



**Magnus**

*Semper Fi*

Jambrea Jo Jones

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Liquid Silver Books  
<http://LSbooks.com>

Email:  
[raven@LSbooks.com](mailto:raven@LSbooks.com)

Editor  
Tracey West

Cover Artist  
Lyn Taylor

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## **Blurb**

Marine Colonel Joe “Magnus” Rivers’ job is his reason for being. Protecting the United States of America from all threats is his sole purpose in life. That life is turned upside down when a woman is assigned to his team of elite Marines and his attraction to her threatens his career.

NCIS Special Agent Emily Patterson’s orders: infiltrate Colonel Rivers’ team and find the culprits behind a slate of kidnappings connected to a sex slave ring. Her mission parameters didn’t include an attraction for Colonel Rivers but nothing in Emily’s career could have prepared her for Magnus. Her job becomes more difficult as she gets to know the man behind the uniform and Emily finds herself wanting to prove herself to him, potentially exposing her identity before she clears Mag.

Mag and Emily struggle against their growing feelings for one another, both knowing the consequences of giving in to lust. Mag is Emily’s team leader and fraternizing is against the rules. Emily is investigating Mag and his team; getting involved with him could ruin her investigation and her career.

## **Dedication**

First I would like to thank all of the men and women who serve our country. I was happy to serve in the United States Air Force; I only wish I could have stayed in longer. This is for my dad, the Marine, my sister and brother-in-law in the Air Force and my brother in the Army Reserves.

Thank you Rhian Cahill, my Rae Rae, for keeping me focused and on target.

Thank you Joy Roach for all your support and tough love. Mag wouldn’t be here without you and your dedication. You’re like a sister to me and I love you!

Last, but not least, thank you Liquid Silver Books for taking a chance. To Moni and Tracey for loving Mag as much as I do.

## Chapter One

*To observe a Marine is inspirational. To be a Marine is exceptional.*

“Get the fuck outta my face, right now, maggot, before I skin you alive and wear your ass as a hat. What the *fuck* do you think you’re doin’?” Colonel Joe “Magnus” Rivers yelled at the recruit and snatched the M-4 out of her hands.

“Colonel.” His Gunnery Sergeant tried to calm him.

“Fuck that shit. She got Stewart shot! This is why women shouldn’t be on the front fuckin’ line. Fuck!” Magnus ran a hand over his face and handed the gun off to Corporal Moore. “No fuckin’ way is this going to work.” He turned to walk back to the barracks.

“Mag, Private Stewart wasn’t really shot.” His Gunny rushed to keep up.

“I know that, Gunny. It’s the principle of the matter.”

“Oh, he knows another word besides fuck.” The words were almost too faint to be heard, but they reached the Colonel’s ears.

Magnus whipped around and got up in the recruits’ face. In a quiet voice, he addressed the woman.

“What did you just say?”

She stared straight ahead, and didn’t look him in the eye.

*The only smart thing she’s done so far. What the fuck was the General thinking? Take a deep breath, man. Calm down. No one was really hurt.*

Reasoning with himself sucked, but luckily for the recruit, he was able to leash his anger.

“Not so tough now, huh, Patterson? Drop and give me twenty.”

Without hesitation, she dropped to the ground and started counting out her pushups. Magnus would expect no less and his team knew it.

“Moore, take over PT.” He turned back to Gunny and gestured for him to follow.

“Roberts, I don’t think I can keep this up. What was the General thinking? This woman doesn’t belong here. She’s some military brat trying to prove herself. How are we supposed to make her into a soldier?” Magnus said in frustration.

Gunny Paul Roberts looked back at the woman doing pushups.

“I don’t know, sir. Looks like you’re doing a good job to me.”

Magnus looked back and waved his hand. “Physical exercise does not a soldier make. You saw her at the range. How the fuck did she make it out of boot!?”

“Mag, it’s only been a few weeks. Give her a break.”

“I can’t. I wouldn’t let the guys get away with that shit. No fucking way am I giving the wannabe warrior a break. She’ll do it my way or I’ll kick her ass back to daddy’s.

“We’re supposed to take her on fucking missions for chrissake.” He shook his head. “She’s going to get someone killed.”

“We have a month before we hea—”

Mag glared at the Gunny. Without another word he entered the building, trying to forget the woman doing pushups in the yard.

*Trouble with a capital T is what that one is.*

Mag led Gun to his office. “We need to go over the training schedule. I want us tight

before we head into Sri Lanka. We'll have to compensate for Patterson."

"I don't think you're giving her enough credit. She made it through boot camp. Not even her dad's rank would get her through that."

"So she has guts, but can she really cut it?"

"We have training time. Push her to the limit. You know the General isn't going to take her off the team. We work with what we've got. That's all we can do. Remember, this is a peacekeeping mission. If we do it right, a shot won't even be fired."

"Well, listen to you, the voice of reason. Fuck, Gun. When did you get so smart?" Mag asked with a smile.

"Never mind that, I thought you had a training schedule you wanted to go over."

Mag pulled up the chart on his computer and got to work.

"We're down two members so we're going to have to run Patterson, Moore and Stewart together. If today is any indication, we're going to need more time on the range. That fucks up the schedule. Moore is a sniper and Stewart is a damn good shot so I'd planned to skip most of the range time. Good thing we weren't using live rounds." He sighed.

"Why don't I spend a little after-hours time with Patterson on the range? That way we don't have to push the other training back," Gun offered.

"No. I want you to pair up with Stewart. He needs some extra hand-to-hand training. I'll help Patterson with her weapons training."

"Are you sure you won't blow a gasket?"

"Yeah, I'll be fine. Just don't let me catch Stewart kicking your ass or you'll never hear the end of it."

"Let's hear you talk when Patterson whips you on the gun range."

Mag leaned back in his chair. "Were you not on the same field as me today? I don't think I have anything to worry about."

"Do you know when Jackson and Parker will be back?"

"The General wasn't sure. I do know they won't be back before we're on mission. I want to run a couple more field tests. Tomorrow, zero four hundred."

"I'll gather the troops. You need to talk to them or do you want me to release them?"

"Go ahead and dismiss them."

"Should I send Patterson in about her range training?"

"No, I'll give her tonight. I'll talk to her after the exercise tomorrow. We'll see how she handles herself after the dressing down today. If you want to snag Stewart for that extra hand-to-hand, go ahead."

"I'll give him tonight too." Gun rose from his chair.

At the door he turned back to look at Mag. "Try not to break her, Mag. We really don't need to be down another man."

Gun continued out before Mag could respond. With a shake of his head Mag closed his eyes and took a deep, cleansing breath.

*That woman is going to be the death of me.*

He rubbed a hand over his face and got back to trying to figure out how to keep his team alive.

\* \* \* \*

Special Agent Emily Patterson slammed into her room. If she had to do one more

pushup, she might just scream. Not that she minded the physical training. She ran on a regular basis and went to the gym a couple nights a week, but this Marine PT might kill her yet.

One of the good things about being a female Marine, even a pretend one, had to be having her own space. She could drop her act and relax a little. Emily plopped down on her bed. She didn't want to move for a week. She stunk to high heaven, but her arms jiggled like wet noodles. She really didn't think she *could* move. All her training had not prepared her for the sheer physical exhaustion of this case. Zero four hundred would be here too soon.

