her.

"In front," he instructed.

Her eyes lit up. "You're going to let me drive?"

"No," he said.

Evergreen gave Alpine a mean look to show her displeasure; however, his next words caused her to bite her lower lip and sigh.

"The only place I'll allow you to drive is in bed. Straddle me," he instructed as he sat back to give her room.

Damn, she wanted nothing more in that moment than to do just that, but her pants were too tight to allow her to sit that way. "My jeans are too tight for that," she whispered.

"Then take them off," he growled.

"In case you didn't miss it, we're outside," she said.

"On private property that I happen to own. Take them off, Evergreen."

"What are you going to take off if I do?" she challenged.

"The veneer of civilized man that's kept me from throwing you down and plunging into your tight pussy whenever I see you," he threw back.

Well, damn. She couldn't top that comeback, so her only resort was to top him. Holding onto the bike, she unbuttoned her jeans and slowly peeled them from her body. Though it was May, there was a slight chill in the air. Of course anything under seventy was a slight chill in her opinion. She should've felt the coolness. Instead, she felt only the heat from Alpine's eyes as he watched her.

Getting the jeans down her legs was one thing; getting them past her boots was another, but she managed. She was flexible like that. Raising a single brow at Alpine, she folded her jeans and stuck them in one of the saddlebags. Mission accomplished, she

took a step back and struck a pose. She'd never fit in anyone's size four (unless they put a one in front of it), but she was comfortable with her body. From the growl that emanated from Alpine, she could tell he was comfortable with it too. Rocking week-old Senegalese twists, that leather bustier, her fav black, leather jacket, some black lace panties and those fucking boots, she felt so sexy that she smacked her own ass and called out her own name. And then she climbed atop Alpine and whispered his.

Settling herself atop his strong thighs, she gasped when he pulled her tighter against him.

"Are you wet for me?" he asked as he spread her wider and rocked her against his denim-clad cock.

"I'm wet, but maybe it's for me," she threw back. "After all, I do look hot."

"Damn right you do," he said, "but let me correct you. That wetness is all for me," he growled in her ear.

Thinking they were going to have a make-out session on his bike, she slid her hands under his t-shirt.

"No," he said as he captured her hands and placed them on his shoulders.

"What do you mean, 'no'?" she asked.

"I've got other plans. Hold on tight to me, baby. I've had this fantasy about having you straddle me as I drove us home."

“I know you can handle a bike, but are you that good?” she asked.

“Better. The driveway’s only a couple of miles long. I’m going to go nice and slow. I’m not going to do anything. I just want to feel you against me.”

Smiling, she wrapped her arms around him and laid her head on his chest so he could see where he was driving them. She’d had some good seats in her day, including the fifty-yard line at Morehouse home games, the luxury box at a Braves game and center court at a grand slam event, but none of them compared to the seat she had now.

Alpine had taken a couple of women out for a spin on his bike, but after today, he knew he’d never let another woman ride on the back of his bike. That was Evergreen’s seat. He liked the feel of her body wrapped around him. He liked it too good. Tonight had proven to him just how deep he was in with Evergreen. He’d been ready to fight everyone in Atlanta for daring look at her. Later, he was going to have a talk with his mother for outfitting her in something so damn sexy.

His parents knew he was a slave to Evergreen, and yet they baited him. Hell, everyone in the Mad

Clatter baited him. And tonight, he'd been willing to fight them all, including the dynamic duo if either of them had volunteered to take her home. She was his, and he was going to prove that to her and the whole of Georgia tonight.

As they rode, Oceania's words came back to haunt him. All he could think about for the last few miles was Evergreen riding him as he rode his bike. His cock had been hard for the last fifteen miles. Who was he kidding? His cock had been hard since meeting her. He hadn't even thought about another woman, much less touched one ever since he'd kissed Evergreen on the floor of the Mad Clatter.

Evergreen was everything he'd ever wanted. And right now he had her right where he wanted. Tonight he was going to love her so good she'd stay where he wanted her: in his life, wearing his ring, his surname, and that sass that was such an innate part of her.

