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HOLIDAY



Irish Kiss

CHRISTA PAIGE

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This is a work of fiction. The characters, incidents and dialogues in this book are of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is completely coincidental.

Blurb

For six months, Gavin has kept a tenuous hold on his desire for Cassidy, knowing policy forbids them from taking it to the next, inevitable stage. With their case all wrapped up and ready to go to trial, he is eager to pursue a deeper connection with her. A Saint Patrick's Day party seems like the best place to explore their growing passion.

Not very successful in love, Cassidy is hoping to break the streak of bad luck in her relationships. She thinks Gavin could be her Mr. Right and sets out to intercept him at the pub. Instead, she finds herself in a tense situation.

Gavin intervenes and their passion flares wildly out of control. They barely make it to a private area before their desire ignites and their feelings are revealed. However, an unexpected predicament crops up. Cassidy is crestfallen at the possibility of losing what she found in Gavin's arms.

Now that Gavin has finally claimed his woman, he will let nothing get in his way again. Whether it is the constraints of their law enforcement jobs or the issues from her past, he vows to stay by her side and shower her with his affection for as long as she wants him.

Now all he must do is prove it to her.

Dedication

To my very own Sir Hubby, thanks for being my best research resource. And, to my fabulous crit-partner, Raven, for being there from start to finish.

Chapter One

Damn, he needed to get laid.

Bitch of it was he only wanted it with one particular woman.

And as of now, she had yet to appear.

Lifting the bottle in front of him, he brought it up to his lips. Another swig of ice-cold ale slid down his throat. He speared his fingers into the little wooden bowl in the middle of the table and fished out a shelled peanut. Cracking it open, he inspected the perfect halves and discarded them. He popped the nut into his mouth. A jingling drew his attention to the entrance of the pub as a bubbly, clearly tipsy couple waltzed inside.

Still not her. *Hell!*

Grabbing another peanut, he went through the motions with the shell while continuing to stew over her whereabouts. He had already wasted nearly an hour staring at that glass door, waiting for her to show. It had given him plenty of time to reflect on the circumstances of their situation and the issues keeping them apart. He loved his job, for the most part, and she had an affinity for her occupation. She did it beyond well. Capable, powerful, and smart all described her to a tee. But he wanted to know more about her outside of the daily grind.

Gavin was pretty sure she had similar feelings about him. They simply needed the opportunity to explore the possibilities. He could feel the pent up desire building around them, simmering like a low flame. All they needed was one hot flash, and they'd go up like wildfire.

His cock throbbed its agreement.

The door to the pub opened again and the bells on the handle trilled, drawing everyone's attention to the newest partygoer. Gavin watched as she finally walked into the lounge. She slipped off her jacket, tucked it over the crook of her arm, while surreptitiously scanning the occupants. *Who exactly was she meeting?* Gavin worried he'd somehow misjudged the situation. Did she intend to meet someone other than her co-workers? Like a date? The peanut in his hand turned to dust as he clenched his fist against a tide of irritation quickening in his thoughts.

He wondered if maybe he should've told her he planned on coming here tonight, too. Perhaps their mutual feelings could be explored in a not-work-related atmosphere. Suddenly, he realized the next step he took depended on who showed up to join her. Damn, so much for his well laid plans. He meant to use the element of surprise. Now it looked more like he'd be flying by the seat of his pants.

Fine. He decided to sit back there in the darker area of the bar and watch the proceedings. Surely, some would occur. Simply a matter of time, because she came dressed to kill. Her tight denim skirt hugged a rounded, drool-inducing ass. No doubt the whole package would inspire the urge to murder for a right to buy her a drink, the little vixen. She knew exactly what happened when she flashed those too-perfect thighs, encased in barely-there stockings. If she moved, just so, the bow of one garter could almost be discerned above the hem line of her skirt. His fingers itched to run up the inside of her gorgeous legs, to find the silky ribbon, yanking it loose and exposing her to his hungry gaze.

If the skirt didn't inspire random violence, the breast-hugging, gathered crop-top would. The flash of tight belly gave only a glimpse of her hot body. The emerald green cotton outlined her luscious curves and showed off a scandalous glimpse of cleavage. At least no one could venture into dangerous territory by pinching her. After all, it *was* Saint Paddy's Day and green was the color *du jour*.

His head spun as he envisioned pressing his lips to one heavy swell, tracing it down and into the vee made utterly tempting by the demi-cup bra she wore. It lifted her up like an offering. Gavin was damned good and ready to lie down as the sacrifice to that beautiful creamy flesh.

For nearly half a year, he had to rely on his imagination when it came to thinking about what she hid beneath understated pencil skirts, and tailored jackets. The simple, no-nonsense pumps she wore, and smoky nylons, concealed her natural curves, too. Business camouflage, he mused. Garments designed to throw off a discerning eye, forcing one to notice the woman and her brains, instead of a lush, jaw-dropping figure. Many times, Gavin had resorted to undressing her mentally, even at the most inopportune moments. Confined in a small cubicle, their attraction slowly building, did sinful things to his common sense. However, acting on those impulses could never happen. Mixing work and romance was forbidden, not to mention utterly taboo.

It didn't stop the sparks from igniting between them, though.

The day she purposely brushed her hand across his, Gavin felt the chains restraining his desire for her loosen. He drew on his famous control, attempting to wrangle the possessive beast dwelling under the surface into submission. They had a looming deadline and any distraction would be detrimental.

Soon, however, the rules flew out the proverbial window. Sharing in silent, unspoken conversations with only heated looks, he tried to convey the depth of his interest. At some point it had altered from purely sexual chemistry to a deeper magnetism. In his fantasies, he wanted to be with her outside the job, holding her hand as they shared a romantic dinner. He longed to take her to a movie and have her lean against his shoulder, while he offered her popcorn from his fingers.

It didn't mean his desire for her had diminished. Not at all. The battling parts of him dueled for supremacy. His physical state demanded he claim her body and prove to her the intensity of his passion to make her his, while his mind and heart longed to share more than sexual intimacy. He wanted all of her.

From the looks of things right now, it seemed his physical side just might win that battle first. Six months was a long time to wait for what was his, and he would *not* risk losing her to an overly interested rival.

His eyes narrowed on her, tracking her movement through the crush of bodies swaying about the small dance floor. Irish ballads blared from the speaker system and the air conditioning blew the swirling decorations into a spinning conflagration. Shimmering green streamers fell in twisted array from the ceiling. A large, papier-mache rainbow was suspended in an arch over the main room. It ended at a huge black cauldron where a drink fountain streamed with a tinge of jade liquid. "All you can drink," green beer piped out of the top, cascading down into the lower segments. Glass steins embossed with three-leaf clovers lined the table beside it. Not wasting her time on the beer, she strode past the free-flowing liquor without even a second glance. Instead, she charged right up to the high counter, waved down the bartender, and immediately ordered up an Irish Eyes

lowball. When he handed her the glass, she tilted her head flirtatiously and cheered, "*slainte sloynnta*." Her raven-black, shoulder-length curls bounced as she tossed the drink back. The lovely, pale white column of her throat invited stares. He was a sucker for the sight, just like all the other sappy bastards in the vicinity who were eager to capture the pretty lady for the night.

The hell they would. She was *his* woman, and the time had come to show her that.

He waited, though, watched and knew the opportune time to intervene would arrive soon enough. The crush of bodies made it difficult to keep her in view and the loud din of the party muffled normal conversation. Gavin staked out a new spot that gave him a better view of the proceedings. Quickly stalking past dancers and groups of people, he settled at a bistro table close by, giving him the ability to hear her and track her whereabouts. Settled now, all of Gavin's attention was focused on his woman.

He watched her as she picked out a seat and draped her leather jacket over the slatted chair back. With little flourish she sat on the wicker stool, letting her elbows rest upon the bar top. Overhead, the cascading lamplight winked off her shimmering gold bracelet. When a loud and boisterous man planted his ass in a seat beside her, she turned to face him. The line of her cheek showed a slight blush. Those long, dark lashes of hers swept down and lifted a smidge. Gavin knew it veiled the beauty of her vibrant hazel eyes.

"What's an attractive lady like you doing all alone at a St. Paddy's Day celebration?" the thick-neck asked in a deep, too interested, tone.

"Meeting friends. I'm early, though." She winked at the meathead and his smile grew lascivious.

"Well, honey, I can keep you company while you wait. What's your name?"

Her lips pressed together and the pink tip of her tongue peeked out sensuously, wetting her bottom lip. "Cassidy, and yours?" she answered but did not touch on his other offer. Good, things might have gone badly if she had accepted the stranger's proposition. Flirting is all fine and dandy, but hooking up with a brawny linebacker who had sex on the brain would totally not do.

"Bryce," he replied, as he motioned to get the server's attention "Give me a double shot of whisky and Cassidy here could do with another lowball. On me, of course."

One side of her mouth kicked up in a tight grin, she nodded her head and muttered, "Thanks."

Mr. Muscle scooted closer and slung his arm about Cassidy's lower back. She didn't move an inch, and it pissed Gavin off royally. He ground his molars together, willing his possessive instincts into submission.

Better to wait for the opportune moment to make his intentions clear, and right now was too soon. Let her relax some, lower that guard she always kept wrapped so tightly around her. She needed a few more drinks, some inane chatter with men who acted like gigolos. Afterward, he would march in and rescue the damsel from all the horny, pig-headed players.

"Another Killian's Red?"

Gavin pulled his stare away from Cassidy and turned to look at the waitress. Nodding his head, he grinned at the harried server. Dressed in a gold-shot corset and velvety black skirt, she looked almost Irish. A cheap, emerald colored plastic top-hat balanced precariously on her head. Two twisted braids draped behind her shoulders and her impish smile tempted him to tip her a bit more than the expected fifteen percent. A

little green shamrock decorated one rounded cheek, and Gavin wondered if the cute get-up earned her more money from all the tables she served. He might even be tempted to outright flirt with her, if his concentration had not been so completely taken by the enigma sitting a few feet away.

"With lime, please," he said, knowing it was probably sacrilegious of him to taint the ale with a spritz of citrus. Hopefully, no snake-charming saints would come to take him to task for his desecration of the Irish brew. He grinned at his inner rambling before leaning back in his seat and refocusing his attentiveness on Cassidy. Now a throng of drooling morons formed a circle about her chair. A regal princess holding court, Gavin reflected. Several shot glasses of whisky and half-filled pints of Guinness lined the bar in front of her. Offhand, he noticed they were in the middle of a drinking game. The Irish Car Bomb, he realized. Once the bartender topped off every shot with a splash of Bailey's, all of the participants crammed together, and each of them scooped up a smaller glass. One of the college frat boys weaseled in between Cassidy and the rest of the gaggle of lusting whelps. Counting down from three, he indicated the game had begun. Sloshing and plopping followed as each person dropped their shots into a waiting beer mug. Everyone chugged the alcohol down in rapid succession. Gavin waited to see who gulped the triple threat of liquor the fastest.

Cassidy's drink registered little change and Gavin hid his grin of approval. At least the woman had self-preservation instincts and knew had to use them. It would be entirely too stupid getting soused when she was all alone and left for the panting, salivating wolves.

She set her drink aside and shifted, lifting one thigh and crossing her legs. The change of her position allowed Gavin a glimpse right up her skirt. A bolt of lightning shot straight to his balls, his cock surged to attention, hard as a damn steel rod. The sight of her lacy panties tempted his carnal hunger into dangerous territory. He could discern the slightest shadow of her feminine curls, and nearly groaned as he imagined parting those eye-catching, long legs and burying his head between them.

God damn, but he wanted to taste her. Craved it like a thirsty man longing for water. His patience was quickly running out.

And oh, how he had waited. The last weeks had been a real ball-buster, while they worked together in such close quarters. They spent three of those long, agonizing months partnered up for most of the day, reviewing files and other minutia. This time spent one-on-one gave him a better understanding of the woman underneath the exquisite looks. If her beauty had not drawn him in, her intelligence and witty repartee would have. Cassidy was no empty headed bomb-shell. Nothing got him harder when he was around her than when she challenged him with cold-hard facts and inborn intuition. Some of the most heated arguments aroused Gavin to the point of pain. There had been a few times he almost lost control of himself. All he wanted to do then was back her up against the flimsy wall partition and wrench her skirt up, so he could feel the fiery heat of her pussy against the unbearable pressure of his throbbing cock.

However, he resisted. It took immeasurable control that he didn't realize he possessed. Counting down the days until they no longer worked together kept him just this side of sane. Finally, they reached the end of their casework-enforced relationship. Now, nothing constrained them to stay apart anymore. No job, no rules, nothing.

Many times in the past weeks, he had wrestled with the idea of asking her out. Be a

little dangerous and buck the system, perhaps they might even indulge in a forbidden courtship. Looking at her now, surrounded by eager men, made Gavin wonder if he had waited too long to initiate something outside the constraints of their professional duties.

Earlier this week he had noticed the colorful flyer tacked to the peg board in the copy room, indicating tonight's little holiday get together. Gavin decided a bit of reconnaissance was in order. He covertly listened in on a conversation between her co-workers, Danni and Juliet. When they confirmed that Cassidy would be joining them, Gavin's plans for the evening instantly solidified. He suddenly had a Saint Patrick's gig to attend.

Dressed in a holiday-appropriate, forest green button-up shirt, he came prepared to woo and seduce her. After arriving much earlier than the time on the flyer, he had anxiously awaited Cassidy. His anticipation had mounted as each hand ticked down on the clock.

Now she was here and getting ready to party.

In a few moments, Gavin planned to act upon their attraction. He needed to make a declaration of his intentions and find out where she stood. Imagining what would happen afterward encouraged his resolve. He could hardly wait for their very first kiss and the resulting passion. When he took her, bringing them to the pinnacle of utter bliss, soaring into ecstasy, he had no doubt in his mind that Miss Cassidy Hyatt would finally realize she was his.

The jaunty tune blaring from the speakers petered out with the last few notes of a lively violin. The next song piped up and everyone in the pub perked in interest. "Down By the Sally Gardens," drew the dancers into a slow, swaying rhythm. A big flat-screen television hung at a tilted angle on the back wall. The current song's music video showed the sprawling emerald landscape of Ireland and zoomed in on an old, stone castle. A running marquee indicated the Celtic band, Lark and Spur, performed this version of the song. The melody made for a very intimate atmosphere. Gavin clenched his fist to still the knee-jerk reaction of watching Cassidy being led from her chair to an inner area on the small parquet dance floor.

Frat-Boy wrapped both his arms about Cassidy and hugged her in a wimpy embrace. Gavin saw red, bright and vivid as murder, flash through his mind's eye. Then, as Cassidy swayed back and forth with the lilting tune, that perfect, curvaceous butt drew more than just Gavin's stare. His palm itched to shape the tight curve and squeeze, put his own mark of possession on it, warning all other moronic, death-seeking men away from what belonged to him and him alone.

God damn, but she was making him crazy. How much longer did this freaking Celtic ballad have? Gavin wondered if he could last for the next few minutes without cutting in to the duo and staking his claim.