What she really wanted to know was who the hell Colonel Rivers thought he was. Em had never been dressed down with someone in her face like that before. The thing that really ticked her off—she had to hold back. She didn't want to bring the wrong kind of attention to herself. She was supposed to be a fuck-up trying to prove her Marine daddy wrong. Showing off her skill with a gun would not help with her cover.

*How do I get myself into these messes?* She rolled her eyes and struggled to push up off the bed. She knew she wouldn't be able to sleep until she showered. She needed to hurry. She had an allotted time in the communal shower and the minutes ticked away. The guys would want their turn too.

Emily stood in the shower washing off the day and thought about Colonel Joe Rivers—a tough man, who pulled no punches. In her real life, he would be the kind of guy she'd love to go drinking with so they could share war stories. She could picture the two of them arguing about old wounds and who was the better shot.

But she had to keep her distance in case Rivers was involved. Not that that would be a problem—he didn't want her anywhere near him. A pity, he made her weak in the knees with his short black hair and dark brown eyes. When she closed her eyes, his image appeared. She'd always had a thing for BDUs and he looked good in his uniform.

*Is he involved?*

The evidence pointed in his direction. She didn't want to believe it, but she wouldn't rule him out just because she had the hots for him.

Rivers would have to know if someone in his unit was crooked. No way had a team member stolen women and children right under his nose. Time would tell. The mission next month would be important. The men needed to believe she would do anything to get back at her dad for not believing in her. The person behind this had to trust her. She didn't know how far up the chain of command the trafficking went. Her superiors felt it went above the Colonel.

"Patterson, you in there?"

"Um ... yeah. Hold on a sec. I'll be right out."

She rinsed off the soap, turned off the water and grabbed her towel.

*Shoot, I forgot my clothes. Damn it.*

She wondered if they were all out there waiting. Em didn't relish the walk back to her room in only a towel and she had no idea who'd spoken. She wrapped her towel around her, grabbed her stuff and left the showers.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to take so long." She looked up and saw it was Stewart on the other side of the door. "Sorry about today, Stewart."

Apologizing for something she did on purpose felt wrong, but she had a job to do.

"No problem, takes the heat off of me. Usually the Colonel is in my face for some

mistake or another. Just don't hit me with live rounds and we'll be okay," he said with a chuckle.

"Deal." She laughed back.

She headed back to her room and bumped into someone headed the other way.

"Sorry." She mumbled.

She glanced over and noticed it was Moore with his shower gear. She adjusted her towel as his gaze traveled down her body. She shivered a little and made a note to herself to bring clothes next time. She didn't like the way he looked at her—like the towel wasn't even there. When he reached her face again, he smirked and waggled his eyebrows. Raising her chin and meeting his gaze head-on, Em smiled, then walked briskly back to her room. She felt his gaze on her the entire way, but he would not intimidate her. He wasn't the first man to objectify her and he wouldn't be the last.

Em sat on her bed and started going over the case. She didn't have a case file and had to work from memory. She couldn't even make notes. She had to be careful because right now she had no idea who to trust. She was at a disadvantage because two members of the team were missing. Too new, she couldn't ask about them. The others—Rivers, Roberts, Moore and Stewart—were typical Marines.

So far, nothing really jumped out. Moore just put himself on her radar with his attitude by the showers. Stewart seemed too innocent. That really didn't mean anything, but it was her first reaction to him. Plus, he was fairly new too, transferred in last month.

Roberts could be the inside man. If anyone could fly under Rivers' radar it would be Roberts. The two were close. Could they be in on it together? Was the whole team behind the kidnappings? Who pulled their strings? The quick answer would be the General. But someone pulled his strings too. That's why NCIS didn't know how far up it went.

Em wondered if the two missing team members might hold a clue. On her next call to the office she would have to ask one of the agents to check in on them. She needed to know why they were missing. Two members away at the same time had to be fishy.

She also needed to talk to the women again. When they were rescued, they couldn't ID their kidnappers, only that they were military. The only team in the area during that time was Colonel Rivers'. They'd learned that over two months ago and it had taken this long to get her in place.

Now she needed to get some sleep. The puzzle wouldn't be solved overnight and zero four hundred really did come early. She didn't want to know what Rivers had in store for her tomorrow.

\* \* \* \*

The man picked up the phone and dialed his contact. It rang three times before it was picked up.

"Is it set?" The other man asked without preamble.

"Yes. If anything goes wrong, the new girl can take the fall. Will I know my contact on sight?"

Introductions were not necessary and names were never revealed on an open line.

"You don't have to do anything but lead the woman and children to the drop spot. The contact will take care of bringing them in. Your job is to make sure you take at least two or three civilians and get them on the plane. Can you handle it?"

"Of course. I've done this before."

“Just make sure everything happens with no mess ups. I already had to pull one person from the team. Don’t make me pull you too.”

“No, sir. I understand and it will go as planned. What about the Colonel?”

“You just worry about your part in the mission. I’ll take care of the rest.”

“Yes, sir.”

The man on the other end hung up.

*I can’t believe that old fuck questioned me. I know my damn job. He’d better pull through and take care of the Colonel. Hmm ... I wonder if the Colonel is on the payroll. Not that it matters. It does matter. No it doesn’t. And why the fuck am I arguing with myself? I need to hit the rack.*

The man continued down the hallway to his bunk. Now that Jackson and Parker were gone, he had his own room.

*Stupid bitch doesn’t have to share a room. Before this is over, I’ll get me a piece of that ass. Fuckin’ women belong in one place—on their backs.*

He went to the desk in his room and turned on his computer. After entering a couple passwords he found the site he was looking for, the kind of site that most people didn’t know about. He clicked his favorite link and while he waited for it to load, he took his pants and underwear off and sat back down.

“You know you want it, you filthy slut.”

*Head phones, you idiot.*

He grabbed them from beside the computer and quickly plugged them in and placed the buds in his ears. His hand went to his flaccid cock and pumped it a couple times. He looked back to the scene and instantly hardened as the live feed showed him what he liked.

“Please, mister, no. Please, that hurts.”

“That’s it. Beg me.”

The man on the screen had a small Asian woman pinned and bent over the bed. He held her in place by her long black hair. Occasionally he would jerk her hair forcing the girl to look up on the camera. The woman had tears in her eyes, but the man didn’t stop.

*That’s it. Take her; fuck her like you hate her. Make her yours.*

“It hurts.” She cried again.

“Take it, you slut. You know you want it.”

The man on the screen shoved his cock up the woman’s ass. She screamed and passed out. The man in the chair coated his desk with come at the woman’s scream.

*Fuck yeah. Just wait, Patterson. Soon that will be us.*

The man cleaned up and went to bed with dreams of Patterson on her back flashing through his head.



## Chapter Two

*Pain is only temporary, pride is forever.*

Em watched Rivers stride to the training ground. Today would be the first test in full combat gear and with the team working together. She was surprised he let her have a gun after snatching hers away yesterday. They wouldn't use live rounds and that worked to her advantage. Em had to find a way to screw up again. Taking another shot at someone seemed like a bad idea. Of course, she wasn't exactly sure what the schedule looked like. If she did, it would be easier to plan her attempt at being a bad soldier. She really wanted to shoot Moore after yesterday's shower incident, even if it was with dummy rounds, but if she did that Rivers might scrub her from the mission and she couldn't have that.