Evergreen had no idea how fucking hot she was. Oh, she teased about it, but if she knew how hard he reacted to her she'd be almost as conceited as her cousin Timber. She always looked good, but when she'd peeled those tight jeans off, he'd had to breathe deeply in order to prevent himself from coming in his jeans. Damn, she looked edible, and as soon as he got her in the house he was going to eat her.

Alpine had mad skills on a bike. He had to, as he was the son of Mad Bruce. He also had mad skills with his tongue, as she'd discovered the moment they set foot in his house. Driving his bike into the garage, he cut the engine. Instead of getting off, he gripped her ass and ground her hard against his cock.

Wanting more, she arched into him, rubbing her breasts against his chest. He felt good, but she needed more. Working his t-shirt up and pulling the front part over his head to keep it in place, she licked his nipple.

"Shit. Evergreen," he rasped as she licked its twin.

Liking the way his voice quivered, she set about unlacing the corset, needing to feel his skin against hers. Smacking her hands away, Alpine finished the task and took a moment to ogle her freed breasts.

Growling, he roughly palmed them. "So damn perfect, and all mine," he said as he pulled one into his mouth.

Evergreen could only hold onto him as he went about his task. He wasn't gentle...but then she didn't want him to be. Her breasts bared, her come soaking her panties, her sex jammed against his cock, and her

boot-clad legs wrapped around him, she knew she'd never felt more wanton or wanted. Though Alpine was fully dressed, she'd never seen a hotter man in her life. It wasn't simply the fact that he was hot...it was the fact that he was hot and he wanted *her*. And she wanted him back.

When Alpine pulled back, every part of her body protested.

"No," she said as she attempted to wrap herself tighter around him.

"I need you in the house so I can fuck you properly," he rasped as he dismounted.

Picking her up, he unlocked the door and carried her over the threshold. Kicking the door shut, he locked it, set the alarm and made his way through the house. They made it as far as his den. Sitting her down on a sumptuous couch, he stood back and began to strip. His chest already exposed from where she'd pulled the front of his t-shirt over his head, he finished the task of pulling it off before stepping out of his boots and pulling off his socks. His movements sure and efficient, she couldn't help but admire the play of muscle. Seeing him in nothing but jeans and arrogance, she couldn't help but be turned on. He was a beautiful man. When he unbuttoned his jeans and freed his cock, she couldn't help but moan his name. "Alpine."

Free of his shirt and boots, Alpine forced himself to slow down. Freeing his cock, he stroked it, silently apologizing to it for taking so long to stake his claim on his woman. Evergreen's eyes went dark, her breathing became choppy, a moan spilled from her succulent lips. He watched as she squeezed her voluptuous thighs together and cupped those delightfully heavy breasts. He reacted when she breathed his name. No compliment he'd ever received came close to matching Evergreen's need-laced uttering of his name. She said his name like it was the only word she knew...like it was the only word she needed to know.

Finally stepping out of his jeans, he tossed them aside and knelt before her. He'd spent his life in the company of beautiful females, but no woman had ever gotten to him like Evergreen. No woman had ever caused his body and mind to react so strongly, so desperately. No woman had ever called to him so intensely. Wearing nothing but a short leather jacket, some tiny black panties, some "about to set something off" boots, and a "come get me" look, Evergreen Archean was hands down the most beautiful,

sensuous, desirable woman he'd ever been in the presence of. And she was his.

Kneeling before her, he pulled her forward, spread her legs and nosed her sex through those panties before ripping them off and drinking her nectar. Evergreen's sighs filled his ears as her sweetness exploded on his tongue. Taking his time, he feasted on her, wanting to capture every drop, needing to prove to her that while all men should bow at her feet, he was the only man who should be allowed the privilege of touching her.

Evergreen had never felt such pleasure. All she could do was hold him closer to her and take his loving...and love the hell out of it. Alpine ate pussy like maestros conducted orchestras: perfectly.