Patience, he reminded himself.

Chapter Two

Where was he? When Danni had informed her of Gavin's little eavesdropping stunt, Cassidy felt sure that he would be here tonight. She even dressed in a tad more-revealing-than-normal outfit, thinking it might entice him. They'd sidestepped the temptation for too long, and now doubts about where they might go from here had begun to bother her. Being successful in love had never described her relationships, and she longed to see what might develop between her and Gavin. Maybe this time, she would get lucky in more ways than one.

If only he would show up. In the meantime, a little liquid courage could go a long way.

After the dance, she quickly insisted upon returning to her seat. Bad move, she groaned inwardly, as the circle of men grew closer to her. The scents of their varying colognes mixed into a cloying conflagration. Hints of citrus, musky sandalwood and a spicy, cheap aftershave clashed with the pungent tang of brewing ale. Barley malt and hops tinged the air all around them, barely concealing the stench of sweat.

Cassidy hid her grimace at the press of warm, male bodies hemming her in on all sides. Her self-preservation instinct kicked up a notch, heightening her reactions. She curled one hand into a fist, curving her thumb over the knuckles. *All the better to clock you with*, she muttered in her thoughts. The big burly Bryce must not have learned the age old, stay-in-your-own-space, adage. He kept sidling up closer to her side, and the urge to sucker-punch him back into his own seat strained against her control.

"Such pretty curls," he said with hint of possession coloring his tone. From the corner of her eye, she tracked the way his hand lifted off the bar heading straight for her hair. Shifting to face him, she cut off his attempt, assuring herself that no sweaty, meat hooks speared into the closest ringlet.

"Thanks," she muttered. A quick tilt of her chin summoned the bartender and she hastily ordered another drink. This time she asked for a chilled longneck.

"A beer drinking woman. Just my type," a tall, arrogant man said as he came to stand on the other side of her chair.

Cassidy cocked one eyebrow up and she noticed where he practically gaped. His brown eyes stared right at her cleavage. Completely obvious, the man inspected her like a piece of prime horse flesh. She wanted to scrunch up her nose and bare her teeth like an irate mare, ready to cow-kick a randy stallion right into his place. He wore a wrinkled suit shirt with a paisley tie, the shirttails hung out of his pressed slacks. Sandy brown hair looked as if he had run his hand through it many times today. It stuck up in odd places, adding to the tousled appearance.

"Long day at work?" she asked nonchalantly.

"Something like that," he replied not giving her much else to go on for his dishevelment. "Nothing a cold one won't fix," Mister Messy added.

Cassidy fought the urge to grimace. Drowning one's sorrows in the bottom of a beer mug never solved a damn thing. Moreover, it almost always ended with a headache. She hated headaches. "Perhaps for some; as for me, I prefer a straight shot of bravado and a hot night of mind-blowing sex to remedy my ills." She traced her fingertip around the

edge of her bottle nearly smiling as each man tracked that slow, sensual slide of her finger about the curve of the glass. What the heck, she might as well do a little flirting while she waited. Get some practice in for when she finally saw Gavin.

"My dear Cassidy, I see you have done more than your share of the liquid portion of that prescription. You looking for a volunteer on the mind-blowing part?" Bryce said in an overly excited manner. It raised Cassidy's hackles. What should have been a funny, maybe a bit crude, discourse, the jock had completely mistaken for an invitation.

"If you prefer brains to brawn, my evening is still open," the other man offered congenially. Before she could stop him, he reached over and chucked his thumb under her chin, tipping it back so she had to look up at him.

"I don't do anonymous sex," she uttered irritably, taken aback at his forwardness.

"You're Cassidy. I'm Jerrod. There are no secrets between us now." One side of his mouth quirked and deep laugh lines creased at the corner of his eyes as he moved even closer. His other hand slid behind the chair and hooked onto the back. With a jerk, he spun the seat until she fully faced him. Bryce cursed as the motion forced his muscled arm to release his hold. Cassidy pressed her lips into a rigid line and straightened her spine. She could feel the man behind her now, tension wafted off him at the meddling Jerrod had instituted. Now, *she* had become some sort of prize between them, and neither seemed interested in letting things go.

"Boys, I wasn't inviting either of you. Only, stating a fact." *Or maybe a wish, where her elusive, divinely handsome quarry was concerned,* Cassidy considered privately.

"Let's simply enjoy our drinks and celebrate the holiday. After all, it only comes around once a year." She wrenched the chair back to face the bar top. "Maybe we all need another round?"

Crooking her finger, she called the waiter back and ordered half a dozen Saint Patrick's Day-themed shots. Screw moderation, a bit of inebriation went a long way.

When she agreed to meet the trio of work acquaintances here tonight, she hadn't considered them running so damn late. When a call came in to the office earlier, they had prodded her to go ahead, saying they would meet her when things were tied up. When did things ever get neatly tied up in her job?

Never.

There was a distinct possibility that she might even have to fly solo all flipping night. She groaned. Good God, she loathed the bar scene. Tolerating the hangers-on and the drunk idiots, ranked right up there on her run-away-as-fast-as-you-can o'meter. Kinda like rattlesnakes, gang-bangers and an idiot doped up on PCP: avoid at all costs, was her mantra.

"One, two," Jerrod counted, and everyone swallowed their green-colored shot on three.

"Maybe Cassidy here isn't of a mind to choose. I think she wants both of us at the same time," Bryce suggested, followed by a loud guffaw as he slammed his big hand down on the counter. Emerald-tinged liquid splattered everywhere and little droplets coated the slick Formica, dampening the peanuts in a nearby wooden bowl.

"I'm game," Jerrod replied, sliding his arms along her shoulders and pinning her to the chair-back. "I'll even hold her down for you, at first," his voice lowered, arousal lacing his words.

"A man can't pass up that kind of offer," Bryce exclaimed as he gripped the arms of

the stool and positioned her in front of him again.

Cassidy felt her heart rate soar. It throbbed at her temple and echoed loudly in her ears. Being confined did things to her sanity. She despised the sensation and could feel fear curling in her gut. *They are only playing* she chanted silently. When Bryce moved off his own seat and pressed his palms against the inside of her legs, she flinched.

"Stop it you two," she managed to say evenly, with no sign of her agitation.

"Now why would we do that?" Jerrod muttered from behind her, his mouth hovered just inches from her ear. The bitter rank of his beer tainted breath prompted her gag reflex. She forced herself to swallow back the bile rising in her throat.

"Ah, she's playing hard to get. We'll show you a good time honey. Relax. It'll be fun," the brawny one said as he pushed open her legs and brought his big body in-between. He walked his fingers up her thighs to the dip of her waist. Curling his hands around each side, he jostled her, shifting her off balance.

Crap. Cassidy felt anger twining with unease. She didn't want to lash out and hurt one of these guys. But they were quickly crossing the "Cassidy doesn't give a fuck anymore" line. Someone was about to get a bloody nose if they didn't cut it out.

"Just lean back and lighten up, it's all good," Jerrod uttered as his hands tripped across her collarbone, lower still to the edge of her shirt. He traced the intricate stitching and delved into the space between her breasts.

That was it; she had come to the point where it was no longer fun and games. Time to teach the bad boys a little lesson. She twisted to the side first, dislodging Jerrod's questing hand. Squeezing her thighs together, she bent her knees, angled for Bryce's gut, and let loose her legs.

A whoosh of air followed the hard contact as one pointed heel hit the curve of his abs. He shifted a bit to the left and her other leg missed. He caught it against him, pinning his arm on his side, holding her immobile. "Might have to teach the lady a little lesson on manners, eh Jerrod?" he said in a low, ominous voice.

"We had fun with that last one, as I recall. She wasn't much into submitting either." Jerrod's sniveling laugh made Cassidy seethe. Looking around, she tried to find someone who might be of use in her plight. They all leered at her, the scene one of titillation for them. Damn and blast, stupid idiot men. Did every one of them think with their dicks? She struggled to find a way to win back the upper hand, to strike out and make the mighty Y-chromosome fall.

By the looks of things, it needed to happen fast too.

Narrowing her eyes in warning, she tried to struggle out of Jerrod's hold while tracking Bryce's movement. He came close, his big burly body crowding her as he leaned near and pressed his mouth to her cheek. "So warm and sweet," he said in a provocative tone.

"Stop it, Bryce!" Cassidy demanded in a most authoritative manner. Twisting to the side, she yanked her arm free of Jerrod's grip and elbowed the beefy idiot in the ribs.

The playful expression on his face changed, darkened. A line crossed his brow, his lips flattened, and he inhaled slowly through his nose. He didn't even flinch at her jab, and suddenly Cassidy wondered if she could overpower either of them. *Shit, shit, shit!* It figured she would end up in dire straits. Screw flirting. Next time she would keep her mouth shut.

"Come on now, honey, give me a little taste," he cajoled and Cassidy flinched at his

sickening, sugary tone. It hid malice and evil intention that set her heart pounding and her stomach flipping. Bryce was not playing any game here. He really intended to take what had not been freely offered.

"Let me go, you bastard," she hissed not really caring any more if she made a scene.

"No. Not until you give me a kiss," he declared while dipping his head and closing the gap between them.

"How about I teach you boys how it's *really* done?" The domineering, masculine voice came from her right side. She could hardly process who it was speaking to her as she felt two rough, strong hands wrap about her upper arms. All of a sudden, she was yanked forcefully from her seat. The room blurred as she spun around, and he deposited her upon the bar counter. A large, warm male body pressed tightly to hers.

The tip of one calloused finger pressed her chin up until she was looking straight into smoldering blue eyes, framed by thick eyelashes. She blinked; astonished when she realized they were familiar eyes. *Gavin!* He moved so fast, she could hardly track his motion, but she couldn't utter even one coherent thing, because his mouth pressed to hers and the world around her dimmed.

He cupped the back of her neck, his fingers speared into the hair at her nape, tugging until pinpricks of sensation zipped from his hold straight to the sensitive flesh between her legs. Incessant strokes of his tongue traced the seam of her lips, demanding she open to his questing. She obliged him, parting her lips eagerly. God, how long had she wanted to be kissed by him? It seemed like a lifetime by now. He delved in, slipped inside the inner flesh and met her tongue. They dueled for control, their tongues dancing and tasting as she reveled in the heat his kiss ratcheted up with long, determined caresses.

His lips firmed, he angled to the side and stepped near. The brush of his taut chest against her breasts sent shockwaves careening throughout her, and she gasped at the contact. He took her breath inside him, deep within his lungs and tilted her backward, rocking side-to-side.

"That's it, baby, give me more," he whispered against her lips.

He didn't have to ask ... she was already there, moving so her legs could squeeze his sides. The heat of his body raised gooseflesh on her inner thighs. He traced her bottom lip with the tip of his tongue all the way to the corner of her mouth, and nipped her. She moaned low in her throat and he chuckled, repeating his naughty little bite. With his palm cupping the upper curve of her ass, he drew her up, pressing her into his embrace. Wicked, searching kisses dipped down to her chin, trailed along her jaw, drifted upward to her ear. Another nibble sent heat ricocheting from that twinge as excitement bubbled within her core, enticing and oh, so marvelously hot.

"Cassidy," he murmured, his warm breath skittered below her ear. "We'll finish this later. First, though, which one do you want to take?" he whispered, while his body rubbed sinuously back and forth, inciting a horrible empty ache for completion.

She paused, drew a deep breath in and held it, processing his question. After catching on to the act, she crossed her wrists behind his neck, and whimpered, not really acting *per se*, because it felt heavenly. At the moment, she knew clarity would be her best weapon, and maybe he was here simply to help her out of this mess. But, damn, she really wanted him. Leaning into his arms, she felt them tighten, scooting her fully into him as his hips circled, finding her throbbing, damp core. Arching up, she moaned with the first glancing contact. The feel of his steely, hard erection pressing against her inflamed center

increased her need until she was burning up from the inside out.

"God damn, Cassidy, I'm of a mind to fuck you right here on this bar. Baby, you are so hot and wet. I can feel it through my jeans."

Cassidy looked up at him, saw the storm of passion in his features, and knew he wasn't playing either. He wanted her, too. Exhaling slowly, she tilted her head to the side and mouthed, "Big boy."

He chuckled and both of his eyebrows kicked up, "This isn't finished between us, yet, Cass."

Staring back at him in challenge, she said "After that kiss, it better not be."

A quick wink and he cocked his head to the side indicating she should feint to the right and use the element of surprise on Mr. Hefty Man. She nodded her understanding. Before she shifted even one inch, he captured her face in his palms and drew her back to his waiting mouth. He kissed her hard, with deep sweeps inside. When he pulled away, he drew her lower lip into his mouth and sucked. Moving to the side, he glanced at her and whispered, "A quick reminder of what's in store later."

"Like I need one?" she smirked.

He dropped his hands and said, "Now."

Cassidy flew off the bar top and launched herself at Bryce, backing the stunned idiot into the seat behind him. At her side, she felt the other two grappling about their space. It took only a few seconds for her to pin the asshole into his chair, her knee in his groin.

"Don't mess with me, Bryce. I don't like it at all. Understand?"

Anger filled his eyes, his forehead and cheeks turned flame red. "You little tramp! You were asking for it with that get-up!"

Cassidy reined in her temper. She really wanted to smack some sense into the dipshit, but spending the entire night with the annoyance of a police report wasn't high up on her list of to-dos for the evening.

"You've had too much to drink, Bryce, if you believe that lie," she said through gritted teeth.

"Slutty bitch!" He lurched up, ready to fight for the upper hand. Cassidy braced for impact.

"Asshole," the angry growl came from beside her. She saw a quick motion and Bryce went flying out of the chair. Gavin, tall and menacing, reached down and grasped Bryce by his shirt, lifting all two hundred fifty-plus pounds with a decisive yank. Face-to-face, they glared at each other. "You have a death wish, moron, if you don't shut your fucking mouth now."

Bryce sputtered but didn't back down. Another wrenching shake and Cassidy realized that trouble was brewing. Big trouble.

"Let's go," she demanded.

The directive was met with silence. God, men and their posturing crap.

Not wanting everyone in the bar to hear her, Cassidy sidled right up next to Gavin and murmured sotto voice, "Detective Marshal, kicking his sorry ass is only a momentary pleasure and bound to cause talk. Do you *really* want to waste the rest of Saint Patrick's Day filling out an incident report?"

He turned those vivid, storm-tossed eyes on her again. The harsh angles of his face were taut, stressed. Those full lips pressed into a fierce grimace. He ran one hand through his neatly cropped brown, wavy hair. Bit by bit, he released Bryce, his fingers loosening

from their hold on the other man's shirt. When he stood up to his full height, she reeled. He never seemed so big, so imposing when they were working together. Right now, he looked like the ex-swat team officer he'd been for nearly ten years. Lethal described him perfectly.

"Well, do you?" she asked with a hint of amusement.