Her hand went to her mouth as she yawned. Zero four hundred really was too early. She rested her M-4 in her arms, ready for today's instructions.

"The mission we're going on is a peace-keeping one. We're only there to protect the non-combative and evacuate them if necessary. We'll have coms today. Each of us will have a code so there are no names on an open channel. These will be the codes we'll use on the actual mission. I'm Alpha, Roberts is Beta, Moore you'll be Charlie, Stewart you're Delta and Patterson will be Echo. Any questions?"

He paused for a second, but Em knew no one would say anything.

"Good. On the course there will be dummies to rescue. Patterson, try not to shoot them."

She just stared straight ahead and tried not to react as the men focused on her briefly. The urge to show him how good her gun skills were made her trigger finger itch, but she controlled herself.

"Moore, you take point. Stewart, you're with Roberts and I'll pair up with Patterson. Let's get this bitch done."

*Shit! I get paired with the one man I don't want to fuck up in front of.*

Em adjusted her weapon, waiting for Rivers to reach her position.

"You ready for this, Patterson?"

"Yes, sir."

Em wanted to say more, but she stopped herself. *You're playing a role. Stay in character.*

"Hoorah!"

The rest of the team echoed the Colonel.

"Follow me, Patterson and watch your trigger finger."

Em shook her head and followed him. She liked watching him work—his body tense and ready for action even though it was a test run. He motioned for her to get down. She dropped to her stomach and belly crawled after him. The mud from the ground squished into her blouse. Em barely kept the grimace off her face. She held her M-4 in front of her and concentrated on following Rivers. He moved across the ground at a fast pace. She contemplated falling back more, but it was too soon to start screwing up.

"Status check."

The whispered command sounded in her ear.

“Beta—all clear.”

“Charlie—all clear.”

“Delta—all clear.”

“Echo—all clear.”

She felt silly chiming in when she was right behind him, but she knew it was part of protocol.

“Continue forward and meet at the village. Keep your ears to the ground. There will be hostiles looking for us.”

*Great, just great. I wonder if I could get captured.*

Still behind Rivers, Em fell back a little. He focused ahead and hadn’t looked back in a couple minutes. They were close to the fake village and the hostiles had to be lurking somewhere. She veered left, broke away from Rivers and dropped her com. Her cover story already rolling through her mind.

*I’ll just tell him I dropped the com and they came from behind.*

Not making it too obvious, she searched for the other team. She heard chatter to her right. She maneuvered herself so they really would catch her from behind. She searched for a stick and found one. She broke it and tensed, preparing herself for the capture.

“Well, what do we have here, boys?”

“It looks like that the new woman on Mag’s team. He’s going to be pissed.”

“Yes, he will. I hope he lets us watch when the yelling starts.”

Em ignored the chatter as they hauled her to her feet.

“Sorry, ma’am, but we have to tie your hands. It’s part of the capture,” someone whispered in her ear.

She just nodded.

“Rog, Tank, take her back to base camp. We’ll go see if we can round up any more of Mag’s team.”

“On it, boss.”

“Let’s go, ma’am.”

Em followed the men back to their camp, trying not to think of the fury Rivers would unleash on her.

\* \* \* \*

Something felt off. Mag looked back to check on Patterson and swore under his breath.

“Echo, status.”

Dead air met his call.

“Echo.”

Nothing.

“Charlie, you have eyes on my position?”

“No, Alpha. Give me a sec.”

*How the fuck could she mess this up?*

“I have eyes.”

“Can you spot Echo?”

“Negative, Alpha.”

“Everyone rally at the village, I’m going after Echo. Beta, you have lead.”

“Copy that, Alpha.”

He turned and didn't get far before he found her com and a path going on a different heading.

*Why did she turn here? She can't be that stupid. And why drop her com?*

She left a trail a mile wide.

*What are they teaching in boot these days?*

Then he noticed the other boot prints.

*Fuck me.*

"Beta, I'm rendezvousing with the group at the village. Is it secure?"

"Secure and awaiting your orders."

Mag eased his way back and headed for the village, double time.

*Wait until I get my hands on her. She's going to wish she was back at boot camp.*

He heard a noise to his left and stopped. The other team was on his six. He rolled on his back and sat up taking note of the two members of the other unit. Before they could draw their weapons he got off two shots, one to each of their hearts. The two men dropped to the ground. He nodded and continued on.

"Beta—two enemies down."

"Roger that."

A couple minutes later, he arrived at the village. Roberts and Moore were on the perimeter searching for the enemy and Stewart was by a shack with a group of the rescue dummies.

Roberts saw him and headed his way. "Where is Patterson?"

"Well, isn't that the fucking question of the day."

"Does that mean...?"

"Yes. She was captured. Let's head back to camp and radio Mission Complete."

"Mag." Roberts put a hand on his arm.

"What!"

"Try to calm down a little before you go off on her."

Mag just looked at Roberts.

Roberts threw his hands up. "Fine. Do it your way."

"Let's go. Stewart, leave your friends and double time it back to camp."

"Yes, sir."

The group rallied and ran back to base.

"Team Two, this is Team Leader One. Take your package back to base."

"Roger that."

In no time, the group was at the barracks waiting for Team Two and Patterson to return. They rounded the corner and Mag waited for Patterson to focus on him. She looked over and raised her chin in the air. She didn't look sorry at all. There was something odd about that look, something he hadn't seen before. He would figure out what it was.

"Patterson, front and center."

He watched as her hands were cut free from their binding and felt a shock as his cock hardened.

*You have got to be kidding me. No way can I be attracted to a Marine brat fuck-up. Nope. It's just been a while. Fuck!*

She stood in front of him and he paused to get himself together.

He took a deep breath. "After breakfast, you will report to the gym for extra PT."

Then we will discuss some extra practice that it seems you need. Dismissed.”

She did an about face and raced back to her quarters. A good thing because he didn’t know how much longer he could control his temper.

“Stewart, report to Roberts at twelve-thirty, the rest of you are dismissed until fifteen hundred for target practice.”

He ignored the groan from the men and went to his office to prepare himself for his meeting with Patterson. Maybe he’d take a cold shower first.

\* \* \* \*

Em hurried through breakfast so she could report for PT. She wanted to get it over with. The dressing down was coming; she just wondered if he would wait until after the workout session or if he would start off by yelling at her.

The gym stood empty when she arrived. Not waiting, she went straight for the treadmill and started her workout. A few minutes into her run, the doors opened and Rivers walked in. This was the first time she’d seen him in anything other than BDUs. Her foot slipped when he bent over to tie his shoes. She jerked her head away, but not before she noticed how nice and tight his ass looked in his running shorts. His arms looked so strong and his legs, rock hard. She had to swipe at her mouth just to make sure she wasn’t drooling.

“Patterson, get off that thing and get over here.”

She turned the machine off and walked to him, not in any hurry to reach the spot in front of him.

“Yes, sir.”

“You know why you’re here, right?”

“Because I allowed myself to be captured, sir?”

Em hated the passive tone to her voice. She wanted to tell him if she didn’t want to be caught she wouldn’t have been. There was something about this man that made her want to be her best.