"Alpine," she screamed around the set of orgasms that crashed over her. "Alpine," she breathed when she floated back down to earth.

"*Only* Alpine," he said as he picked her up and carried her to his bedroom.

Evergreen didn't miss the hint of possessiveness in his tone or in his touch. Alpine held her like someone was going to snatch her away from him. Seeing him as he was, she couldn't imagine that

anyone would dare something so stupid. Right now, he looked like the black, Native-American Highlander that he was. His eyes were stormy, his voice rumbling, his claim absolute. She knew they weren't just engaging in lovemaking. Alpine Bruce was claiming her...and she was going to let him.

Alpine set her on the bed and then climbed in beside her. Taking her foot in his hand, he carefully removed her boots and then her leather jacket. Once she was fully bared in front of him, he settled her on his lap and rested his forehead against her.

"Mine, Evergreen," he stated. "Mine," he reiterated.

"Yes, Alpine," she agreed as she lifted her head to receive his kiss.

Their tongues mated slowly, leisurely exploring the tastes of each other. Their hands gently traversed the terrain of each others' bodies. Their hearts beat a Scottish reel, a Native American war song, and rhythm and blues. In between they sighed each others' names.

"Alpine," she said.

"Evergreen," he responded.

Somewhere in between, he laid her down and covered her in his promise before entering her with a prayer.

“Every single moment,” he breathed as he eased his length into her. “Since the first moment I saw you.”

Alpine made love to her with a gentleness she didn't expect, being their need was so strong. He stroked her with tenderness even as he held her with such strength. In return, she opened herself to him and allowed him to see who she was, to feel what she felt, to share in their mutual awakening. Through it all she held onto him, needing to wrap herself in him as much as possible. She looked into his eyes and held his gaze, captivated by the stories she saw there that all involved her. Seeing happily-ever-afters in them, she climaxed...and he came with her.

Alpine didn't roll off of her after he came...and she didn't want him to. Instead, he eased his weight off of her and made love to her mouth and worshipped her body with his hands. In between, he sang her name.

“Evergreen, Evergreen, Evergreen.”

“Alpine, Alpine, Alpine,” she sang back.

“How do you feel?” he asked after she'd climaxed again.

“Brand new,” she confessed from her perch atop his chest. Feeling his release coating her sex, she commented, “We didn't use protection.”

"I never intend for anything to be between us," he answered.

"And if we have children?" she asked.

"You mean when we have children...I'll love them just as fiercely as I love you."

She'd suspected that he loved her, felt it even, but hearing him say it did something to her. Reaching down, she took his lips. "Thank you," she said.

"Don't ever thank me for giving you everything you deserve. If you must thank someone, thank my father for showing me how to love a woman. Thank my mother for demanding that my father love her fully or not at all."

"I like your parents."

"Of course you do. They spoil you."

"Of course they do. I'm cute. I'm smart. I knocked you on your ass."

"You're beautiful, sultry, intelligent and mine. And speaking of asses, I owe you a spanking for almost making me kill every man in Atlanta tonight," he rasped.

"Not my fault," she said.

"It is your fault. You think you can just parade your beauty in front of men and expect them not to look?"

Evergreen couldn't help but feel empowered at his words. Alpine wasn't just saying those words for

effect. He meant them. Still, she had to yank his chain a little bit. "What about the women? I'm sure a few women were looking."

Growling, he smacked her ass. And she got wet. Okay, she got wetter. Grinding herself against him, she felt him harden...so she grinded harder.

"Evergreen," he warned even as he smacked her ass again.

Ignoring his warning, she seated herself on his hard cock. Looking him in the eye, she challenged him. "I believe you owe me a ride," she said as she rotated her hips.

"I was trying to be gentle with you," he said. "I'm a big man."

"And luckily, I'm a big woman; now give me the hard ride I need, or get me a man who can give it to me," she taunted.

Alpine's eyes went wild. Gripping her hips, he pulled her down as he slammed up into her. "I will never allow another man to touch what is mine, Evergreen. Ever," he emphasized as he pounded into her sex.