"Nah, I have better things to keep me busy tonight, Investigator Hyatt. Wouldn't want to dirty up those handcuffs I intend to use on you," he whispered in a seductive growl, low enough so only she could hear.

Cassidy felt her stomach flip at his declaration. Handcuffs? Maybe she'd hook Gavin up, and have her wicked way with *him*.

"Son-of-a-bitch. That look on your face is gonna get you fucked up against the wall in the bathroom, Cass," he cursed again.

"Is that a guarantee, Gavin?"

Forgetting the morons they were dealing with, he stormed over to grip her wrist and hauled her against him. "Let's go. Right. Fucking. Now."

Chapter Three

He didn't wait for her to answer, but simply lifted her into his arms and hauled ass to the back corridor of the pub. She inhaled his clean, crisp scent. Completely male, she realized he wore nothing saccharine or spicy. The undertone of bergamot enhanced the natural fragrance lingering on his skin. Frankly, in her opinion, he smelled amazing. Cassidy laced her arms around his strong shoulders and nuzzled into his throat, nipping his skin with teasing bites.

"I have wanted to kiss you for so long," she stated truthfully.

With a muttered oath, he picked up his pace. Cassidy barely registered when he reached for the bathroom door and pulled it open with a forceful yank. Distantly, she realized it was single-occupancy and, lucky for them, it had been vacant. He flicked the lock, securing their privacy and whirled around, backing her roughly against the cold, tile wall.

"Same here," he responded, as his mouth found hers again with a demanding kiss. He framed her face within both his palms and anchored her for his devouring possession. A stab of fiery sensation pulsed low in her belly when his tongue delved deep, enticingly rubbing the tops of her teeth. He surged into the depths of her mouth, touching and tasting her with sweeping caresses.

The thick, pulsating length of his erection ground against her belly, like a scorching hot brand. She flexed her hips, seeking the rigid flesh caged behind his jeans. Her mind whirled with an incessant hunger, wanting him to thrust that steely cock where she clamored for a hard, fast claiming. All her bottled-up desire blazed to life, prodding Cassidy to forgo a slow seduction. Instead, her lust propelled her straight into desperation. She wanted him to rip her clothes off and put an end to the constant torture of their job-enforced, long-withheld need.

The hollow, clenching depths of her pussy convulsed in anticipation. As if he knew what she longed for, he pressed into her more, meeting her jerky rocking. It burned through the silky material and a cry escaped her throat when he pushed her back to the wall once more, hitched his fingers in the hem of her skirt, and yanked it up.

Jerking backward just an inch, he inhaled, his chest heaving with the same agony echoing within her. An identical compulsion coursed through her veins, setting ablaze every single nerve ending. And damn, he hadn't even touched her most intimate erogenous zones yet. Their sensual contact promised to detonate within her a tide of such intense passion that she didn't think she would survive it, or manage to come out of it the same.

Impatiently, he wrenched the skirt higher, baring her legs and the scrap of nothing covering her delicate folds. "Ah, fuck," his fingers delved under the waistband and speared through her damp curls, moving low until he found the taut bundle of nerves underneath.

"Oh, sweet Christ," he groaned and it rumbled in his chest. "Cass, there's a piercing here."

"Uh huh," she managed to reply as he took hold of the little metal ring and plucked it gently. When he rolled the ball between his fingertips, she stuttered, "Gavin, oh God."

She couldn't form another coherent word as he flicked his thumb repeatedly against her swollen clit and returned to the piercing, fingering it with insistent pulls. Each tug rubbed the back of her clit, sending bursts of white-hot lightning snaking down into the depths of her very womb.

"Let me see! Damn you, Cassidy! I've got to fucking look at you!"

The next instant she heard the fabric of her panties tear and cool air met her inflamed flesh. He stepped back a pace and she whimpered at the loss of his warmth.

"Christ, now that's pretty. So, fucking beautiful. I want to tease it with my tongue, Cass, and suckle at that silver ball, just enough till the pain blurs with pleasure." He bent down, let his breath waft out over the pierced flesh and clasped the tip of the triangular-hood piercing between his lips.

She stood up on her toes as sensation swamped her core and flooded her pussy, readying it for penetration. Empty, hollow, she ached for him and yet he simply teased. Reaching out, she fisted his hair in both her hands, hauling him to her, urging him to take more.

"Gavin, please," she uttered, as a shiver worked its way from the top of her head and speared throughout her entire body. "I need more."

The tip of his tongue flicked the end of one side of the ring, swept the straining flesh of her clit with a little tease. When he found the other ball, he tugged it with his teeth. Deliberately exhaling, he swiped it once again and drew back. He tilted his head and looked up at her. "More, Cass?" His hoarse tone was gravely, heady with lust. Gripping the curve of the ring, he skated the tip of one finger over it, discovering the entire length of it and reversed course.

"Yes, damn you! More!" She panted, leaning against the chilly tiles as the inferno crashed into her like a wave of molten lava. Burning up in want of him, she spread her thighs wider and bit the inside of her cheek. She wouldn't beg for it. Yet.

"Like this, baby?" Two fingers lanced up within her folds, reaching far into her inner depths.

A strangled cry for more came out garbled, tears pricked her eyes.

"Or, do you want something else?"

She nodded; a squeak the only noise she could manage.

"My cock, Cass? You want that?"

Oh lord, did she ever. Biting her lip, she peered at him, excited at the way he knelt in front of her. The hollow of his cheek was flushed; sweat beaded at his temple and ran down the side of his face. His features firmed, eyes blazing with unconcealed passion. She watched as he marched his fingers back through her curls and cupped her clit within his palm. He bore down, dragging his calloused fingertips roughly upon her straining, burning flesh.

"Please, Gavin," she whispered.

In a blink, he lurched up and pinned his solid, muscled body to hers. One big hand worked quickly, flicking the button of his pants open and unzipping his fly. She reached out to help him and grasped the material, dragging it below his hips. Too impatient to do much more, he worked the cotton boxer-briefs out of the way. His thick, engorged length sprang free. Cassidy's eyes went wide at the sight of his jutting erection. The flared head looked angry, so inflamed it was a deep purple hue. An opaque droplet formed at the top, shimmered with the damp evidence of his desire. He fisted the base, ran his hand up and

back, squeezing it in a fierce grip.

"Open, baby. Spread those pretty thighs for me," his voice lowered to a deep scratchy grumble. Giddiness spread within her every cell as she scooted her legs to each side and reached out to touch him. Dragging her finger through the beaded moisture, she massaged below the unyielding peak to the underside, and its rushing vein below. Her fingers wrapped about him, but couldn't close completely; the width of him was so much more than she expected. How would that velvet and iron erection shafting into her feel? Her inner walls convulsed at the sheer possibility of his length working deeper than anything she had experienced before. A shiver of expectation rippled outward from her womb, and she squeezed his throbbing length tightly in her grip. He cursed, followed by a rumbling groan.

"Hard, Gavin," she demanded, wanting something beyond an easy, questing thrust.

"Patience, Cass. I swear, once I get inside you, there's no way I could do anything else. I'm dying to feel you milking my cock until I can't hold back anymore. I've waited too fucking long to do this." The flared tip of his shaft thrust up through his fist, his grasp firmed as he guided it to the swollen folds at the very heart of her femininity. With his other hand, he cupped her thigh and lifted her leg, draping it parallel to his hip. She understood the unspoken directive and crossed her calf around his lower back, drawing him even closer. Off balance, she was now angled perfectly for him. The next instant, she felt the bloated head shift, his heavy shaft moved against her slit but did not enter. She couldn't even find the breath to gasp as the crest nudged her clit, rubbed in provoking arcs. Shards of bliss ricocheted out from the heated caress.

"Look baby," Gavin demanded.

She did as he instructed, her eyes focused upon the sight of his thick cock, sliding forward and prodding the silver piercing. Transfixed, she watched as he retreated an inch and dragged the massive length forward, stroking her center.

"See how your cream is covering my dick? Do you see it, Cass?"

Oh, did she ever. His cock glistened now, slippery with her essence.

"It's so hot, I'm burning up already." He rocked his hips, skated the shaft further, brushing the tense nerve bundle hidden there. Cassidy nearly screamed at the simple touch. Frustration and urgency twined together until she wanted nothing but him inside her. And, she wanted it right now.

"Gavin," she said his name as a plea.

"Keep watching, Cassidy. See me take you," he commanded.

Her gaze fixed on his length, the wide crest parted the quivering walls of her core. A shudder worked its way from the top of her spine to the tips of her toes.

"Hang on to me, Cassidy. I can't wait much longer."

She ran her hands up from his elbow to the clenched biceps of his upper arms. Grasping them, her nails pricking the sleeves of his shirt, she held on as he directed.

"Fuck, ah hell, baby. I have to..."

He surged in, barreling through the quivering muscles of her pussy, which clamped down on his cock immediately.

Halfway in, he retreated and returned, working his shaft deeper with another forceful thrust.

"Too tight, too hot," he gritted his teeth together, spearing up farther inside her and rolling his pelvis with short, aggressive drives.

A low keening sound broke the silence, and she realized it was she who made those whimpering cries. Each surging plunge worked deeper and farther. The breadth of his shaft stretched her nearly to the point of pain. Anything more and Cassidy knew she'd scream. The pressure wound into a conflagration of sensation. Pleasurable bursts, combined with the slightest burning hint. Tension gathered low in her belly as he withdrew almost to the tip, and the emptiness threatened to overwhelm the last tattered threads of her control.

"This is going to kill me," Gavin uttered in a breathless moan. "You're too small baby. I don't want to hurt you."

Cassidy lifted her other leg, wrapping both calves crosswise over his hips. One of his hands moved underneath her, squeezing her ass and holding her to him. The other palm smacked on to the wall, as he braced them for a better angle.

"Gavin, *fuck me*," she said, swallowing back the urge to shout the demand.

Suddenly they were turning, his arm wrapped around her upper back, holding her against his heaving chest. He pivoted on his heels until the sink counter bumped her legs. Instinctively, she lifted them higher and he leaned the upper curve of his thighs against the edge of the granite top. Bending his knees, he gripped his palms on both sides of her waist.

"Take it, baby." He tilted his pelvis and squeezed his hands, yanking her forcefully down as he plunged up deeper.

"Gavin!" she moaned his name and he did it once again, moving higher inside her.

"More, Cass. Damn, you take more!" Another plunge as he pulled her down onto his rigid erection.

Once again he bucked into her. He held her to him, refusing to allow even the slightest retreat. A stabbing penetration and he rolled his hips, Cassidy needed to feel him, craved the brushing strokes of skin against skin, her throbbing clit rubbing enticingly to the base of his cock. She squeezed her legs and shifted.

The tension snapped, the final inches surrendered to his impalement. "Fuck! Yes!" he shouted in triumph.

"There, baby, you have all of me," he muttered between gasping breaths.

"I can't wait any longer," she sobbed, the pressure growing unbearable. "Move, Gavin. Make me come."

Everything spiraled out of their control. All her focus narrowed and fixed upon the increasing strain, winding her need into a blazing inferno. Necessity eclipsed any other thought. She bore down, and Gavin heaved up at the same time. His fingertips dug into her hipbones, pinching as he held her against the cradle of his pelvis. He rocked and circled, dragging her back and forth, grinding her swollen clitoris to the slick flesh where they were joined.

She struggled to find that perfect rhythm. The first little explosion rocketed from where they touched so intimately, and she couldn't stop her cry.

"Yes, Cass, that's right baby. Again," he directed her with his words while his palms gripped firmly and urged her to circle against him, once again.

Tighter and tighter he wound her. Piercing thrusts worked all the way to her womb, igniting a storm of lightning zipping with currents of sheer intensity. Her inner muscles quivered, clamped down to hold him deep, and shuddered when he pulled away. Another driving stab of his engorged cock followed by another, and Cassidy lost her breath.

Dizziness crashed into her as the tether snapped and her pussy convulsed.

"Yes, Baby, come for me," he crooned. He powered into her like a piston, muscles bunching and moving, taking her further into the most distant realm of paradise.

"Oh God, Gavin!" she tried to speak, but the words came out in a breathless rush.

"Now, Cassidy! Fucking come, now!" Hard, shallow jolts propelled her to the edge of sanity. Low in her core, a swelling tide grew until the tempest crashed into her, stealing her very sanity. She clamped her hand to her mouth, staving off the shuddering screams tearing from within her.

"Hell yeah!" Gavin shouted as he pumped into her, the scorching jets of his seed spilled into her clamoring, inner depths.

Swollen and thick, each pulse of his heated essence detonated another tremor low in her core. She couldn't hold back the cries and with one final, harsh plunge he gave her all of his burning length.

"Cass, baby," he soothed. Dropping her legs, his arms embraced her shoulders as he hauled her into his heaving chest, steadying her and keeping her from falling.

Tears streamed down her cheeks, sweat dripped from her belly, and she trembled with the aftershocks of that mind-blowing climax.

Cassidy didn't think she'd ever forget what had just happened between them.

Chapter Four

"Damn, I don't want to leave your body." Gavin rocked his pelvis again.

She sucked in a lungful of air as sensation ebbed outward from where her inner walls clasped his still erect cock.

"Don't, then," she gasped, as he pulled back a sliver of an inch and tilted forward. "We could make up for lost time?" Cassidy offered.

"Have to baby, not going to fuck you in a bathroom for the rest of the night," he all but growled the dictate. "Besides, next time we won't have all these clothes in the way. I'm dying to see you completely naked."

She dared a glimpse at their dishevelment; his pants were practically hugging his knees, the belt dragging on the ground. She was still completely clothed, except for the shredded g-string which had ended up a few feet away.

"Ready?" he asked a bit roughly.

Nodding, she bit down on her lip, bracing for him to pull away.

He took his time and she savored the fullness until the very last inch retreated.

Gavin stiffened, looking down at his cock and he cursed low, under his breath.

"Jesus, Cassidy. God damn, I fucking didn't think. I wanted you too badly."

It took a moment to understand what he was concerned about. *Protection. Shit. Good going*, her conscience reproached. *But it felt amazing*, her inner slut counted. Trying to ignore her thoughts, she pouted and glanced up at him. Attempting levity she said, "A little too late to be diligent don't you think?"

"It won't happen again, I promise." Gavin's thumb slid up her jaw, tilting her head back so they were staring into each other's eyes.

"We're safe, and I'm healthy," she finally told him. Luckily, she was taking the pill in order to regulate her cycles. Not like she'd been actively having sex these past few months or years even. Her last relationship had crashed and burned, leaving her a bit shell-shocked. She privately hoped things would work out better for her and Gavin.

"I'm clean too, but if it makes you feel better, next time I'll wear something," he offered like a true gentleman. Cops and their high moral core, she thought with a tiny bit of censure. She liked the wild, thrilling sex.

Cassidy shook her head. She didn't want anything to hinder the sensation of feeling him within her. "No, Gavin. I don't want it."

His chest tightened as he took in a lungful of oxygen and exhaled sharply. "Then, let's blow this joint. I don't know how much longer I can wait to get inside you again."