“That would be correct. Have you always been a screw-up or is it just me you’re trying to send to an early grave.”

“They came out of nowhere and I—”

“No excuses. We go on mission soon and I can’t be worried that you’re going to be captured. You need to pay more attention to your surroundings. Maybe a few hours working out with me will remind you to focus on the task at hand. You ready?”

“Yes, sir.”

The next hour was pure and utter hell. No other words could describe the pain Rivers put her through.

“Enough, for now. Good job, Patterson. If you’d show half as much dedication to mission work, I don’t think I’d have a problem.”

“T—thank you, sir.” She could barely breathe and he wasn’t even out of breath.

“So why is it you’re such a fuck-up on the field?”

And here it was. The dressing down she’d waited on the whole workout session. Of course, she’d made the mistake of working out like she meant it.

“I don’t know, sir. Maybe you intimidate me?”

He barked out a laugh and she tried to hide her grin. She couldn’t let him know she actually admired him.

“I suggest you get over that, ASAP.”

“Is that an order, sir?”

“Yes, it is, now head to the showers. You have to report to the rifle range at fourteen hundred. The rest of the team will be there at fifteen hundred, but you’ll be working with me. I can’t have you shooting the men and you could use the extra practice.”

“Yes, sir.”

Not having the energy to stand and watch his sexy ass walk out of the building, she sat down on the nearest mat. The man would kill her yet. Hell, being a Marine might just be the end of her. Her father warned her when she’d told him about her cover story that this wouldn’t be a walk in the park and it would be different from anything she’d done in the Air Force or the NCIS. He was right.

Em closed her eyes for a second. She never remembered being this sore. Her bruises must have bruises. She needed to solve this case—fast. So far, she was no closer to the truth than she’d been last week. Something had to break. A call to the office was in order. Tonight after dinner, she would call her contact.

Now she had to get ready for lunch and the range.

## Chapter Three

*Deadliest weapon in the world—a Marine and his rifle.*

Mag waited for Patterson at the gun range. He had a hard time piecing the woman together. On one hand, she fucked everything up. On the other, she appeared dedicated and wouldn't stop until she finished. He'd worked her hard in the gym. She'd matched him step for step. He expected her to whine and try to get out of doing the work. She'd surprised him.

Her commitment to the workout tipped the scale on the things that surprised Mag. His reaction to her might be a problem. Being angry at the woman getting captured was easy; the hard part happened when she stood side by side and actually kept up with him.

He turned as the door to the room opened. It would only be the two of them until the rest of the team arrived in an hour. He wondered if she would surprise him again or if he'd been imagining things.

Patterson walked toward him and he had to admit she looked pretty sexless in her BDUs, with her brown hair pulled twisted in a bun. Something about her green eyes pulled him in. He didn't want to go there. Hell, he *couldn't* go there. The military had rules against fraternizing for a reason. And Mag liked rules.

"Sir?"

She stood in front of him with her M-4 at her side, her safety glasses hooked into her blouse and her ear plugs around her neck.

"You ready to show me what you've got?"

He noticed a gleam in her eyes and took note.

"Yes, sir."

She walked up to the station, placed her gun on the ledge, put on her glasses and ear plugs and waited for his go ahead. He put on his safety equipment as well. He wasn't a dummy; she *had* shot Stewart the other day.

"Start with five rounds and see how many times you can hit the center."

He pushed the button and watched her square her shoulders as her target hit the end of the range. Mag didn't even flinch when her gun went off five times in rapid secession. He did notice Patterson hesitate after her first three shots and he had to wonder what caused the pause. When she finished he pushed the button to bring her target to the booth.

"Tight grouping there with those three, but what happened with the other two?"

She shrugged, "I'm a little better with my Sig. I was just getting a feel on the first two. I might have gotten lucky on the other three."

"So, you're saying that the shots outside the target were your first two?"

"Yes, sir."

He knew she lied to him.

*Why would she lie about something like that? Just what the fuck is going on here.*

"Five more rounds." He barked out.

No hesitation on her part. She turned and shot five more times, all outside the center. Like she didn't even look where she aimed.

*It doesn't add up.*

“What the fuck is going on, Patterson?”

“Sir?”

“Don’t fucking ‘sir’ me! Those first three shots were no fluke. You know how to fire a weapon. So tell me right now what the fuck is going on.”

“I really don’t know what you’re talking about, sir. Those were lucky shots. I wasn’t that proficient in weapons during boot.”

“So tell me this, how did you get on my team?”

“My dad knows someone, who knows someone. He didn’t want me to be just a Marine. If I joined, he wanted me on a Force Recon team. He said no child of his would be a Marine grunt,” she said, with a hint of disgust in her voice.

“So this is all fucking politics? Someone on my team could be killed because a fuck-up like you got a spot that a real Marine should have? Fuck this shit. There’s something you aren’t telling me and I will figure it out. You can bet your sweet ass on it. Now go over to that table, take your weapon apart and clean it. I want you back on the range for ten more rounds. Then, you’ll start over again until the rest of the team gets here. You get me?”

“I get you,” she mumbled.

“What was that? I didn’t hear you, Marine.”

She shouted, “I said, I get you. Sir.” Em marched to the table he pointed out.

*Why does she make me want to smile when she goes off in a huff? I’m seriously sick.*

He went into his own booth for some stress relief target practice while he waited for the rest of the group.

\* \* \* \*

He watched from the window in the door. He didn’t have a perfect view, but he could see Lieutenant Patterson fire her weapon and he loved the way the rifle made her body jerk just so. She had control. Something he didn’t suspect. Not that it would matter when he claimed her. She wouldn’t need a weapon. Hell, she wouldn’t even need clothes. Not for what he intended. He might not even sell her. She could be his. The things he could do to that woman. He wouldn’t tell his contact about her. Maybe he could grab a couple extra women on the mission.

Using the Colonel’s team on a “peace-keeping” mission as a front to capture sex slaves—Christ, he loved his job! Testing the merchandise happened to be the best part. He liked being top dog. Following the Colonel’s orders pissed him off, but he knew how to play the good little Marine. His dad had taught him well.

The man stopped daydreaming as the shooting stopped. It looked like the Colonel yelled at Emily again. Man, he loved her name. It just rolled off his tongue. He hated having to call her by her last name, too impersonal for his slave and Emily happened to be a beautiful name. He wondered what bug crawled up the Colonel’s ass. He could take care of him on the next mission. One shot would do it.

He drifted again and had to shake himself to pay attention. He wished he could hear what they were saying. Too soon, Emily walked to where he couldn’t see her any more. He wondered what her skin would feel like. It looked so creamy and soft when she left the shower yesterday. She’d been a little wet, and oh how he wanted to lick the water from her body. It physically hurt him to let her go, but it was too soon. His gaze returned to the window when he detected more movement. Emily fired her gun again. The Colonel

stood behind her, touching her. That man could not touch his woman, it wouldn't be. He moved to open the door before he caught himself.

*Too soon. Remember, it's too soon.*

He removed his hand from the knob and backed off for a second to catch his breath and control his anger. He had to appear calm when the others got there.

The man returned to his former place by the window to watch the two move together as the gun fired.

A noise behind him alerted him to another presence. He grabbed his gun and hurried away to make it look like he just got there.