Gasping from the pleasure, she met him thrust for thrust. Digging her nails into his shoulders, she bore down on him, shivering from the fullness. She was filled to the brim with Alpine and enjoying every second. Squeezing her thighs around him, she

clenched harder and threw her hips down to meet his upward thrusts.

“Harder,” she challenged as she pinched his flat nipples.

He thrust harder. So did she. “Harder,” she called out again, needing to feel him everywhere all at once.

She found herself flat on her back, one thigh hooked over his arm and two hundred plus pounds of Alpine thrusting into her with a speed and intensity that robbed her of breath.

“Harder?” he asked arrogantly.

Her body too consumed with pleasure, filled to bursting with him, all she could do was moan. It was so good, so good, so damn good. And it kept getting better.

Hooking her other leg over his arm, she was completely open to him, and Alpine used that to his advantage. “Take me, Evergreen. Show me that you can handle my cock. Prove to me that you can handle me,” he challenged as he used his strength to pull her further down onto his cock even as he thrust into her.

Evergreen might be smaller, she might have a little less physical strength, but she was an Archeon woman, and an Archeon woman didn’t back down from shit, especially a challenge from her man. Reaching up, she wrapped her arms around Alpine

and caressed his chest with her breasts as she rocked her hips into his thrusts. “Show me that you can handle my pussy, my strength, my intellect. Prove to me that you can handle me,” she demanded as she took his mouth in a fevered kiss.

Alpine didn't break their kiss. He didn't withdraw from her body. He didn't even fucking pause in his rhythm as he rose to his knees in the bed. Gripping her ass, he used his strength to pump all one hundred seventy-five pounds of her down his cock. Not an easy maneuver, and she couldn't help but be impressed with his flexibility. Not a light woman, she couldn't help but be impressed with his strength. But ten minutes later when he was still pulling her down into his thrusts, she had to acknowledge his prowess. Alpine Bruce was all fucking man. Feeling her orgasm crawling up her body, she closed her eyes, anticipating the rush of pleasure.

“Open your eyes,” Alpine demanded. “Open your eyes so I can see your orgasm as well as feel it. Keep them open so I can see your mind and body acknowledge that *I* am the only one.”

His words triggered her orgasm. The pleasure robbed her of breath, but she held her eyes open, unable to look away from everything in Alpine's eyes. Her orgasm washed over her for many moments, but Alpine did not cease his thrusts.

“Alpine,” she moaned.

“Evergreen,” he answered arrogantly.

“Yours, all yours, only yours, always yours,” she admitted.

He answered her admission with a smile. Moments later, his roar of completion filled the room and his release filled her body. “Damn right, you’re mine,” he said as he settled them in the bed and pulled the comforter over them.

Chapter Six

"The I Do"s

"I didn't do it," Evergreen shouted to anyone who'd listen. And she didn't...well, at least not all of it. Perennial helped.

"So the groomsmen were all laid out semi-conscious on the ground when you arrived?" Daddy Mad asked as he and Cadillac roused the groomsmen.

"Maybe."

"All five of them?" Momma Mad asked as she put together some ice packs.

"They started it," she said in her defense.

"How exactly did they start it?" her momma asked as she helped Momma Mad.

"They arranged for strippers to perform at Alpine's bachelor party."

"Oh, well then they should have two black eyes instead of one," Momma Mad said as she snatched the ice pack off of one groomsman's eye.

Clicking her tongue in disgust, she told them off. "Get your own damn ice packs."

"Maybe they can find those strippers and get them to get them some ice packs," her momma tossed in as she hit one of the groomsmen with an ice pack.

“But Gage and Cannon put a stop to that nonsense,” one of the groomsmen said.

She didn’t know if that was supposed to be some kind of defense, but if it was it was a shitty one. “The fact that my bffs stopped it is the only reason y’all don’t have two black eyes.”