She stepped back and he followed, helping to rearrange her skirt so she looked somewhat put back together. Quickly he yanked his jeans up and stuffed his still-aroused length behind the thick material. After fastening the belt, he straightened his shirt.

Pulling out a wad of paper towels, he twisted the faucet for the hot water and doused them, wringing out the excess fluid. A few steps brought him near to her. "Cass, let me tend to you."

Parting her legs, she trembled at the touch of the warm, wet towels on her inflamed skin. He dabbed gently, cleaning her up with tender affection. Afterward, she dipped down and grabbed her torn panties, tossing them into the trash. "Looks like I'm going

commando now." she muttered.

Gavin smirked, "Good. The less in my way, the better."

A low chime drew his attention. He shoved his hand into one pocket and pulled out his cell phone. His lips twisted into a grimace and Cassidy just had to ask, "What is it?"

"A missed call from Mason," Gavin replied with irritation. "It better not be work related," he said grouchy.

"Hot to get into my bed, detective?" she teased.

"Fuck, yeah. Your bed, your kitchen table, hell, anywhere as long as it means you and me going at it again. I've waited much too long for you, Cass," he said with a hint of arousal coloring his hoarse tone.

"You better check that message then, before making plans you can't keep." She batted her eyelashes at him suggestively and smiled when he groaned a sound of sheer masculine desire.

As he dialed his mailbox and listened to Mason's voicemail, Cassidy moved to the sink and set about fixing her hair into a quick twist. It was too messy to do anything else with it. Taking another handful of towels, she doused them with some water and a few pumps of soap. The suds foamed up and a sea-breeze aroma, tickled her nose. She dabbed the wad of wet paper on her cheeks and under her eyes, removing the dark mascara smudges. Okay, she was somewhat presentable now.

"Damn it to hell!"

Cassidy saw Gavin's scowl in the reflection of the mirror. Crap, it was the blasted job. There went all their plans of hot monkey sex on her table. "Work?"

He shrugged. His hand speared into his dark brown hair and ran through the tousled waves. "For the both of us. Our star witness just turned up dead in an alley off Martin Luther King Boulevard, right near the border of Compton and Paramount. Figures it'd be our district. The gangbangers had their own little party tonight, too."

With a sigh, Cassidy moved toward the bathroom door, "Better get on it while the clues are hot."

Inside though, worry plagued her. Everything holding them back from exploring a relationship had been resolved with their case going to court. Now, without the testimony they required to ensure a guilty verdict, they were doomed to head back to the drawing board with an inevitable continuance. Which meant they'd be together again in a working capacity. Intimacy between detectives and district attorney investigators was frowned upon.

Everything had just been shot to shit.

Gavin cursed, obviously deducing the same thing upsetting her. He stalked to her side and paused, reaching for the doorknob, "I don't think I can keep my hands off you, Cass."

She smiled at him and replied, "Then, don't. Though I dare you to try it while at the location. It might be a tad difficult with all those deputies milling about at the crime scene."

He wrenched open the door and waited for her to walk out first. "Tease," he muttered right next to her ear.

"Always," she said with a smirk and a wink.

Gavin's responding grin was surly. "Let's go," he ordered, turning her toward the back of the pub and the exit leading into the parking area.

Chapter Five

Hellfire and damnation. Just when he thought heaven was attainable, freaking chaos ensued. He only hoped they could find some way around this sudden mess because, he knew to the depths of his very soul, there'd be no way in hell to stop him now. One taste of Cassidy and he was a goner. He didn't have the willpower to deny them the exhilaration they found in each other's arms.

He couldn't, and he wouldn't. Consequences be damned and all that other horseshit. She was his woman and no top brass' edicts would change that fact.

Gavin followed behind Cassidy as they made their way through the small hallway to the door. When she paused, mid step, and turned around, he shot her a questioning look.

"My jacket," she explained.

He nodded, "I'll get it for you. Stay here."

A line creased her pretty forehead where ebony ringlets bounced with her steps. "Gavin, I'm more than capable of retrieving my coat."

Crossing his arms over his chest, he hesitated and said, "I know, Cass, but I don't want to strangle any one of those brain-dead, moronic assholes who might fancy ogling your swollen breasts, or leering at the just-fucked blush lingering across your cheeks."

She sighed, shook her head, making the loose curls dance, fluttering along her neck and throat. Muttering something under her breath about alpha-males and their possessive instincts, she spun around, leaning back against the wall. With a short little wave and fingers waggling, she pointed to the main room of the pub, "Go ahead and get it. Me and my blush will wait right here like a good little girl."

God, he wanted to fuck her all over again, maybe bring out the bad girl within, so he could spank her ass and see *those* cheeks all flushed. His cock surged to life once again, throbbing like a migraine that no amount of Tylenol could alleviate.

Striding determinedly into the darkened room, he paced to the bar where said idiots lounged, sprawled out in an inebriated repose upon several of the bar stools. Gavin frowned, not seeing Cassidy's jacket anywhere. Before he could get his fury all up-in-arms, the server behind the bar motioned for Gavin to meet him at the cash register.

"Got the lady's coat right here," he said while rummaging behind the counter and pulling out her jacket. "Didn't want anything to happen to it while you two were busy," the bartender added with a knowing grin.

Gavin took hold of it and tucked it under his arm. At the last second, he recalled his still open bill. *Oh yeah, the cop skipping out on his check. Good one Marshal*, he admonished himself, and laughed when he remembered Cassidy had one to pay as well. "I need to close out our tabs," he stated while digging into his pocket and retrieving his wallet. Flipping out two fifties, he set them on the counter. "Keep the change."

The bartender nodded his thanks, smiling, and Gavin turned to leave, eager to join up with Cassidy.

"Hey buddy, does she fuck as good as I think she does?" Bryce asked, his head thrown back in a drunken stupor. "God, hearing those moans when you seduced her on the bar-top makes a man's dick ache for more."

Gavin growled, low and ominous, and snarled a vile oath. He stilled, taking up a

deadly stance.

"Shut up you idiot," Jerrod interjected, when he noticed the vicious glare Gavin was shooting them.

"Do what your friend says, and you might not get hurt." Gavin didn't hide his livid response. Curling his hand into a fist, he thought about letting loose and clocking some sense into the dumb-ass.

"I got my shamrock with me tonight. I bet it'll bring me luck with her too," Bryce said confidently while lifting his hand and holding his palm out.

A Blackberry phone, with a jade-green silicone cover, rested in Bryce's meaty hand.

Jesus! He had Cassidy's phone! Bryce had crossed the line into no-man's land. Shit was about to go down.

Gavin braced, ready to fly at the other man and take the low life to task.

"It's okay, Gavin," Cassidy said in a fake, sweet voice. She reached out and plucked her cell out of Bryce's hand. Smartly, she kept her profile at a slight angle so neither man could stare at her breasts. Gavin would have to shoot them if he saw anything like that, and damn it to hell, his berretta was safely under the seat in his car. Fucking figures. A few hollow-points would be a bonus right about now.

"Get them out of your sights, Gavin." Cassidy smiled up at him and reached for her jacket. Wisely, she slung it behind her shoulders, shoved her arms in the sleeves and quickly secured every single button. When the last fastening was done, he exhaled slowly, took two long strides, and came to stand beside her.

"I told you to wait for me," he muttered irritably.

"And *I* told *you* I could take care of myself." Cassidy's lips formed a moue, and he couldn't resist leaning near and covering them with his own in a quick possessive kiss. He needed to mark her in some way as his, to warn off all the panting mongrels. After he pulled away, he slung his arm about her lower back, tucked her into his side and escorted her to the front of the pub.

The bells jangled as he pulled the glass door open and they stepped into the cool, night air.

"Gavin, what are we going to do about..." she mumbled the pressing question.

He squeezed her tighter against him, "I'm not letting this get in our way. We'll figure out something. Let's get to the location and at least see what we're dealing with."

Her head tilted against his shoulder. "Okay," she said in an insecure tone.

Gavin came to a sharp halt and pulled her around to face him. "Let me be perfectly clear, I don't intend to give you up, Cassidy. Not now. Not after what just happened between us in there."

She chewed her lip nervously and Gavin realized something more simmered under the surface. Her eyes reflected caution and distress. "Isn't that what you want as well?" he asked carefully.

"I'm not exactly stellar with relationships. Circumstances always seem to come out of nowhere, and somehow I end up alone, again. Maybe I don't want to get my hopes up only for them to be dashed," she said honestly, her gaze flitting to the sidewalk avoiding his stare.

Stroking his thumb up the line of her throat, he cupped his palm at the nape of her neck, encouraging her to look up and meet his eyes. "Those circumstances made it possible for us to find one another, Cass. I wouldn't change the outcome at all. A

seriously dangerous situation would occur if I had to vie for your affections with some competitor. Besides, I'm not willing to let this new incident obstruct anything between us. We'll find a way. I promise."

The forced smile she gave him tore at his heart. Shit. She didn't believe his pledge. Gavin decided then and there to use any means necessary to prove his assurance. Bracing against the urge to smash something, Gavin stewed internally. If fate wasn't fucking around with them, then the job certainly was. Adding her demons from the past to that little cluster-fuck, tipped the scales in favor of failure. Except, Gavin did *not* fail. He had a near perfect solve-rate in his drug busts. Tenacious, bold, and determined, once he set his mind to something he almost always attained it. And, it would be the same with Cassidy. Once he figured out what the hell to do about the murder, their jobs, her issues, and the climbing arousal mauling his restraint.

Jeez, wasn't this Saint Patrick's Day turning out great?

They walked the length of the sidewalk, arm-in-arm, and turned the corner to the parking area. "Let's take my car. I'll send Mason back for yours."

She considered for a moment and said, "Need to get my briefcase and badge first."

Once they retrieved her stuff, they walked to Gavin's shiny, blue 1969 Challenger. Two white racing stripes ran lengthwise on the hood to the top of the car, and followed the line all the way to the rear spoiler. He loved that car and babied it with tender affection. The current wax job shone with a high gloss while the interior was upgraded for maximum comfort. The butter soft, leather seats absorbed some of the roaring made from his big-block engine. It was every man's dream muscle car. And now he'd have his hot looking woman sitting right beside him while he drove it.

"Nice car," she commented blandly.

"What? You don't appreciate a bit of muscle?"

She looked back at her eco-friendly hybrid and smirked. "Honestly, I've never been inside one."

Hell, she was in for a treat and maybe some distraction too. "Well, baby, get in and lets go. It is high time you experience zero to sixty in the blink of an eye."

Shooting him a skeptical glare, she did as he instructed.

Gavin sat in the driver's seat and fit the key into the ignition. He toggled the shift into neutral and the engine roared to life. "Hold on Cass, this is almost as good as sex!" Releasing the clutch, he revved the car into first and shot out through the lot and onto the street. Shifting up, he sped through second and third gear; then eased the Challenger onto the straightaway, heading for the Golden State Freeway onramp. Free-flowing traffic made it possible for him to barrel down the long ramp and merge into the lane. He depressed the accelerator and the car kicked into fourth. Finally, he traversed three more lanes and hopped into the carpool. Slipping into fifth, he let the Challenger gather speed. He dared a glance at Cassidy. Her eyes were wide and staring, her hand wrapped so tightly around the "oh shit" handle that her knuckles were white and trembling.

"You scared?" he asked but didn't attempt to hide his amusement.

"You are going to get a ticket for reckless driving, Gavin," she replied through clenched teeth.

"Nah, registered it to the department. No Triple-A with a gun is gonna be ballsy enough to pull me over," he said confidently.

Gavin could tell she tried not to grin at the Sheriff's department's nickname for the

California Highway Patrol.

"Then you're going to get us killed if you continue at that speed," she replied and this time her anxiety laced every word. He backed off on the acceleration, allowing the car to slow down a smidge.

"I have EVOC training, Cass, remember?"

She laughed and one of those adorable dimples decorated her cheek. "I don't care how many times you took a patrol car through a slick course as a recruit Gavin, this is no cruiser and you're still going way too fast."

He tempered the speed down even more, wanting her comfortable, not hanging on for dear life. "Better?"

She shot him a fleeting look, and he didn't miss her eyes glancing to the speedometer. "*Barely* legal, but yes, much better."

Gavin snickered at her reply. Releasing his hand from the stick shift, he reached across the small space and grasped hers. It felt right holding her fingers within his. "I'd much rather take this baby on Pacific Coast and zoom up the highway with the windows down, taking in the ocean breeze. Even more so, I want you to be there with me."

Her other hand let go of the handle and slipped down the line of her seatbelt, settling in her lap. She was more relaxed now and Gavin suddenly realized he truly cared about how she felt. She meant far more to him than just a great fuck. He didn't want to make her uncomfortable.

"That sounds nice. Maybe we can, once this case is finally put to bed."

Oh yeah. Good idea. Focusing on the plans he wanted to make with her, once the case was closed, he continued, "Take a drive up the coast and spend the day at Balboa Park in San Diego. Get some ice-cream cones and take a long, leisurely walk in the sand."

Cassidy tipped her head back against the headrest, her eyes nearly closed. She looked so beautiful like that and he wondered what she might look like with that raven-black hair spread out on his pillow. Her lithe, athletic body draped only by his bed sheet. A vision of her long legs spread open as he pulled the sheet away, revealing the shiny silver piercing and her wet pussy to his view, made his mouth dry and his cock surge. He swallowed back his need and let a deep breath escape between his gritted teeth.

"You're thinking of something other than the murder, Gavin, aren't you?" she said lightly. When he glimpsed at her, he followed her line of sight and realized she could make out his blasted erection in the dim interior lighting.

Continuing with the distraction theme, he said, "I'm thinking about that piercing you have, Cass. Whatever led you to get it done? Not that I'm complaining, it's the sexiest thing I've ever seen."

She chuckled at his comment and turned to face him more fully. Her shoulder leaned into the back of the seat and she crossed her legs until her knees were angled right up against the shifting consol.

"After my probation ended at the district attorney's office, a few of my co-worker friends and I decided to take a weekend trip to Mexico. We stayed at a beach resort in the Yucatan. On the second day, while out perusing souvenirs, we noticed a shop that offered more than the typical belly-ring piercings. Turns out, it was run by the most highly respected tactician in the piercing industry. I was curious about the procedure and she assured me it was virtually painless, even less than having the earlobe done. I didn't really

believe her, but when Juliet piped up with her own interest for a piercing, the both of us decided to do it. In the end, it really didn't hurt, *that* much."

Gavin's eyebrows rose up at the mention of austere, all-business Juliet Talbot. The D.A. Investigator every cop wanted to avoid. "I can't even begin to *imagine* Miss Talbot doing anything remotely wicked."

Cassidy reached out and playfully smacked him on the chest. "Underneath all that tough veneer is one wild, wanton woman," she said with a bit of pluck. Gavin didn't believe her and frowned with total skepticism.

"*If* you could find someone brave enough to fuck the starch out of her, maybe," Gavin teased. "So she got herself a ring down there, too?" he asked with patent curiosity.