"Hey, you're here early too. You ready to go? We should be good today with Patterson fucking up. I bet he's easy on us."

The other Marine stepped around him and opened the door to the shooting range. He followed the man, eager to be in Emily's presence again. He loved the way she smelled, so sweet and fresh like a bright summer day. He hoped he got the booth next to her. Maybe he could ask her out first, before she became only his.

He stopped just inside the door next to the other Marine and they waited for the Colonel to notice them.

"Stewart, Moore, pick a booth and start with your practice."

The time for his fantasy would come. For now he must be a good Marine and practice his firearm skills.

\* \* \* \*

Em turned when she heard Rivers speak to the other Marines. She beat herself up over her shooting.

*I am such an idiot—trying to show off when I'm undercover. Jesus, he makes me so wet. Emily, get your mind out of the gutter. You have to stop thinking of what he might look like out of uniform. Hmm ... maybe I should keep thinking about him naked. If I'm concentrating on his body, I'm not concentrating on impressing him. Okay, enough. Pay attention to the men.*

Em watched Moore and Stewart reach the cubbies and prepare for shooting. Her rifle needed to be put together again. The exercise meant she had to focus on detail.

Em wanted to wait to call her boss, but she needed someone to ground her, get her mind back in the game. The training session couldn't be over fast enough. Maybe they would have an update for her. She needed to know if the whole team was involved or if just one man with an outside contact handled the kidnappings.

She could grab dinner with Moore and Stewart. She needed to get a better feel for the two of them. They all had some free time coming up. She could question them about the unit. Moore would know the most, he'd been there longer, but something felt off about him and she didn't relish dinner alone with him. She'd like to speak openly with Rivers, but her comfort didn't outweigh the risk and it could be her libido talking, not the agent.

Yes, she needed to make that phone call. Em focused on her target. She tried to make her shots tighter, but not centered. She wanted to look bad, but needed to show some improvement. After her last round she stepped back right into Rivers. She didn't seem him, but felt his presence. Her body knew he hovered behind her. His scent, musky and male, drifted toward her. She stood straight and walked forward. She didn't have much room to maneuver, but turned to face him.



He pushed the button to bring her target toward them.

"This looks a little better, Patterson, but not as good as your first three shots. I wonder why?"

"My last three shots of the first set, sir."

He made a non-committal sound.

"Clean your rifle, do one more round and then you're dismissed. You'll report to the range at zero four hundred for more one-on-one practice. Is that understood?"

"Yes, sir."

She couldn't believe her break. The other guys hadn't been there long so this could be her chance to call the office. She hurried through the process before Rivers changed his mind.

She'd cleaned her rifle for the last time when Roberts strolled in. She made a mental note that the man arrived to the range late. Rivers didn't say a word, just nodded toward a station.

Em rushed out of the door before anyone stopped her and headed straight for her room to put her rifle away then made her way to the phone in the hallway of the barracks. Before picking up the receiver, she looked around to make sure no one lurked around. She dialed the number and put her back to wall to make sure no one snuck up on her. The call could seal her fate if caught.

"NCIS, how may I direct your call?"

She jumped at the voice on the other end, her focus on her surroundings, not the call.

"Special Agent David McMichael."

"One moment, please."

"McMichael."

"Hey, David. It's Emily."

"What's wrong?"

"What makes you think something is wrong?"

"The fact that you weren't supposed to report in until the end of the week. Can't hack it as a Marine? Need pulling out?"

"Fuck you, David. I just need to talk the case out a little and I have some free time. The rest of the team is at the range so I took the opportunity to call. Any breaks on your end?"

"We have Elliot Jackson and Alex Parker in custody."

"You have enough to keep them?"

"Right now they are people of interest. Neither is talking, but this will keep them away from you. If one or both of them are involved and not available you could be tapped to take their place. You get the feel for the rest of the team? Anyone approach the team fuck-up yet?"

"I'd like a background check on Dale Moore. Something seems off about him. Kyle Stewart is new, but he could be in place because of the screw up with the last kidnap victims. I don't think Joe Rivers is involved, but I'm not a hundred percent on that. If he isn't involved, Paul Roberts could be in charge. Roberts and Rivers are tight. I'd hoped someone would've recruited me by now. Everyone knows the Colonel hates me and pushes me. Maybe fuck-up isn't the way to go."

"So you have nothing?"

She sighed into the phone. "Nope, nothing. I know it's early yet, but I wanted to

have some idea. Have the victims come forward with any new information?"

"Nothing solid. I think the only way we're getting these guys is in the act. Then we can pressure the low man into giving up the person in charge for a deal."

"I'll keep my eyes open when we reach Sri Lanka. I hope it isn't the whole team or I'm fucked, David."

"Go with your gut. If you think Rivers isn't involved, rule him out him and bring him in."

"I'm working on that, but it's hard to get close to someone who is the perfect Marine when you're playing the comic relief. I almost screwed the pooch, David."

"What are you talking about?"

She blew out a breath. "At the firing range, I shot for center until I remembered where I was. I hope Rivers isn't involved because I think he suspects something is up. He keeps asking questions."

"Then find out if he is involved, quickly, before you're blown. If he's clean he could be a big help."

"You're telling me shit I already know. I'll call you before we leave or if something breaks. If you get anything call and tell them you're my brother with an emergency."

"What? Not your husband?"

"Fuck you, David."

She hung up the phone and headed to her room to get ready for dinner running smack dab into Rivers.

"Whoa, what seems to be the rush, Patterson?"

"It's Emily."

*I did not just say that out loud. Where is my brain?*

He cocked an eyebrow.

"Never mind." She turned to leave.

"When we aren't on the field or on exercise, it's Mag."

"Not Joe?"

*Why can't I shut up?*

He grinned at her. "Only to my mother."

"So noted."

This time she did turn and walk away.

*When will you learn Em? Stop thinking with your pussy and start thinking with your brain. Find out what's going on before you blab to someone who could kill you.*

Once inside her room, she fell to her bed thinking of Mag's hands on her body. Mag. She kind of liked it, but he looked more like a Joe to her. She closed her eyes and drifted off with Joe Rivers running through her dreams.

## Chapter Four

*Being ready is not what matters. What matters is winning after you get there.*

### Four weeks later

The team gathered in the front of the barracks for PT. Rivers ordered an evening run to help with team unity. Em figured the run had to be a punishment for her but she could take anything he dished out. The hard part for her came when she had to remember to screw things up.

She considered herself a good agent. Usually she didn't have a problem with undercover work. She went in, got the job done and got out. She didn't even have to think about the difference in this mission. Em put it at the feet of Joe Rivers. Magnus. She wondered what he did to earn him that nickname. It didn't matter. She needed to think of him only as Colonel Rivers.

Out of the corner of her eye, Em spotted Rivers. She forced herself not to turn and look at him. The team stood at parade rest, awaiting his instructions.

"All right, let's get to running. Stay in formation. I'll set the pace and you'd better keep up." And off he went.

Rivers headed the group, Roberts and Moore ran side by side, and she had to keep up with Stewart. This would be a perfect opportunity to mess up.

A few blocks into it she slowed down, just a little.

"Patterson, get up here before the Colonel looks over." Stewart hissed.