Cannon and Gage not only put a stop to the striptease, they also worked the groomsmen over just enough to let them know they didn’t appreciate the insult to her. They were the best. She knew she’d made a good choice when she’d asked them to stand up for her. Alpine had his brother and four cousins; she had her sister, Oceania, Timber, and the dynamic duo. That was a winning combination for a kickball team or a kick-some-ass team, which is part and parcel to why she chose them.

“You don’t think giving the groomsmen black eyes after they’ve already been taken behind the woodshed by Cannon and Gage is a little bit over the top?” one of the regulars asked.

“Not at all. You don’t come into my wedding and think you’re not going to catch a fist to the face after you tried to parade some non-approved titties in front of my man. That’s just rude. How would you like it if I arranged for some random dick to be present in the same room as your woman?”

That shut everyone up...except for Alpine, who wrapped her up from behind. "This scene looks vaguely familiar," he whispered in her ear.

"Not my fault."

"Of course it isn't." He chuckled into her ear.

"You laugh now, but it's a good thing you left before the strippers got there, or you'd have two black eyes and a couple of broken ribs to go with it. And an ass-whipping from me, my big sister, my momma, and your momma for that matter," she said.

"Which is one of the reasons I left. I'm a smart man."

"And mine. I thought you were adamant about not seeing me in my dress before the wedding?" she asked as she settled into his embrace.

"Which is why I'm behind you...with my eyes closed."

"You should open them. I look really, really hot. Way better than those strippers your so-called friends arranged for you."

"Of course you look hotter than any other woman, which is just one of the million or so reasons I'm marrying you."

"What are some of the other reasons?"

"You're smart, you're feisty, you beat my little brother and cousins."

“That was the cool part. I’d do that for free. Highland’s an asshole and your cousins aren’t much better, especially the Irish one.”

“Fearghas isn’t Irish, honey. He’s all Scotsman.”

“I know that, but since he’s the ringleader of the non-approved titties, he’s going to be Irish in my book.”

“That’s not really fair to the good people of Ireland.”

“Fine, but I still hate him.”

“Why? He’s not a bad guy once you get past the—” Alpine began.

“The thick crust of bastard,” she finished.

“That wasn’t what I was going to say, but that’ll suffice.”

“And I still hate him. Did I mention that?”

“Only about a thousand times since you met him two days ago, but why expend so much energy hating him when you can simply get even with him?”

“Oooh, that is so gangsta. Sometimes I forget you’re your momma’s son,” she said.

“While you might forget that, I bet you won’t be forgetting I’m my da’s son. I know you didn’t forget it last night when you were riding two hundred thirty-five pounds of prime Bruce male.”

She shivered at the thought of how well he’d loved her last night. Playing hooky from his own

bachelor party, he'd crashed her bachelorette party and kidnapped her. After taking her for a short ride on his motorcycle, he took her for a long ride on eight inches of thick cock.

"That's not fair to make me wet before the wedding," she whispered.

"Why not? I couldn't think of a better scent than the smell of your arousal."

"Well then, I guess I should remind you that you've never had a better rider...and you won't be having another one," she said as she reached behind her and felt him up through his kilt.

She smiled upon hearing his groan. Alpine Bruce was one hot, fucking man...and he was all hers.

"Like I'd want another rider," he said as he reached around and cupped her breast. "I'm like my da is with my mother."

"Totally whipped," she said as she made a whishing sound and cracked her imaginary whip. She'd crack her real one later.

"Fucking possessive," he corrected.

Whatever else he was about to say was cut off by her sister, who came over and yanked her out of Alpine's arms. "I can't believe you're over here making out with Alpine when we're over there cleaning up the beat down."

“It wasn’t my fault. Alpine keeps touching me,” she said.

“Yeah, well half of that pile of beat down is your fault.”

“Yeah, and the other half of it is yours, Perennial. So shut up.”

“Why are we arguing with each other when we can go over there and beat Fearghas some more?”

Yeah, why were they? Spotting Fearghas, she told him off some more. “See what kind of trouble you started with your parade of titties? I can’t wait until Hell freezes over and you find some woman desperate enough to marry you, because then I’m going to parade dick in front of her left, right and center. How you like them apples?”