"Well, actually, she got something different," Cassidy hedged.

Good lord, they had something different for that type of decoration? Gavin's mind spun as he thought of the implications. A sudden notion popped into his thoughts and he impulsively voiced it, "Are you pierced in other places, Cass?" His stare dropped down to the swell of her breasts, hidden from his view behind her dark, leather coat.

Shaking her head, she chuckled at his query. "Nope. Only the one there." Licking her full, bottom lip she turned her curious stare up at him and grinned as she asked, "What about you Gavin? Would you get a piercing anywhere?"

A virulent, scorching image of her luscious mouth wrapping around his cock, the velvet brush of her tongue soothing over a ring pierced through the tip, made him nearly crash his beloved Challenger. Hell, if there was a tattoo parlor on the way to their crime-scene, he might just investigate the benefits of getting a Prince Albert. "I'd do it for you baby," he finally replied.

"A discussion for another time," she muttered as Gavin downshifted and took the off-ramp onto Long Beach Boulevard. The light turned green and he sailed through the intersection. A mile later, he made a quick U-turn, taking them north on MLK and heading straight into a darkened alleyway. The lights shining down the gloomy road were red and blue flipping about in a radiating pattern. Two, bright spotlights from a patrol car speared the darkness, illuminating the scene.

"Damn shame we lost her," Gavin grumbled

"Starlight Jones lived a hard life, detective. It was only a matter of time." All business now, she released her seatbelt and straightened her coat. Leaning down she picked up her briefcase. Clipping her badge on the lapel of her jacket, she turned to open the door. She paused for a moment, and faced him once again, "After this?" she let the question linger between them.

"Cass, I'm so *not* done with you tonight." He reached out and gripped her shoulders, hauling her over the elbow-rest compartment, practically into his lap and captured her mouth with a deep sweeping kiss. She sagged into his arms, her relief apparent, and for just a few more seconds he held her within his secure embrace.

"It'll be a real bitch waiting until we are done here, but know this, baby I can't get enough of you. Hell, you've gone straight to my head."

When she pulled back, a smile quirked on her lovely kiss-swollen mouth, and she ran her fingers alongside his waistband, dipping low to find the rigid evidence of his hard-as-nails cock. "And other places, too. Good. 'Cause I'm wet and aching for you again, too." With a final squeeze, she scooted away and pulled the door handle.

Gavin was out of the car in a flash, rushing around to the other side. Being Mister

Gallant, he escorted her from the vehicle, to their now deceased head witness.

It was going to be one fucking long night. So much for imbibing in some green ale and a wishing for a pot o' gold. Right now, he had to deal with the ramifications of his star witness' death, while sporting the hard on from Hell.

So much for the luck of the might-be-a-smidgen Irish.

Chapter Six

They weren't on official business at this location. Nevertheless, Cassidy wanted to fish for some reason to help her understand why they lost Starlight Jones a week prior to the case going to trial. All those precious hours of work, flushed down the toilet with one well-aimed bullet. Crap. Why couldn't the bad guys retaliate ten days from now? Cassidy thought petulantly. She liked Gavin. A lot. Her affinity for him went beyond the sex. *That* was good, she wasn't going to lie to herself. The man made her feel amazing. They simply felt right together, like two puzzle pieces fitting side-by-side, merging into one, vivid picture. He made her feel beautiful and wanted. Cassidy longed to believe his declaration about sticking around.

Maybe she should take the same approach. Together, they could find a way around the roadblocks and issues. Losing Gavin would hurt too much. Resolved to let go of the past and move forward with hope, Cassidy picked up her pace and confidently walked beside her man.

She couldn't prevent the investigator inside her from assessing the scene. With a trained eye, she looked at the handful of clues and recognized they really had nothing to go on. This alley reeked of old rotting garbage that the slight March breeze didn't sweep away. The murderer hadn't even bothered to conceal the kill, leaving poor Starlight sprawled in front of an overfilled dumpster like a bit of refuse. Monsters, the lot of them, she sniped in her thoughts. Underneath the fetid stench, she identified the taint in the air of their victims' blood. Nothing jumped out at her that they could use as damning evidence, clearly another dead-end. *Yay.*

Gavin flipped his badge at one of the homicide investigators standing closest to the sheet-draped body. A decisive nod from the officer allowed them to pass by the yellow crime-scene tape to the command post. Carefully, they picked their way around two evidence markers highlighting bullet casings. Together, they strode over to the cruiser where a young deputy leaned against the driver's side door. His shorn hair was gelled up into a precise flat-top, his tan and green uniform pressed immaculately. Cassidy knew, before he even looked up, that the poor thing was a trainee. He held a steel clipboard while frantically writing details on a report sheet. When they stopped in front of him, his chin lifted a notch. The splotchy red patches on his cheeks outlined the pasty, white features of his boyish face.

Gavin lifted his flap-badger once again, and the young man responded by snapping to attention.

"Where's your daddy, deputy?" Gavin asked in a no-nonsense tone, using the department slang to inquire about the training officer's whereabouts.

The trainee peered over his shoulder and Cassidy followed his line of sight. Another radio-car idled a few yards away, and a tough looking two-stripe deputy stood with one hand on the open door, in an obvious conversation with a fellow cop.

"My T.O. is conferring with the handling unit. He bought this one for me." The deputy swallowed and sniffed shallowly, "It's my first murder."

Gavin let his stare linger for a moment. Cocking his head to the side, he surveyed the beige, tarp-covered body of the well-known prostitute. "It gets easier, I promise."

The young man nodded and turned his attention back to his forms, recording details for later report writing.

"Let's go talk to his training officer," Gavin suggested, and Cassidy pivoted on her heel to follow him.

"Why isn't Mason here?" she asked casually, while wondering where Gavin's partner at Narco had run off to.

"Compton's newest Starbucks, if I had to guess," Gavin replied with a smirk. "Want him to bring you back something?"

Cassidy shook her head. She didn't want coffee right now. What she really craved was Gavin in her bed, doing wickedly scandalous things to her body. She shivered with the potent image of his hard body covering hers, arching into her as he thrust so deep. A tingle of arousal lit up between her thighs and she felt the evidence of her need coating the inner folds at the apex there.

She squeezed her legs together to stave off the aching. Big mistake. A tremor rippled outward from her pussy and she gasped at the pulsing hollowness.

"Cass," Gavin muttered with a clenched jaw. "That look will get you in trouble again."

Cassidy shot him a reproachful glare. "Detective, you wouldn't dare do that here!" she whispered heatedly.

"Don't underestimate me, Cassidy. The way you're twitching your ass in that too-tight, short, miniskirt is driving me insane. You think a bathroom is wild? Try fucking in an alley."

Taking in a calming breath, she attempted to rein in her over-active libido. "I can't help it Gavin. There's nothing there to help act as a buffer. I feel everything."

He groaned, low and deep, his back molars grinding as he physically warred within himself not to do anything rash. Cassidy could see his inner fight as it played out on his face, burned so hot in his heated stare.

"Fuck, it would be so easy too. Just loose my cock and lift your skirt, slide right back into your tight pussy."

Cassidy hugged herself, attempting to stave off her reaction to his stimulating proposal. Even through her shirt, she felt the pebbled, taut peaks of each nipple. The lace of her bra abraded them, increasing the sensitivity. A sigh slipped from between her lips as she shifted her arms underneath those puckered, swollen tips.

"God! There too, Cass?" he all but groaned the question.

Nodding, she refused to look at him, knowing that he did nothing to conceal his rampant desire. "We're at a crime scene Gavin. For Pete's sake, try to show a little respect to the deceased!"

He huffed and replied sullenly, "Fine. But once we get back in my car, all bets are off."

She smiled and cocked her head to the side, catching his eye. "That a promise?"

"Bona fide, baby." He reached over and wrapped his arm around her waist, his hand clasped possessively at her hip as he walked beside her the rest of the way.

They stopped in front of the older deputy and Gavin went through the whole badge flipping, cop-to-cop greeting initiation. Next, he slipped into detective mode.

"What do you got, Summers?" he asked the deputy.

"Call came into the Century station emergency desk. Shots fired and one possible

victim. Unit 212 Edward responded and started the general work-up. I bought the call for my trainee. He needs to learn the paper for this type of crime. Can't be choosy with our callouts."

Gavin nodded, "Anything hinky?"

The training officer shook his head. "Nah, simple execution-style. Suspected gang involvement, and if the Graffiti tagging is current it was probably a retribution killing, too. What's your involvement?"

Explaining the details, Gavin told the deputy about their case, and Starlight Jones's scheduled testimony against a very bad Rowdy Boys gangbanger who was up for drug trafficking and capital murder charges.

When he was done, they exchanged business cards.

"Sucks to be you, D," Summers teased.

Gavin looked back at the trainee and grinned. "Least I don't have to do paperwork on a holiday like tonight."

Summers smirked. "Poor little lamb. He's got a ton of paper to do this evening, while I sit there and drink my java. Not as good as green ale and a heaping plate of corned beef with hash, though. Have a Guinness for me. No doubt, I'll be here all damn night."

They shook hands and the training officer returned to his conversation. Gavin grasped Cassidy's fingers within his and led her around the blockade, heading toward the Challenger. As they neared the classic car, bright headlights illuminated the area. The next moment, a banged up, white, factory-style, no-frills Ford Taurus came to a stop right beside Gavin's car.

"Mason's finally decided to join us," Gavin chided under his breath.

She knew Gavin was being sarcastic. The two detectives had worked together for several years. Their camaraderie went beyond the job and they treated each other almost like brothers.

Cassidy watched as the door to the unmarked county car opened and detective Tyler Mason unfolded from the driver's side. Tall, muscled, and completely gorgeous described Tyler perfectly. His golden blond hair was sun streaked and cropped, almost a little too long for regulation. Autocratic features screamed blue-blood, but the harsh angles of his face belied the years of stress he experienced working first as a beat cop, Operation Safe Streets, and finally at narcotics bureau. A glint in his green eyes warned not to mess with him; he was both dangerous and cocky. The way he smiled that devilish grin warned he wasn't all business.

He wore a simple charcoal-gray button-up t-shirt with an LASD insignia emblazoned on the upper right pocket, and a pair of low-slung jeans that fit his muscled thighs like a caress. On his belt shone his badge, and a bulge at his waist warned he was armed and on duty. In his left hand he gripped a tall coffee cup, hot steam escaped from the plastic lid.

"Well, well, looky who the cat dragged in," Tyler called out.

"Bout time you showed up, Mason," Gavin rejoined with a chuckle.

"Hell, I wasn't the one out partying with the leprechauns," Mason replied with a flirty pout. "Nor did I have a sweet looking date hanging on my arm, like it seems you do. There I am, working my ass off on our cases, while you were out having a wild night with Investigator Hyatt. Bastard."

"Jealousy looks like shit on you, Mason," Gavin retorted coolly.

"I might be consoled if she wants to give me a wild time too. I'm all for dumping the

files on you, in lieu of a little bump and grind on the dance floor. Bring on 'Danny Boy;' it's my turn to slow dance with her." If anyone else had the guts to taunt Gavin like Tyler had, it would never be excused. By the sound of Gavin's rough curse, friends or not, detective Mason was treading on dangerous territory tonight.

Gavin took three long steps and closed the space between them. Cassidy hung back, knowing instinctively that it would make things uncomfortable if she got too close to the other man. Alpha-male bullshit and testosterone posturing made it a very tense situation. She watched as Gavin came up next to his partner. Mason leaned against his car. With one knee bent and his foot propped up on the front fender, he raised an eyebrow in playful challenge and sipped his coffee with an amused look on his face.

"Last I recall, you swapped me bunnies and eggs for shamrocks and the Blarney Stone. I won't complain like a sissy when I have to work Easter. Besides, you aren't dressed appropriately for tonight," Gavin said confidently.

"Says who?" Tyler smirked.

"Me. You forgot something, detective," Gavin uttered. Next, he reached out and grasped a chunk of Mason's upper arm, right below the claws of a scorpion tattoo. With a quick pull, Gavin pinched Tyler a bit harder than was necessary.

"Son-of-a-bitch! You made me spill some of my Macchiato. I'm gonna get you for that Marshal!" Tyler reached back to punch Gavin in the shoulder.

Cassidy sighed. Boys will be boys, she supposed. There she stood, naked under her skirt and utterly aroused. She could think of nothing but Gavin laying her down and taking her to heights of passion she'd never experienced, and he was horsing around like a school boy. She rolled her eyes at their antics and fought the urge to tap her foot impatiently.

"Gavin! I'm getting cold," she called sweetly. "Down, *there*," she added bluntly.

He stiffened and pulled away from Tyler. "You got the handle on this, Mason?"

Tyler nodded his head. "Go ahead; leave me to wallow in the paperwork nightmare without my standard shot of espresso."

"You'll survive." Gavin declared and didn't hang around for Tyler to say anything else. He stormed to Cassidy's side, laced his fingers around her wrist, and all but yanked her to his car. Settling her into the passenger seat, he paused for her to connect her seatbelt.

"Hand me your car key." He held his palm out waiting for her to comply.

She jabbed her fingers into the tiny back pocket of her skirt and brought out the single key. Ignoring Gavin's objecting look, she deposited it in his hand.

After slamming her door, she watched him bolt to where his partner lounged indolently on the car. Gavin rapidly dumped the key into Mason's care. They spoke for a brief moment, sharing information about the case and the location of her car, no doubt. Cassidy couldn't help but stare at Gavin's gorgeous ass. His slouchy, beat-up denim jeans hugged it perfectly. It made her mouth water just thinking about the shifting muscles tightening as he bucked up into her. A spasm clenched deep inside her pussy, and she shivered as need churned at a slow burn in her core. Heat infused every pore and cell of her body. She shed her jacket, tossing it to the backseat. The warmth clung to her, though, burning up from the inside out. God, she really wanted more of her handsome detective.

She realized this car really was a treat. Soft and pliant seats practically hugged her

while the lemon polish on the faux-wood dashboard lingered in the small interior. A bit of wax shined to a high gloss gave off the distinct smell of Carnauba, and she wondered if he had taken pains with making his car look perfect for her. The bluish glow from the display lights made it a very intimate atmosphere. She found herself imagining that drive up the coast, enjoying the rumbling of the muscle-car and the man who drove it.

Gavin ran around to the front of the car and practically dove into his own seat, firing the engine up and hauling ass back onto the main road. He asked for directions, and Cassidy explained the best and quickest route.

Once he was cruising in fifth gear, he strummed his fingers around the shifter. He had such masculine hands. Cassidy looked on as he gripped the round top of the stick shift. She knew those strong fingers could bring her to heights of amazing passion.

"Hold on baby, I'm of a mind to warm you until you're so hot for me, you'll be burning up."

Cassidy worked her skirt up just enough to part her thighs. "How about you start right now?"

A masculine groan filled the enclosed space as Gavin's arm moved and he set his hand on her knee. "Hell yeah. Right, the fuck, now."