She sped up a little and then slowed down again. A mile went by and she continued her erratic pace. She really needed to run full out, she loved the steady tread of her feet beating against the pavement and she hadn't been on a good jog since starting this mission.

"Patterson, what the fuck do you think you're doing?" Rivers' voice filtered to her.

"Running, Sir."

"Looks more like you're walking. Get into formation. Don't make me come back there. You think 'cause you're a girl you can walk? Get your ass in gear."

Em gritted her teeth and pulled in line with Stewart.

*Suck it up and remember, you have a job to do.*

Stewart looked at her and gave her a little grin. Em tilted her head. She'd seen something in his gaze that she hadn't noticed before, but it disappeared so quickly it could've been her imagination. She shook her head and kept pace for another minute before she slowed down again.

"Goddamn it, Patterson. What is your malfunction today?"

"I—"

"Do not answer that. Roberts, you have the team. Princess here and I will meet you at base."

*Okay, that was not part of the plan. Shit!*

The rest of the team continued on, Em ran in place, waiting for Rivers to get in her face.

"I want to know what the fuck is going on, Patterson, and you will tell me. Let's get this run over with and you will not fall behind. Do you hear me?"

"I hear you, sir." She mumbled.

"What was that?"

This time she shouted. "I HEAR YOU, SIR!"

"Better. Now let's run."

He set a slow pace, as if testing her, before he picked his pace up. She let herself fall behind him.

"None of that shit, Patterson. Keep up or you'll be doing pushups for a week." He picked up the pace again.

*Don't do it Em, just don't do it. Don't you dare.*

She did it. Em picked up her pace. He caught up and then picked it up again. The two now ran head-to-head, step for step. Every time one of them upped the speed, the other matched it. Em didn't think, she just enjoyed the pull of her muscles, the wind ruffling her hair. She heard the thump of each step, Rivers' breathing, and a sense of peace settled over her. She liked having Rivers by her side. The two settled into a rhythm, no longer fighting each other.

Around the next corner, the barracks loomed. The team stood waiting for the two of them. Rivers put a hand on her arm and the two slowed down to jogging in place.

"I will figure out what is going on and I'll be watching you, Patterson. Stop fucking up on purpose and get with the program or I'll pull you from the mission. Do another lap and then you're dismissed until thirteen hundred. Meet the team at the range."

He ran ahead and she listened to him dismiss the team.

*What am I going to do? Should I just tell him?*

She struggled over her dilemma as she headed for her room. If she made the wrong decision, she wasn't the only one in danger. The sex ring needed to be stopped and Rivers could help, but she needed more proof that he didn't know about the kidnappings.

*After the mission, I'll tell him.*

Satisfied with her decision Em gathered what she needed for a shower with a lighter heart.

"Lieutenant Patterson, you have a phone call."

She turned to see Roberts walking up to her.

"It came through the base operator. You can take it in the Colonel's office."

"Thank you, Gunny. Would you tell the guys to go ahead with their showers? I'll take care of mine after they're done."

"Yes, ma'am."

He left her and she walked to Rivers' office.

Em shut the door behind her and headed for Rivers' desk.

"Patterson."

"Hey, Emily."

"David, you have news?"

"I just wanted you to know, Jackson broke. His lawyer called for a break, but we'll get his statement tomorrow."

"Shit." Em sat down in Rivers' chair, keeping her gaze focused on the closed door.

"I thought you'd be happy about this. It's the break we've been waiting for."

"I know, but we leave for the mission tomorrow. I'll be out of contact for a while."

I'm still unsure if I should pull Rivers in. Plus, no matter what Jackson says, there is a potential for more civilians to be taken."

"Just be happy that it's wrapping up."

Em sighed, "I know. I am, but so many things can go wrong. What about Parker?"

"He isn't talking. We don't know if he is involved or not. The only thing Jackson has said so far is that it goes higher than we could even imagine. He hasn't said if the whole team is involved or not. We'll get into that more tomorrow. Are you ready for this mission?"

"Are you asking if I can handle it, David?"

"I know you can handle yourself, but this is different."

"How is this any different from other missions?"

"Due to the fact that you've never been in the front with a group of Marines and you're going to a hot zone."

"I'll be on alert. If things go well and I think I can trust Rivers, I'm going to bring him in. I'll need his help if someone makes a grab for the civilians. I still think it's too much of a coincidence that Rivers' team keeps getting sent on peace-keeping missions. Ask Jackson about that."

"Yeah, you focus on the mission and leave the interrogating to me. Do me a favor?"

"What?"

"Try not to get yourself killed."

She gave a small chuckle. "I have no plans on that. I'll call you when I can."

She hung up the phone and stayed there, lost in thought.

\* \* \* \*

Mag stopped at his office door. He went to turn the knob when he heard a noise. He frowned, but listened. No one should be in there and if they were, the door should have been open. There it was again, sounded like someone said Jackson.

*Damn these thick doors. Is that Patterson? What the fuck.*

Next, he heard a click, but no movement coming toward the door. He opened it to see Patterson sitting in his chair, a distracted look on her face.

"What the fuck are you doing in my office?"

She jumped out of the chair and he smiled, somehow satisfied that he'd startled her. She stepped away from the desk.

"Sorry. I had a call and Gunny said I could take it in here."

"Next time, leave the door open."

"Yes, sir."

She started toward the door, but he blocked her exit.

"You'd better get used to me, Patterson."

She stopped to look at him. "Why is that, sir?"

"Since as of now, you and I are joined at the hip. I don't trust you and I won't have you fucking up my mission. Too many people can get hurt."

She frowned, but he stepped out of her way, letting her leave his office.

It had been four weeks and he couldn't figure the woman out. On paper, she appeared to be a good Marine—nothing stood out. When others were around she fucked shit up, but when the two of them were alone, she showed potential and drive. She was hiding something, he was sure of it.

Now that she'd left, he allowed his shoulders to slump and he ran a hand over his face, tired to the bone. He couldn't understand why the General sent Patterson, and he didn't know why the man kept sending his team on these peacekeeping missions. He knew the people needed to be saved, but couldn't they send in the Navy? Hell, even the boys in blue could do the missions his team had been assigned.

Usually Mag felt adrenaline course through his body as he readied for an assignment, but after five of these peaceful missions, some of his fire disappeared. It didn't help that he had to babysit Patterson tomorrow.

A knock at his door brought his head up.

"Enter."

"Everything okay, Mag?"

"As well as it can be. Come on in, Gun."

"You worried about the mission?"

"I'm worried about Patterson getting us killed."

"She's improved."

"I just don't know if it's enough. Shit. Something is off about her, Gun. You saw her today on the run. She's fucking up on purpose, but why? We have to go into a mission with that on our shoulders. My focus will be more on her than the mission and that'll spell trouble."

"I have your back."

"I know I can count on you. I just wish I knew why Parker and Jackson are still gone. The General can't give me an answer and they should be here by now. I hate going into a mission with unknowns. Stewart isn't tested with us yet, another variable to our success."

"We've ran them hard. The team is ready."

"Was there something you wanted?"

"I wanted to see how the run went with Patterson."

"It was fucked-up. She can run. At the end, I thought she might outpace me. She has drive. It's like she is two different people. That's one of my issues. Which one will be on mission?"

"We'll be fine. Moore can hold his own and I'll help support Stewart. We'll only be gone a couple days. Help the civilians, head home—piece of cake."