“All this talk about titties and dicks, it’s a good thing y’all are having an outdoor ceremony,” Oceania said as she strolled up with her bouquet.

“At this slow rate you two are going, I’m going to have to wait even longer for some grandbabies,” a disgruntled Mad said.

“No you won’t, Daddy Mad, because Highland seems to be tossing about his bits all over the place,” she said. “You might have five or six hundred grandkids you don’t know about.”

That remark earned her a glare from said brother-in-law. She met his glare with a middle

finger, a silently mouthed “fuck you” and a very vocal “ha ha.” After all, *he* was the one with the black eye...not her.

“You couldn’t wait until after the wedding to whip their asses. Now all of your pictures are going to feature groomsmen with black eyes,” her aunt said.

“If I waited until after the ceremony, then I’d be mad at my own wedding. Now that I’ve exacted revenge, I can enter into our marriage with a clear conscience,” she said. “And on the plus side, our pictures will make for a good story to tell our grandkids one day. I’m going to call it ‘Why People Shouldn’t Fuck with Evergreen.’”

“You shouldn’t be let loose around people,” one of the groomsmen said.

Well, he started to say it. The rest of his sentence was lost in a grunt of pain from where Cannon and Gage (her new bffs) punched him in the stomach.

“Thank you, Cannon and Gage.”

Cannon nodded...and looked around for someone else’s ass to kick. Gage simply smiled. They looked so cute in their sleeveless tuxes. Of course, she was looking pretty damn good too, she thought as she looked down at her ensemble, which consisted of a white leather corset that laced in the front and the back, a white leather miniskirt and thigh-high white

leather boots with rhinestones at the toe and a silver metal heel.

Ever since meeting Mrs. Mad, she'd found herself developing a bit of a leather fetish. She now had a tab of her own at the leather store. A really generous tab, she thought as she smiled into her bouquet—a gift from her sensei, whose father was a florist. Comprised of the most beautiful blooms in the most vivid colors she'd ever seen on flowers, it was a magnificent piece of artistry. And it artfully concealed the ostrich tickler that was part of it.

Her musings were interrupted by Momma Mad, who dragged her away. "Let's get a move on, people. Evergreen's got that gleam in her eye that means she's about to set something off."

"I didn't do anything," she said.

Looking ahead at Alpine, who watched her approach him with undisguised love and need in his eyes, she amended her statement. "I didn't do anything...yet." She had plans with Alpine...delicious plans that just might get Mad that grandbaby he was coveting. Actually, judging from the passion burning in Alpine's eyes, it might garner him more than one.

Epilogue

Evergreen sat in the circle of her husband's arms and basked in the attention she received. She soaked up their many compliments and demanded more. Hey, she deserved to be adored. Not only had she just completed her MS in Building Construction and Integrated Facilities Management, she'd delivered two of the most gorgeous babies ever born minutes after commencement ceremonies. Elm and Juniper Archean Bruce were only slightly less cute than she had been when she was a baby.

Yep, she deserved all the praise she got. In fact, Alpine should import some from another galaxy to ensure that they had a sufficient supply on hand.

"I wonder if their first word will be 'momma' or 'beautiful lady'?" she wondered aloud.

Everyone in the room turned to her at that.

"Dibs on their first words being 'I didn't do it,'" Perennial said.

****J and J****

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

A kickass tag-team bound together by the pen, Jeanie (the shagalicious wordslinger) and Jayha (the ninja master of h*ll no's) are forces of nature that will either leave you begging for mercy or begging for more.

We are women who have brains we aren't afraid to use; feelings we aren't afraid to express; and, middle fingers that we aren't afraid to extend.

We pen stories that push all kinds of boundaries and we don't apologize for it. Our heroines are feisty; our heroes are hot, and our stories are one-of-a-kind adventures.

Come visit us at www.jeanieandjayha.com.

*Praises, compliments, adulation, and the like for
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