Chapter Seven

Like smooth silk. Gavin felt the warmth of her soft skin. His palm tingled with the slight friction. He inched his hand up further, dragging his fingernails, leaving behind a light scratch, enough pressure to confuse the senses. Her indrawn breath didn't stifle a throaty moan and the sound encouraged his motion. He continued upward, slipping underneath her skirt and dipping down along her inner thigh.

"What am I going to feel, baby? Are you on fire for me?" He tried to temper his voice, aiming for a seductive croon. Instead, it came out like a growl, full of heated desire that he could do nothing to hide.

"Gavin, don't tease me," she pleaded.

He trailed the edge of one garter with his fingertip, soothing her supple flesh and drawing an intricate pattern. Long sweeps ambled up the toned muscle. Each swirl delved higher, until he felt the first brush of her damp curls on his knuckle. With his thumb, he nudged the rigid little pearl below and circled it, tracing the warm metal ring and flicking the tight nerve bundle again.

God, he longed to turn his head and watch her, see the flush spread on her cheeks as he worked his fingers faster, plying pressure to her clit. He resisted the urge and kept his eyes on the road ahead. But, oh, how he could feel. Pulling away a little, he glided over the dew-drenched folds, reveling in the slippery evidence of her desire. "So wet and swollen for me, Cass."

She squirmed in the seat, clenched her thighs together preventing him from retreating and forcing him to caress her slick core once again. Perfect. He wanted her mind on only one thing; him.

"More," she panted, tilting her pelvis up to meet the palm of his hand. It burned him; the hot slippery moisture clung to his skin. He brought his hand up, dampened the unyielding bud with her cream, and rolled it between his fingertips.

"Like this?" Gavin repeated the motion, increasing the pressure, plucking her distended clit once, then twice.

"No! I need it deep!" Cassidy cried. Gavin nearly saw stars wash in front of his eyes as her tone curled around him with claws of intensity, tearing his control to shreds.

Pairing two fingers together, he dipped down and penetrated her as deeply as they would go. "That, Cass?" He fucked into her and withdrew.

A strangled moan ripped from her lips.

"Harder, baby?" Not waiting for her to respond, he speared within her again. Her head rocked back and forth on the headrest. He dared a quick peek, saw her ringlets tangling with her frantic movement and loosening it from the twist.

"I bet you taste like sugar, baby. So sweet and warm, like candy." Pulling his hand from the tight clasp she had on him, he brought it up to his mouth and his tongue flickered out, tasting her passion. "My own special indulgence, Cass. Damn I can't wait to bury my tongue there again. Sip at all that sweetness."

They were getting close to her place. The last main street was coming up. He didn't bother to use the turn signal and flew through the intersection, barely managing to down shift before he popped the clutch. Revving the engine, he ground the gears into the last

position. "We're almost there, Cassidy. I don't know if we'll make it in the door."

She squirmed in her seat, and he registered a flash of movement. The next second her fingertip meandered on top of the waistband of his jeans, finding the top button and releasing it. "I want to taste you, too," she mumbled, but Gavin made out the words clearly, his cock surging with a painful ache at the thought of those beautiful, full lips closing around the inflamed head and sucking.

"I'll be lucky if I don't stall the car prior to entering your neighborhood," Gavin declared huskily.

"What about that EVOC training?" she said with a seductive pout and she moved, so quickly he didn't even see her unclip her seat belt. She curved her knees underneath her until she was all but kneeling on the bucket seat. When she leaned over the console, Gavin tensed, knowing what she planned to do. And he could do nothing to stop her because he wanted her to do it. Would die for her to take him like this.

"Just a taste, Gavin," she breathed the words in a low whisper, the exhalation wafting out on his bare flesh. Slender fingers worked at lowering the zipper, only enough to slip her hand down into his pants. She took hold of his length and pulled it free.

"Cassidy," he said her name gruffly. Gavin gritted his jaw, at the same time that she swept down and suckled the inflamed crest into the heated depths of her mouth.

Like heaven, Gavin thought. Warm, wet, and sucking him with tight rasping pulls. The tip of her tongue lapped and teased, swiping the hypersensitive spots on the underside of his cock.

"You can do more baby, take it deeper," he moaned and it rumbled in his chest. Damp heat enfolded his erection, suckling friction worked along the throbbing shaft. He almost tossed his head back and begged her never to stop. It killed him to keep his eye on the road. God, but did he crave seeing her mouth around his cock.

One of her fists enclosed about the base, glided up and down meeting the deeper plunges of her mouth. She twisted and moved up. Squeezing hard, she drew on the crown and lashed the tiny slit.

"Suck it, Cass!" Gavin demanded. His hand reached out and grabbed her head, fisting those silken curls in a tight grasp. "Deeper, baby, take it all." He pressed her down and she opened her mouth wider, the head parting her swollen lips and meeting the eager brush of her tongue. "Relax just a little. Take it further."

She scooted closer and tucked her knees underneath her belly. Tentative strokes of her thumb traipsed down the heavy vein on the underside of his shaft, all the way to the tight spheres below. She drew her fingernails together. The dragging pressure shot a bolt of lightning into the midst of his aching balls. It coursed out from her tentative pinches, pulsed up his erection and a spurt of his seed ripped from the head.

"That's what I want!" Cassidy declared as she propped one elbow on his thigh, laving the bead with a hot wet swipe of her tongue.

"Fuck!" Gavin shouted.

"Mmm," she hummed and twined it with another harsh suck.

He clenched all his muscles, bracing against the onslaught and resisting the climbing need to let go and climax. Peeling around the cul-de-sac, he shoved the shifter into neutral and coasted the last twenty yards to her house. The car sailed into the driveway and Gavin jammed the parking brake in with a rough kick.

"Enough, Cassidy!" Gavin shouted abruptly. He grasped her shoulders, dragging her

away from his aching dick. Pausing for only a moment, he reached into the side pocket on the car door. He retrieved his spare, used only for training, handcuffs and tucked them so they hung from his belt at the small of his back. Next, he wrenched the door open. Mindless of his disheveled state, he ran around to her side of the Challenger. The door flew open before he could reach it. She flung herself out and into his waiting arms.

Her long, beautiful legs went around his hips as he lifted her to him. With lengthy, erratic steps, he moved quickly to the gated atrium that led off to her doorway. The arch of ivy muffled them from prying eyes, and Gavin's breath scissored out as she ground her wet mound against his straining shaft. He needed to kiss her again and tilted his chin, claiming her mouth. Backing them to the wall, he traced the sides of her face with his fingers, bracketing her cheeks in his palms. Holding her still, he sought more, losing his mind to the heady play of their tongues swirling and chasing one another.

She rocked into him, grinding her pussy on his pounding erection. Pulling away took amazing strength, but he didn't want to wait anymore to have her. Letting her legs go, he set her down beside him.

"Key?" he asked impatiently.

She withdrew it, this time, from the front pocket of her skirt. He seized it from her outstretched hand. It took two attempts for him to jostle the key home and turn the lock. The door opened and they moved into the dark foyer, Gavin closing the door firmly behind them. Cassidy strode into the living room and Gavin tracked her steps like a predator, his eye trained on every move she made. He undid the last few inches of the zipper until the jeans sagged to his hips. With his cock pounding for attention, he fisted it, jerking up and back trying to stave off the throbbing ache, demanding he bend Cassidy over and plunge in deep.

Swiftly, he came up behind her. Taking hold of her shirt, he pulled it off and tossed it to the ground. With a quick twist of his wrist, her lacy bra followed.

"Get your skirt off, baby. I can't fucking wait any more!" Gavin demanded gutturally.

"You, too," Cassidy ordered, her luscious, creamy breasts lifting and falling as she took in tight, excited breaths. From the side profile, he could make out the red-tinged tip, distended and swollen. She turned her head to the side, looking back at him from the corner of her eye. One of her finely arched eyebrows rose in challenge. Hooking her fingers in the denim waistband, she peeled the tight skirt down her hips, sweeping it to the floor. After stepping out of it, and kicking off her shoes, she arched her spine, the tease, giving Gavin a shot of her flawlessly curved ass-cheeks.

"Don't tempt me like that, Cassidy," he warned in an edgy grumble.

"Or what, detective?" She bent at the waist, purposely exposing more of her glorious butt, and a teasing show of glistening, pink skin in the space between.

"Leave on the garters and stockings," Gavin directed hoarsely. The sight rocketed through his brain. It made him harder than an iron rod looking at those tiny bows, holding up the shimmering stockings. It left him in awe of her beauty. Sexual hunger propelled him and he took two space-eating strides, capturing her up against his chest. Rocking side to side, he ground the length of his throbbing cock against her pert ass. She reared back into him, fighting for the upper hand, seeking control. Curling his arm around her, he inched his palm to the middle underneath her breasts and splayed his fingers wide, anchoring her in place. Tilting close, he caught her earlobe with his lips, rasped the satiny

skin, and bit down. "Or we'll go to the couch where I'll spank you. After your ass blushes up nice and pretty, I'd part your thighs, working my cock right into that hot, tight pussy until you beg me for more."

A little sigh of anticipation could not hide the way her body tensed at his explicit words. "First the cuffs and now the spanking. I think it's all threats and no delivery," she replied, rubbing against him with deliberately swaying hips.

"Be careful, Cass," he warned, the muscles in his thighs quivering with the exertion as he battled against his warring needs.

"No," she said in total defiance. One of her shoulders flexed and her arm came around, to the space at the small of her back. Questing fingers sought his blatantly aroused length. "I want it *all*, Gavin."

He braced for the sweeping touch of her fingers, the small palm clasp his dick, running up and down the shaft. "You don't know what you're asking for, Cassidy," he managed to find the voice to warn.

She shook her head, disagreeing. "I know I want you naked, to feel you above me, the incredible burn when you thrust inside, stretching me and telling me to take you." A shaking swallow and she cleared her throat, adding, "I want it all, that possession I know you are holding back from me."

Gavin shuddered at the image she spoke of and, hell, he desired the same thing too. "It's gonna be fast and deep, baby. Maybe too much to take."

Arching her spine, she rolled her pelvis again, "Do it Gavin, before I die waiting for it."

He didn't think anymore. Reaching around to the back of his jeans, he ripped the handcuffs dangling precariously from his belt and brought them around to her arm. Clasp her wrist, he pushed the cool steel to the fragile skin and locked it in place. Quickly, he grabbed for her other arm and did the same, restraining her hands behind her back. Three steps propelled them to the side of the couch and he set his hand on her spine, in the space at the center of her shoulder blades.

"Down," he ordered, adding pressure until her belly settled on the suede sofa arm. "Remain silent," Gavin ordered, his hand smoothing down her side, in a mock play of patting her down.

"Or you will use it against me?" she said with a saucy grin.

He didn't even think as his hand lifted and came down on the upper swell of her ass. "Oh yeah, look at that." Gavin caressed the flushed spot with a gentle stroke.

Her breath rushed out and she squirmed trying to lift herself up, to deepen his touch. Gavin focused on her writhing, the contracting of muscle and the shifting of her limbs.

"*That* all you have, detective?" she cajoled in a sensually laden tone.

Gavin brought his hand down again and again, her well-shaped derriere blushing with each sharp tap. The third time, he let his hand linger, smoothing over both sides and parting her reddened cheeks. Dipping into the space, he moved slowly, forcing himself to feel every inch of her damp flesh. The folds were soaked with hot moisture. A deliberate swirl coated his fingertips and bit by bit he advanced his finger between the grasping muscles there.

A quick retreat and he moved further, finding her straining clit and plucking at the pulsing bud. With his other hand, he reached out and soothed the edges where he spanked her, adding a light drag of his fingernails across the tender expanse.

"Gavin," she whimpered his name.

"You like the burn, Cass?" he asked with a guttural pitch to his words.

"Yes, God, yes," she replied.

"More, baby?" he said, not bothering to hide his mounting excitement.

"Please!" she cried.

Gavin let loose his internal demons, giving her what she asked, tapping her clit, pulling and swirling. He plunged a finger inside her again and again. His free hand continued the intimate strikes on her butt, placing glancing, sensual blows at perfect intervals. Just enough to build the fire, until it raged within her veins as he brought her closer and closer to the precipice.

But he wouldn't let her tumble over the edge. No way! When she came, convulsing with hard, grasping shudders he wanted to be buried inside her all the way to the base, where his balls were soaked in her essence and they attained their pleasure together.

Shivers rippled around his finger and Gavin lost it. "Don't fucking move!" he commanded.

He withdrew from her and she exhaled sharply at the loss of contact. Quick motions worked his pants down and he kicked them away. He toed off his boots, and yanked off the socks. His shirt came next. He nearly shredded the buttons as he tore it from his body.

All space keeping them apart disappeared when Gavin sidled up behind her. Shoving his knee between her thighs, he spread her legs wider, guiding them to each side until she lay against the couch; butt in the air and lifting up on her toes. Spearing two fingers into her clenching heat, he curved them until he found the special spot high up within. Enticingly, he rubbed the area with his fingertip.

"My cock is throbbing, baby. I want in, right here." He fingered the nerve bundle hidden inside her core and she wailed out his name at the repeated exploration.

She bore down and his fingers went deeper, "Gavin, do it!" Cassidy ordered through clenched teeth.

Ripping his hand away, he seized his dick in a firm hold, tensing as it swelled to near-painful thickness. Setting one of his palms on her back, he used the other to guide his length to the scorching flesh of her pussy. "You're going to take it now, all the way this time, Cassidy."

He felt her nod, her body tightening up as a shiver careened throughout her. "Do it."

Nudging the little flexing slit, the crown glided inside and he was immediately engulfed in liquid flames. He couldn't stop himself and grasped both her hips, hauling her backward while spearing his cock past her quivering muscles, penetrating her all the way to the hilt.

Her passion filled cry broke the silence. She gasped, trembled, and swayed, working him inside her further.

"Like a fist, baby. Holding me deep in the heart of your body," Gavin ground out, his words a breathless declaration. "It's like paradise here, Cass." He rolled his hips again, plunging a few inches upward and retreating nearly to the engorged head.

"Don't you dare!" Cassidy yelled. Both of her bound hands curled into fists as she struggled to keep him from withdrawing.

"Never!" he declared and surged forward, powering back into the snug tightness.

Gavin wanted more. Lacing his lower arm underneath her leg, he scooted her off balance, holding the crook of her knee. Sinking within her fluttering sheath, he pitched

forward. "There baby," he crooned.

"Gavin, more!" she called out.

Pulsing ripples massaged his cock, scorching moisture coated the length, and fire surged and ebbed in his veins, coalescing low in the heavy spheres underneath his shaft. "Damn, Cassidy, its fucking bliss."

Her whimpers turned to high-pitched keening. With his every thrust she worked back, meeting the frantic surging and impaling him higher up against her womb. She stood on her tiptoes, her other leg tensing against his arm, increasing the speed of their joining.