Mag laughed, "From your lips to God's ears man. Speaking of Stewart, how is his hand-to-hand coming?"

"He's doing well. There is a lot of anger in that boy. He just needs to settle down and focus. Once he does that, he could be better than you."

"Better than me, huh? What about you?"

"Oh, I'm already better than you." Gun chuckled.

Mag shook his head. "You ready to back that up?"

"Bring it on, old man."

"Who are you calling 'old man'? I think a trip to the gym might be in order, then I'll show you, 'old man'."

"Name the time." Gun grinned.

"Let's get through the range and then talk to me."

"Sounds like an *old man* excuse to me."

"Get out of my office, Gun. I'll see you at thirteen hundred."

Mag released a breath, happy Gun had given him an excuse to relax a little. He leaned in his chair and closed his eyes. Behind his lids, he could see Patterson's face. Maybe he was reading into something that wasn't there.

Mag settled in to get some paperwork wrapped up before they left for the mission tomorrow. After the range, he would release the team for a little R and R. Relaxing before a mission helped ease some of the tension caused by training. Maybe he would take some of his own advice and go into town for a drink. Maybe pick up some chick and get Emily out of his head.

*Shit, when did I start to think of her as Emily?*

He needed to get out of his office. He decided to head for the gym to work off some of his tension. Maybe he could knock some sense into his head. He needed to regain his focus for the mission. The only thoughts he should have right now were of how to get the civilians they would find to safety. They had to be his number one priority. No one would die on his watch. He wouldn't allow it.

Turning off his light, he left the office, locking down his thoughts of Patterson to deal with after the mission. When she started to creep back into his thoughts, he ran to the gym as if demons chased him.

## Chapter Five

*Women Marines—fewer and prouder.*

### Sri Lanka

“Echo, get your ass down before I shoot it myself,” Mag whispered into his com. He grinned a little as Patterson flattened herself to the ground.

“Alpha, we’ve got a problem. The area is hot.” Corporal Moore came through loud and clear.

“What the fuck. Charlie, the other team had this area cleared yesterday.” Mag responded.

“Col ... Alpha, this is supposed to be a real mission. What gives?”

“Echo, you’d better stand down and get off my com unless you really do want me to shoot you. Status report, now.”

“Delta—all clear.”

“Beta—all clear.”

“Charlie—two bogies, five o’clock.”

“Echo, pull back.”

“But—”

“Get your ass over here. *Now.*”

Mag watched as she slowly inched her way to his side.

“I’m ready for this. Why are you pulling me back?” she whispered.

“I outrank you and you will listen to me. Have you learned nothing this past month, princess? Report to Gunny for extra PT once we’re back home. We don’t have time for this shit.”

She looked like she had something to say, but stopped herself.

*Stop looking at her fucking mouth and pay attention.*

“Charlie, did they spot us?”

“No, it looks like they’re on patrol and they’re carrying.”

“Stand down unless they become hostile. Once they’re clear, we’ll head back to camp. Maintain radio silence until they’re gone and then report.”

He looked over at Patterson to gauge her fear level. She looked calm, but he noticed her breathing had picked up. He reached out and placed his palm on her lower back. She looked over, her eyes wide. He brought a finger to his lips, trying to force her to relax and focus on him. He felt the slow rise and fall of her body as she calmed under his touch. He jerked his hand away and looked out toward the field.

*What the fuck are you thinking, jackass? You wouldn’t be touching one of the guys that way. But she isn’t one of the guys, is she? Focus.*

He looked at Patterson.

*Not on her, you idiot.*

Mag’s com crackled in his ear.

“All clear, Alpha.”

“Back to base, double-time.”



The soldiers made it to the camp without incident.

“Sir ... sir!” Patterson called.

He stopped and she ran right into him.

*Ten feet and I could have been in my office. Goddamn it.*

He didn’t turn around. “What seems to be the problem, Patterson?”

“I need to talk to you, sir.”

“Then talk, but this won’t get you out of PT.”

“Um ... could we go into your office?”

He nodded, continued to his office and didn’t stop until he sat behind his desk and she stood at attention in front of it.

“At ease, Lieutenant. Talk.”

She stood at parade rest, but didn’t look relaxed.

“I thought we were on a real mission today, sir.”

“Are you questioning me again, Lieutenant Patterson? Would you like to add more time to your punishment? If you keep it up, you’ll be in PT for a week after we finish this mission.”

“No, sir.”

“Let me ask you a question, princess.”

She started to say something, but he could tell she thought better of it when she pinched her lips together and stood straighter. He had to fight his grin.

“Sir?”

“Why are you here? Why the Marines?”

“Permission to speak freely?”

He waved her on.

“Daddy said I couldn’t do it,” she said with malice in her voice. “I’m here to prove him and everyone else wrong. I can do this.”

“Daddy trying to make it easy for you? Paving the way to a combat troop?” he taunted, knowing full well she’d paid her dues.

“I did my time on Parris Island. I deserve to be here.”

“I’ve been over your records, Patterson. The General showed them to me before he put you on my team. I know you’re a solid Marine, but you shouldn’t be here. My team is on the front line. You’re a distraction we don’t need.”

He looked to see if she would respond, but she said nothing.

Mag continued, “What happens when you miss the target and go down? My men would be worried about protecting you, not fighting the enemy. I can’t have that. Our lives depend on trusting each other in a fight. Just last month you shot Stewart in a mock exercise. Today your ass wiggled so far in the air I’m surprised the patrol didn’t spot it. You aren’t ready.”

Patterson stepped forward and put her hands on his desk, placing her face-to-face with him. He cocked a brow at her and wondered if she realized she’d broken protocol.

She leaned in and spoke in a low, soft voice. “I’m ready, Sir. Put me on the line. I’ll do my job.”

His body reacted in an unexpected way. His cock rose to attention.

*Goddamn it! Down, boy, nothin’ to see here.*

Mag brought his face so close to hers they were almost nose-to-nose. He spoke just as softly. “You are not ready. You will never be ready. Go home now before you fucking

kill someone or end up dead.”

He watched her shiver a little and his cock throbbed in answer. It took all his military control not to kiss her. When her tongue eased out of her mouth to lick her lips he thought he would lose his military bearing and he almost groaned, but caught himself.

*No fucking way is this happening.*

She never dropped her gaze and he respected her just a little more for that. Most men couldn't hold his glare. She wasn't afraid of him, he realized when she didn't back down.

*Well, fuck.*

“What was that, sir?”

He must have spoken aloud. He needed to get her off kilter. Mag leaned in closer so their noses touched, his lips pressed almost on hers. Her breath mingled with his.

“Get the fuck out of my office. You're dismissed. If you know what's good for you, you'll go home.”

Then she did the unthinkable. Patterson's tongue touched his mouth as she moistened her dry lips. He couldn't help it. He tried, but before he could think, his tongue met hers for a brief second before they both pulled away. Patterson stood at attention, saluted him, spun around and raced out of his office as if the devil himself followed on her heels.

“Shit. Fuck. Goddamn it!” He slammed his hand on his desk. “No way is this happening. No fucking way!”

\* \* \* \*

Em sat down hard on her bunk.