"That's right Cass! Hold me there baby!" Gavin penetrated her fully, drew back, surging in again. Sweat beaded on his forehead, rolled down his cheek. He leaned near, working his other arm beneath her stomach. Turning his hand to touch her, he caressed her dampened skin, eager to take one heavy breast within his palm. He caught it in his grasp. Drawing his fingers together, he pulled at the distended nipple. A spasm detonated in her pussy, echoing the intensity of his stroking at her puckered flesh.

She writhed side to side, her spine curving into his chest. A flood of silky cream soaked his cock right when a tremor wracked her entire body.

"Cassidy! Ah fuck, baby!" he groaned. "Give it to me!"

Her walls clamped down on his dick, a vise wrenching tighter and tighter. Only shallow thrusts worked through the storm raining down on his thick, engorged length. Rearing back, she circled about and cried out again, "Gavin, I need...!" A shudder took her breath, her words.

"I know what you need Cass. I'm right here, baby." He ran his hand down her slick belly, speared through her curls, and found her clit. His fingers plied the tight pearl with a tweaking roll.

Impaling her with his cock, he sought to brand her with his possession, marking her with his very essence. The scorching walls compressed around his shaft holding the breadth of his erection in a merciless grip.

"Yes! Yes!" she screamed, her body strung taut and all sound died out, leaving only low gasps.

He increased his pace, surging in and out, deeper and farther, until a shiver streaked up his spine, running straight to the base of his skull. The exquisite pleasure nearly bowled him over.

With a shout, he curled around her body; plunged in as far as he could go and spilled his seed at the mouth of her womb.

Bending over her, he set his cheek upon her back, trying to catch his breath. With each of his inhalations, a hint of her perfume teased his senses. A combination of violet and freesia infused his lungs, emblazoning the scent of her in his brain. From this day on, the bouquet of her arousal twined with those floral notes would instantly arouse him.

"Gavin, if we keep this up, I don't know if I will be able to survive it."

He kissed her soft skin, letting his breath fan out on her sensitized flesh. "You'll survive it, Cass. Again, and again, because there's still so much I want to do with you."

She breathed in, her back rose and fell. "I can only imagine," she teased.

"Let's rest, maybe eat something and you can tell me all about what you're envisioning." Gavin quickly moved away, turning her into his embrace. "First, though, we need to undo these cuffs. You do have a spare key for them, right? I didn't bring mine

in." Good thing all cuffs used the same key.

"Yeah, top drawer of the curio against the right wall." Cassidy laughed, and Gavin shot her a withering look as he strode to the desk, fished out the key, and returned, releasing her from the restraints.

Chapter Eight

Replete and sore in all the right places, Cassidy's mind slowly came back to the pressing events of the night. She watched Gavin pull on his jeans, leaving the top button undone, and she stared unabashedly at the bare, chiseled perfection of his torso. The man was cut. Solid muscles formed his midline, the definition tapered down to his tight abdomen. The ridges there clenched and shifted with his every move. Letting her gaze roam upward, she watched the flex of his shoulders; strong and corded with well honed musculature. She knew he worked out at the station gym on a daily basis, and the resultant evidence made him look imposing and physically powerful.

A darkening shadow on his chin and at the side of his face showed the first hints of rough stubble. She could still feel the rasp of it on her inner thighs from his earlier ministrations. It gave him a dangerous appeal, something beyond the average handsome physique. His features drew her in. From the prominent square jaw with a deep indentation at his chin, to the sharp angles of his profile, he looked virile and wholly male. The slight hollows under his cheekbones gave him a bad-boy air. And those sky blue eyes, so utterly piercing, watched and inspected with a clear intensity. They were the eyes of a detective; always looking, scrutinizing and determined to find the minutest evidence for his cases.

"You like what you see, Cass?" he asked in a slow drawl.

She grimaced playfully, "I want to know how you got such a great tan. You could almost rival a model with that dark skin of yours."

He ran a hand through his wavy, russet colored hair. "Part Cherokee," he replied.

Ah, that explained the lack of hair on his torso, she considered, drawing the conclusion from her minute exposure to the Native culture through Lifetime television movies and paperback stories. Only a smattering of masculine curls on his chest tapered into a thin path at his navel, joining the others below his waistband. "Okay, part Native American, and what ancestors gave you those eyes?"

One side of his mouth kicked up and he propped his chin on his knuckles, in mock contemplation. "Could be anything from German to Welsh. My sister has honey blond hair and the same blue eyes. My guess is the German genetics dominated. What about you, Cass? Pale skin, hair as black as night, and hazel eyes. Someone in your genealogy Celtic?"

She grinned and nodded, "Good guess, close at least. Part Irish and a bit Nordic. Makes for an interesting combination. On my mom's side, it's all Southern. Some great, great, great and so on grandpa, arrived in North Carolina with a land grant from the king of England. According to the paperwork, my relative had a lofty, noble title. Dad's side came from some tiny city in Sweden. It's probably why I only end up sunburned instead of tanned."

Gavin smiled. "You do get a bit pink rather easily." He cocked his head to the side in a mock attempt of examining her features. "A southern belle, huh? I could see you with a pretty bonnet and a parasol. You'd have a bunch of randy Confederate knaves, forming a circle around you, eager to help you cross a muddy puddle."

Rolling her eyes, she went to stand in front of the pile of her clothes. "Right, does

that mean I get to envision you wearing a loin cloth and moccasins, just like they're portrayed on a torrid romance novel cover?"

Tracing his lower lip with his finger, he contemplated her question, and keeping with the book theme, replied, "Only if you play my kidnapped bounty."

A giggle worked its way up and she smiled at the image in her mind's eye. "I take it that means I would once again be bound?"

A tight exhalation followed her declaration and Gavin's eyes sparkled with renewed passion. "Something to consider later, for sure," he said with a bit of huskiness lacing his words.

Bending down, she retrieved the rumpled heap of her clothing. "I'll be right back," she said, turning on her heel and walking to the hallway that led off from the living room. She stopped for a second and looked back at him, "I left my coat in the car, and my cell's in the pocket. Can you get it for me? I'll go find something to slip on."

A sharp nod and he said, "Be right back."

While Gavin went outside to get her jacket, Cassidy stepped into the little laundry room and dumped the bundle in her arms on top of her washing machine. Next, she went to her room, making her way to the attached bathroom. Rolling off her nylons and garters, she tossed them on the counter. She snagged the robe hanging on the back of the door. The soft terry cloth caressed her skin as she put it on, securing the knot at her waist. She took a moment to clean herself up a bit, used the facilities, and clipped her tangled curls back up atop her head.

They had much to talk about now. Cassidy felt anxious about their altered circumstance, and wondered if anything could be done to turn the tide and make it to their advantage. She paced the length of her bedroom. Her bad habit of nail biting reared its ugly head as she considered and discarded possible solutions.

The number one pressing issue was losing Gavin after all that had transpired between them tonight. She could almost feel the budding of a long-term relationship. Cassidy recognized she desired something deeper, too.

Could she give him up?

Shaking her head, she decided the best approach was to sit down and hash it out with him. But, for now, she'd keep her hopes and dreams locked up.

When she returned to the living room, Gavin lounged against the side of her couch, the coat dangling from his fingertips. "Your phone keeps chirping. I think you might've missed a few calls from Danni."

Her lips twisted as she realized he had already checked the cell phone. "Cops *will* be cops", she muttered under her breath.

"Anything else, detective?"

He didn't bother to hide his knowing smirk. "A frantic text message from Juliet as well."

Yeah, Cassidy could see that response from her friend. She held out her hand and Gavin tossed her the phone. Figures he was actually holding it, too. Brazen charmer. Quickly, she scrolled through the message list. First, she sent a quick text to her co-worker, Danni, letting her friend know that she wouldn't be partying anymore tonight. Next, she replied to Juliet, typing out a short explanation for her absence at the bar, in order to quell her friend's fears.

"Gavin? What're we going to do?" Setting her phone on a lamp table, Cassidy

trudged to the couch and sat down.

"I think we have a couple options," he said and came to sit beside her on the sofa.

"I know the D.A. will file a motion first thing tomorrow morning. It'll give us time to dissect the data again," Cassidy explained.

Gavin nodded at her assertion. "Tomorrow, I'll make a call to Property and Evidence, at the department's warehouse in Whittier, to make sure they keep everything accessible."

She frowned at the reminder. The dearth of substantial facts made securing a verdict in their favor nearly impossible now. "Maybe Starlight's deposition can be entered as an exhibit for the prosecution."

Right about now, everything hinged on the circumstantial, paired with a bit of luck. Cassidy despised relying on chance. She worked meticulously on her cases, finding solid proof even a defense attorney couldn't misconstrue. All of that going up in a gunshot unsettled her.

She plucked at the tattered strings of her robe while her frustration grew. Maybe they should fake it and pretend their relationship hadn't grown beyond colleagues.

"I know what you're mulling over Cass," Gavin stated coolly. "It won't work."

Leaning against the fluffy accent pillows, she sulked at his deduction. "I just think we could pull it off for a few more weeks, be platonic at the office, save ourselves the grief of being scrutinized."

He grunted at her diatribe. "Maybe if I fucked you before we left in the morning, a quickie at lunch and when we got home, but I won't be able to keep my hands to myself. I want everyone to know about us. It's a man-thing Cass. Having my woman on my arm is a clear indication of my intentions. I'm not gonna hide how I feel for you. They can go take a flying leap for all I care."

Her stomach flipped at his assertion. Bold and determined to take what he deemed his, no matter the consequences? Unfathomable! "You can't mean it, Gavin!"

A warm, strong hand covered hers and his thumb soothed circles on her knuckles. "I do baby. Is there anything I can do to prove it?" A smile pulled at his mouth, flinty sparks of devilish intentions lit up his sky-blue eyes. "Want me to wear a sign around my neck with the words, 'Investigator Hyatt's smoking hot lover?'"

Cassidy giggled at the inane image. She had no doubt in her mind he *would* wear something like that for her.

"I'm not against bucking the system, Cass. If needs be, I'll call in the union cavalry, set the big-wigs into a groveling frenzy. But I will not act as if I don't have feelings for you."

She shrugged and said, "I don't want to bring us any trouble."

Gavin chucked her under the chin, and crossed the space keeping them apart. His lips brushed her mouth fleetingly. "Cass, it will work out. Whether the case is dismissed, continued for later, or goes to trial as planned. We will hold to what we feel for each other and let the cards fall as they may." He traced her lips with the rough pad of his thumb, her tongue slid out and soothed the tingle his touch incited.

"I like that idea," she finally replied.

"Me too, baby." He inhaled slowly and added, "I'm going to hate seeing you work with some of the other detectives, though. They can be real dicks."

Wrapping her fingers around his wrist, she brought their conjoined hands down to her lap. With a chuckle at his pun, she said, "I have previously worked with them all,

Gavin. That isn't going to change."

He narrowed his eyes on her, his lips twisting indignantly. "Doesn't mean I have to like it. Live with it, yeah. But I'll do my best not to act like a caveman."

Cassidy smirked at his concession. "I'm not too keen on seeing you with any of the fawning investigators either," she shared truthfully.

"They have no appeal to me any longer, Cass, I only want you."

A tentative joy sprang to life within her. She mentally curbed her optimism, still a little bit wary but feeling more confident as the night passed by.

"What a way to celebrate the holiday," she said drolly.

"Do you want me to take you back to the pub so you can celebrate your Irish roots?" he asked cautiously.

"Don't you know, everyone is Irish on Saint Patrick's Day?" she responded with a grin. "Besides, we can party here, by ourselves. I think it's time for an Irish Kiss."

He licked his lips, straightening from his position. "I like the sound of that."

Before she could utter an explanation, one of his hands came behind her neck, cupping her nape and hauled her forward. Their mouths met, his persistent tongue tracing the seam until she opened to his questing sweeps.

Slow, intoxicating, his provocative explorations engulfed her senses, lighting them up with each lingering touch. He sipped at her mouth and pressed hard kisses against her swollen lips. Gently, he soothed the burn with a moist stroke of his tongue.

He tilted her head and pulled back a sliver on an inch, staring down at her. "Cass, you are like a drug, intoxicating me until I'm mindless with need for you."

Cassidy rubbed her mouth fervently to his. "It's intense for me too," she whispered against his warm flesh. "But this isn't the Irish Kiss I meant."

She felt his smile as he drifted to the side and nipped the corner of her mouth.

"Oh, yeah? What did you mean?" She heard the excitement in his hoarse query.

Eager to explain, she glanced up into his vivid, cobalt stare. "It is a traditional Saint Patrick's Day cocktail. I have all the ingredients for it, too."

A devilish twinkle in his eye and a wide smirk made Gavin look devastatingly gorgeous. "You stay here. I'll get the mixings. What do I need?"

Cassidy blinked at his sudden change of demeanor. The sensuality remained but it had turned into playful veneer. She wondered what he might be concocting in those wicked thoughts of his. "There is a bottle of chilled champagne in the fridge. The Bailey's is in the door, too. You need the Midori on the top shelf of the pantry as well. I have the glasses in the hutch. Bring it all back in here and I'll do the mixing."

He repeated the specifics and added, "Why don't you pile all those overstuffed cushions on the floor by the fireplace? When I get back, I'll start the fire and we can relax with our drinks there."

Cassidy nodded her agreement. "I like that idea."

After grabbing each of the big, tasseled pillows, she walked to the space he'd indicated and stacked them for maximum comfort. Eager to get things into a more romantic setting, she pulled the cord to open the fire screen and piled a few logs onto the grate. Twisting the gas key, she took a match from the ornate tin box on the mantle. Striking it, she held it near the igniter and watched as the flames caught with a little whoosh. Adjusting the level until it crackled with building heat, Cassidy tossed the used match into the cinders and set the wrought-iron fireplace cover in place. A sweet, smoky

scent wafted from the fire as the dry chestnut woodchips turned to kindling.

Happy with the result, she scooted back and leaned into the fluffy nest she had created. Lounging in the glow of the flickering flames, she waited for Gavin to return.

Chapter Nine

He came back, holding all three bottles in one large fist. She couldn't even ask about the missing cups, because his intent look fixed on her, taking in her appearance from the top of her head to her feet. The way he inspected her left her speechless.

"Gavin, what about the champagne flutes?"

With his shoulders tossed back, he strolled to stand in front of her. Kneeling down, he set each bottle on the marble hearth. "Nice fire," he said, but he wasn't looking at it.

Cassidy bit the inside of her cheek at his piercing stare. She parted her lips to query him again, but he reached out and set his finger on her mouth, silencing the question.

His large, capable hand hovered above the white robe material, glancing over the tight peak of her breast and crossing to the tie at her belly. Plucking at the knot, he pulled it loose. With an open palm, he moved between both sides and urged them open, exposing her nakedness to his hungry gaze. The muscles of her stomach trembled with his tender roaming. He traced around her navel with a calloused fingertip, dragging it upward and skating into the dip and valley of each fragile rib.

"Beautiful, Cassidy." His hand shaped around the heavy curve of her breast, kneading lightly and drawing his thumb and finger together at the diamond-hard tip of her nipple. Rolling the taut bud, he increased the pressure. Cassidy gasped out loud with the building tension. Sparks of white heat ebbed from his touch.

"So hot, baby. I think it needs a kiss, too."

Cassidy braced for his possession, knowing that his mouth would only stoke the flames. Instead, he pulled away minutely, reaching behind him. He grabbed the Bailey's and unscrewed the cap. The next instant, cold, creamy liquid dribbled onto her rigid flesh and the distinctive aroma of cinnamon tickled her nose.

He set the liqueur back down and retrieved another. The cool, green melon-flavored Midori dripped out from the glass rim, splashing onto her other pebbled tip.

"Now for the bubbly," Gavin said in an eager tone. He uncorked the champagne, letting it drizzle right in the valley between both of her breasts. Rapidly, he set that aside and came up on his knees next to her.

"The perfect Irish Kiss," he murmured while swooping down and swirling his fingers through the moisture.

So many sensations bombarded her at once. The cool liquor, his rasping fingertips, and growing arousal all worked in concert to upset her. She arched her back, lifting up her breasts, silently begging for him to do more.

"You want me to taste *this* Kiss, baby?"

She sucked in a lungful of air as his thumb teased an inflamed nipple. "What do you presume, detective?"

His thick lashes swept down, languorous and sensual. "The clues are certainly there." Gavin dragged his knuckles around one swollen breast, twirling them at the juncture between. "Perhaps I simply need more proof."

Cassidy lifted her hands, cupped both of her aching breasts in her palms, and pushed them together. Capturing the firm peaks with her fingers, she strummed the rigid tips and watched as Gavin's stare turned molten. "Like this?" she whispered hoarsely.

"God, yes," he groaned and bent low, taking one of her offered nipples into his hot mouth. The first flick of his tongue made her stiffen. Each inciting lash detonated a maelstrom of wicked heat within the swollen mound. It grew too extreme, too forceful and she cried his name, begging for something more.

"You're burning up. I believe I can fix that."

The next instant, she felt the cool liquid dousing her again, the tingling effervescence added to the sensual storm. "Gavin," she cried, barely able to make a coherent sound.

"Yes, baby?" he asked in a sinful manner.

His mouth closed around the other nipple. He laved and rasped the tip, drawing on it, sucking the heady combination of alcohol from the distended bud.

Pulsating bursts echoed each restless suck, every teasing stroke. It lanced straight from her aching breasts and rocketed downward, reverberating in her throbbing core. His hand found her other breast and massaged the tender underside. Traveling along the crest of her hip, he drew elaborate swirls with his fingertips and mixed the Irish Kiss concoction all over her belly.

The moment his mouth settled in the indentation just above her feminine curls, Cassidy tensed against the onslaught of sensations careening like a tempest within, gathering low in her womb.

"It's too much, I can't handle it," she managed to say.

He laughed, kissing her abdomen affectionately. "You can. We'll take it slow this time."

Hell, she didn't think she could handle it slow either. He'd taken her to heights she didn't even know existed. Sex with him embodied all things wild, frantic, and mind blowing. But slow ... that would be torture to her senses.

Warm fingers speared through her curls, heading straight for the rigid pearl and its silver ring. True to his word, he took his time enticing the inflamed nerve bundle. He cupped her clit with his palm, dragging it up and back, increasing the pressure with each shift and pull. On every downward motion, he found her piercing and tweaked it. The double stimuli wreaked havoc within her quivering center. She clamped her own hand there, soothing the spasming folds, trying to abate the pulsing emptiness.

"God, Cass! Yes, touch yourself!" The hoarse timbre of his words spurred her on.

He plied more pressure to the ring, twisting it, tempting her beyond reason.

"Do it, baby."

Wetting her fingers in the scorching hot slickness, she slid them forward and teased below her clit. Retreating, she worked one inside her, almost to the knuckle. Pulling out, she repeated the motion, going higher until she met his fingers. He captured her hand in his grasp, laced his own around her two fingers and directed her touches.

"Right there."

She thrashed her head side to side. The unbearable pressure gathering under her fingertips grew extreme. Each stroke wound her higher, like a spring coiled tightly, ready to snap. A rhythmic pounding resounded high up in the very heart of her femininity. Desperate for more, she directed their entwined hands lower, to the moist petals of her center. She ran their conjoined fingers through the slick wetness, pressing in a bit until the muscles clenched around them.

"Gavin," she sucked in a shaky breath through gritted teeth and he made her move in a little deeper. "I want *you* there."

His hand stilled as he looked up at her. Their eyes met and she held his fathomless stare.

In a quick move, he shucked off his pants and lay down next to her. He turned onto his side, facing her. "Come here Cass; let me make love to you."

Shrugging her shoulders, she let the robe slip off her arms and she rolled up into his waiting embrace. One of his thick, muscled thighs slipped between her legs, parting them. He hooked his hand around her calf and swept it up until it curved. She squeezed her leg on his ass, bringing him fully into the cradle of her pelvis. The stroke of his cock against her swollen folds sent a spasm ricocheting inside her throbbing depths.

"Slow," he reminded her.

She nodded, undulating her hips. She needed to feel his jutting length parting her grasping inner muscles.

"A little at a time, Cass. Okay?"

Her breasts heaved up and down, the nipples rubbed provocatively against his sweat-dampened flesh. A strong grip firmed around one of her butt cheeks as he pulled her even closer.

The first hard nudge probed past the dew-slick entrance. An iron hard rod imbedded itself at the opening of her core. Squirming to move him deeper, Cassidy rocked her pelvis, seeking more of the bulging crest. He eased himself an inch further and a cataclysm of strong tremors simmered to the near boiling point.

A bead of moisture gathered at his temple where his pulse pounded out a chaotic tattoo. Cassidy watched it roll down the side of his face, to his cheek and jaw. Curving up, she pressed her mouth to the spot, swiping the droplet with her tongue. The spicy tang burst on her taste buds and she wanted more, couldn't stop herself from closing her teeth and biting him there.

He surged up at her naughty nips, rocked and retreated with each of her little rasping tastes. Cassidy couldn't hide her gratification and tilted her pelvis to accommodate his further penetration. "More, Gavin!" she demanded.

He drove higher, burying himself to the hilt. "Like that?"

All she could manage was a soundless nod of her head. Then he moved. He filled her completely, withdrew, only to drive himself deeply again. He merged them together with each impaling stroke. The hot glide of flesh to flesh, while he sheathed his rampant erection within her, felt overwhelming. She cried out at the tempest brewing in every single cell.

One unrelenting hand settled on her ass and pressed forward so he could grind into her. Each circling drive of his pelvis ignited flashes of radiant light, propelling her closer and closer to that pinnacle of utter ecstasy.

Shallow and even, he kept up the torturous pace, holding back from the powerful claiming he had done the first time. She squeezed her eyes shut tight, her body shivering with the pent up need.

"Look at me, Cass. Let me watch you fly to the heavens."

She forced her eyelids open, and met his passion-filled gaze.

"That's it baby, just *feel* me." He pitched up and rolled his pelvis with a restless fervor, plunging deep and withdrawing. It was a primal cadence, branding her from the inside out. He raised his hips as his pace increased. A current of electrical pulses crashed down upon her, pulling her into a deluge of sensation. His stirring thrusts quickened and

Cassidy writhed, moving of her own accord.

He surged deep inside her and she thrashed about, the spasms doubling in their power as she tried to keep him within her. When he retreated again, Cassidy panted, seeking to regain a semblance of control. Her inner muscles convulsed as a great agony of pleasure reverberated in the empty depths.

Filling her with one swift motion, his mouth possessed hers and he kissed her with wild abandon. Heaving gasps tore from his chest and Cassidy twisted, struggling to take all of him. She arched up, unable to remain still.

"Yes, Cass! Come baby!" he shouted.

They moved closer to the final, glorious peak. He brought her higher, wound her tighter, until a jarring wave crashed into her and an uninhibited scream tore from her throat. A thousand shimmering stars burst behind her closed eyes as her passion crested. Shuddering contractions exploded in her pussy, clamping down on his rigid length and milking him with a fierce quaking tremor.

Gavin stiffened in her tight embrace. A guttural shout followed as he impaled her as deep as he could go. He thrashed up, drew back with a short retreat and pounded into her over and over again. Hot spurts of his seed washed against her, scorching her with radiant bliss. It sent off another shivering climax, and she braced against the assault to her senses.

"Cassidy, shh." Gavin said right below her ear.

Damp trails of moisture lined her cheeks. The overpowering affects of their passion was evident in their labored, ragged breathing.

Darkness pulled at her vision, exhaustion weighing her down. Dimly, she realized he had moved just enough to grab the blanket on the couch-back. He gingerly settled the cashmere throw atop her and tucked her head up on his chest.

"Sleep now, Cass," he murmured gently.

Fatigue pulled her under, and Cassidy gave in, falling asleep in the arms of the man she realized meant more to her than anyone else.

*

Gavin held Cassidy, emotions swamping him that he'd never felt for anyone else. The aloof, cynical cop dissipated for the time being and a proud man emerged in its place. He brushed a messy lock of her black hair off her cheek and realized how amazingly resilient she could be.

He knew their case had taken its toll on her. The many hours they shared brainstorming the facts, determining the tactics to use in the investigation, and following up with interviewing witnesses had brought them closer.

Somehow they just fit. But her past threw up an emotional wall he needed to scale and, somehow, he'd find a way to reassure her of his affection.

Gavin watched the play of light from the flames in the fire. The orange glow, reflected off her pale white skin. He'd left marks on her; like a nip of his teeth, and fingerprints from his restraining hold on her shoulder. A flare of triumph burst to life within his chest at the sight. He liked seeing the remnant of their love-making lingering on her soft skin.

He bet she had left similar ones on him.

Many things whipped through his thoughts as he attempted to find a solution to the work issues. In the end, he realized it wasn't right to drag her into his own rebellion. He could give a fuck about internal affairs looking into their private lives. However, Cassidy

had an excellent reputation at the D.A.'s office and he loathed the idea of tainting it. The best solution would be to transfer the investigation into Mason's more than capable hands. His partner could be a real flirt, but Gavin knew he respected Cassidy and would never tread where he hadn't been invited.

With that issue almost settled, Gavin allowed himself the pleasure of holding her in his arms. Tomorrow, he'd tell her the plan and they could go from there.

After some time, the fire died out and the room turned cool. Shifting to his knees, he carefully lifted Cassidy in his arms and brought her to the bedroom. He left the lights off, heading straight for her big, utterly girly bed. Pulling back the frilly comforter, he set her down on the side farthest away from the door. He curled his body around her, consciously choosing to keep her safe in his embrace. She snuggled against him, finding a comfortable spot.

For as long as he could, he stared down at the beauty he'd chosen to be his. Sleep finally claimed him, and Gavin fell into a deep slumber with a smile on his face.

Chapter Ten

The next morning they walked outside to their cars. It was a good thing Mason had remembered to bring her hybrid back, or one of them would have ended up late to work. Their conversation during breakfast turned out better than she expected. Working alongside Detective Mason made the most sense and allowed her and Gavin to avoid reprimand. He still remained a vital part of the case, though not as the primary source.

All that remained now was the fate of their relationship. The prominent question in her mind was, *would he stick around like she hoped?*

Cassidy paused beside the car door and sought a bit of bravado. She really wanted to know where they were going to go from here.

"See you in court, detective," she said softly.

"And afterward, investigator," he replied firmly.

"Like tonight?" she asked hopefully.

"And tomorrow, then the next day, and the day after that." He wrapped his arms around her shoulders and held her against his chest. Warm lips skimmed down her cheek to her jaw, and traced the line up to her ear, "And the nights Cass. Next week and next month, and next year, too."

She turned a confused glance up at him. Was he saying what she thought he was? "That long?"

"For as long as you'll have me baby," Gavin nuzzled her throat, kissed her collarbone and nipped his way up to her chin. His mouth met hers, soft and gentle for a moment. He deepened their kiss, pressing her back to the car and working his knee between her thighs. The first brush of his leg against her exceedingly sensitized pussy had her gasping for air.

"Gavin," she choked out as he repeated the motion.

"Cass! Bare again? Are you trying to give me a heart attack?"

She shook her head, "No, I want you to stick around a while, too."

He feathered kisses on her cheek, the tip of his tongue dipping into the dimple there. "You know baby, last night wasn't just a fluke. I think Lady Luck was smiling down on me the moment you walked into that pub. You set every cell of my body on fire. I made a wish and it came true."

She exhaled little by little, "You sure it wasn't a Shamrock Shaker doing wacky things with your mind?"

"Nope. Irish eyes were a'smilin' down on me, baby. 'Cause I have you now, and that's all I really wanted."

She kissed him back, loving the way he tasted like fire and ice, passion untamed. "Just don't come running to me on April Fool's, trying something stupid. I have a gun, Gavin, and I know how to use it."

He laughed, and reached around behind her to open her door, "Baby, I plan to be eating chocolate bunnies with you at Easter, shooting off fireworks at Independence Day, and kissing your beautiful lips under the mistletoe at Christmas."

"What about Halloween?" she asked bemusedly.

"Ah, baby, don't get me started on what costume I want you to wear. I won't make it

in to work today."

She smiled up at him, her joy completely unveiled and declared, "Just as long as I get to see you dressed up in the costume of my choice."

He licked his bottom lip. "Oh yeah, whatever you want, Cass. I'll do it. Let me guess, that archaic loin cloth?"

Cassidy shook her head, smiled at the image he presented. "All I want is you naked with a piercing, Gavin. One like mine."

His breath hissed out between his firm lips. With a low oath, he reached out, hooked his fingers at her waist and hauled her to him. Tossing her over his shoulder, he carried her right back into the house. He slammed the door behind him and stalked to the hallway.

"Looks like we aren't going to work quite yet after all," she laughed while quickly attempting to unbutton her blouse even though she was upside down.

"God damn, baby, we'll be lucky if we make it in by lunch." Gavin dropped her on the bed and covered her body with his.

"Do you really mean it, Gavin?" she asked cautiously.

"That I'd do the piercing?"

She shook her head. "About sticking around?"

"I'm not going anywhere, Cass. Besides, Halloween is seven months away. I plan on having you there to kiss away my pain during the piercing procedure."

"It doesn't hurt that much, you wuss," she teased.

"I'll show you not to call my manliness into question, Cassidy Hyatt!" Gavin declared before parting her thighs, wrenching her skirt up, and sliding home.

They were lost in their fervor, climbing the heights of ecstasy and reaching for the heavens.

Together. Just as he promised.

The End

About the Author:

Christa Paige started her writing career as a critique partner for aspiring authors. Prompted by the crit-group, to attempt writing her own, she embarked on the fascinating journey of being a novelist. She has a passion for the paranormal genre and decided to create a unique twist on vampire lore. A Southern California native, she is happily married to her very own alpha male. Together, they restore classic cars and often go RV-ing. When she isn't writing, she is a busy mother of two little girls. Her days are spent home-schooling. At night, she continues working on the next installment in her Blood-Vine series.

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