*What the hell was that?*

She took a deep breath and then another, trying to calm her speeding heart. Her eyes lids fluttered shut and all she could see was Rivers' face so close she could kiss him. Oh how she wanted to kiss him. That small taste wouldn't be enough. When her tongue had touched his lips and their breath mingled she thought her knees would buckle. She wanted him to grab her and hold her tight. Instead, she'd turned and ran—probably for the best. Her body just needed to catch up with her brain. The focus should be on the mission.

The team had to go out again. She wondered if he would let her go with them. Maybe she should tell him the whole story now so he would take her with them. The people involved needed to be stopped. Following her gut, she left her bunk and made her way to Rivers' office.

She entered the building and started down the corridor but a voice drifted to her position and drew her up short.

*“We have to do it now. I saw the perfect group. I'll be adding one more to the list, but this one is for me.”*

There was a pause, like the man waited for someone to speak.

*“No, you can't have her. She's mine.”*

*He must be on some kind of mobile phone. How the hell did he get reception out here?*

Em pressed against the wall and inched her way to where she thought the voice had come from. She peeked around the corner and could only see the back of the Marine. It looked like he had a satellite phone.

*Well, that explains it.*

*"He'll never know. I've got this in the bag,"* he continued, his voice too low for her to identify.

He turned to face her position and Em flattened herself against the wall. She backed away slowly in the direction she'd come and bumped into something ... or someone. She turned, right into the arms of Joe Rivers.

*Damn it, what is with my luck?*

"What are you doing?"

The man on the phone had to have heard Rivers. She didn't say anything, just shook her head, grabbed his hand and turned him around so she was hidden from view.

Maybe she could still get out without the other Marine realizing she was there. She just had to nudge Rivers along to the entrance. Em walked backwards.

He gave her a puzzled look.

"I'll ask again, what are you doing?"

She spoke in a low tone. "Nothing, I just got lost."

"The building isn't that big, Patterson."

*Well shit! There went that plan.*

"No, sir, it isn't. Night, sir." She turned to go back to her room, not explaining herself at all.

*He already thinks I'm a nut, might as well just keep confirming the fact.*

She didn't stop to see if he addressed the Marine.

\* \* \* \*

The man stopped in mid sentence. He heard a noise coming from the hall.

*Shit, who the fuck is that?*

"I've got to go. Someone is here. I'll call back after the mission tomorrow with a head count."

He slipped the phone into his pocket and rounded the corner to see the Colonel's back. Was someone with him? Behind him, he felt the presence of someone else. He turned to see who it was when the Colonel spoke again.

"The building isn't that big, Patterson."

"No, sir, it isn't. Night, sir."

Had Patterson overheard his conversation or had it been the Colonel? No matter, Patterson wouldn't be a factor soon. After they got back to the States, she would be his.

Patterson left and the Colonel turned around.

"Moore, Stewart." He nodded at them. "Good job out there today. Tomorrow, we're heading back out. There's a group of civilians holed up in a village that the locals have been raiding. Our orders are to bring them to the camp. You two should get some rest. We leave at zero three hundred."

He didn't wait for them to respond.

The men shared a room so they walked together.

"Wonder what Patterson did now."

"Who knows."

"She sure is a nice piece of ass. I wonder if she'll give me a taste."

He tuned the other man out. He had to focus. On tomorrow's mission he had to make sure the men didn't make it out alive. The orders were to kill anyone not attractive enough to sell. If the locals were out killing people, it should make his job easier. Of

course, if Patterson continued to fuck up it would help, too, because the Colonel's attention would be focused on her.

He worried if she'd heard his conversation. He thought on what he'd said and figured it would be too confusing for her to follow. The only question she might have is why he had a satellite phone in his possession. She wasn't that smart so he should be in the clear.

He wanted a taste of her. Just a small one, but he didn't want to put her on guard.

"Are you listening to me?"

"What? Oh, sorry. I zoned out. Must be tired."

He headed to his bunk and dropped down, turning away from the other man. He returned to his thoughts.

In his mind, he could see her—Emily. She stood before him in her towel, her skin moist from the shower. A small drop of water slid toward her lips. Emily's tongue reached out to lap up the water. She moaned low in her throat while looking at him. His cock hardened. He pulled her toward him and took her mouth in a fierce kiss. She didn't want to open for him, but he forced her to accept him. Her towel dropped between them.

He stood back to take in her beauty. He imagined her plump breasts had rosy pink nipples to match her tongue. They hardened under his stare and he leaned forward to taste her. He groaned at the imagined taste. The man's eyes popped open, the images snapping away as reality washed over him.

*Soon, my sweet, very soon you'll be mine to do with what I please.*

He fell asleep with a smile on his face.

## Chapter Six

*When in doubt, empty the magazine.*

Nerves on edge, Em paced in her room. Zero two-thirty and the mission began at zero three hundred. She couldn't screw up this time. Too much depended on things going right. She didn't worry about the civilians, at least not yet. They were safe until they got to the States. But as long as the team remained in Sri Lanka her worries focused on them—the men she had to count on out in the field.

Em left her room and headed to the common area. Moore and Stewart already sat on one of the couches.

"That scene rocked, when the kid is on his back stabbing him and then he throws the kid in the water and the bridge blows up. That movie is sure to be a classic."

"What are you guys talking about?"

They both looked up at her.

"This movie we saw not too long ago."

"What's it called," She asked.

"*Tropic Thunder*," Moore replied.

"I don't think I've seen that one. Who's in it?"

"Ben Stiller, Robert Downey Jr. and Jack Black to name a few."

"Oh, the way you were talking I thought it was an action movie."

"It is, but it's a funny one. You'll have to watch it when we get to the States. Maybe the three of us could have some downtime."

The shock must have shown on her face. The guys usually avoided her and didn't make friendly overtures.

"Don't look so shocked, Patterson, you're one of us now. Don't let the Colonel with his 'you're a girl' bullshit get to you. He's just testing you. He does it to all of us. It's like his little test to make sure we're ready. I think it relieves some of his tension. I would *not* want to be in his shoes—leading a team—too much pressure for me. I'll just shoot the bad guys and be happy."

She didn't know Moore had it in him to talk to her without leering, but somehow he managed. She sat down across from the two men.

"You've known the Colonel the longest, Moore. Is he always so intense?"

"When we're preparing for a mission, yes. When we have downtime and are just keeping up on PT, no. He likes to joke around with us a little. Gunny calls him Mag, but we just stick with Colonel."

"Do either of you know how he got his nickname?"

"No, Gunny probably knows. Those two have been tight for a long time."

"Why are you three sitting in here? You think this is some kind of vacation? We've got work to do. The interpreter is already out front, let's go."

She jumped at the sound of Rivers' voice.

The three of them scrambled out of their seats and followed Rivers to the front of the building.

"We're going in silent. The village is ten clicks to the north. We'll hump it to the

village with no coms. Keep them live in case we need to use them, but until we get to the civilians, I don't want to worry about someone picking up our chatter.

"Moore, you're in front, scout out the area, keep your gun locked and loaded. Stewart, you're with Gunny. Protect the interpreter. Patterson you're with me. Keep it tight, let's go."

The sun slumbered in the distance while the team made their way to the village. The trouble would start when they headed to home base. It would be full daylight on the trek back, but it couldn't be helped. It would be easier for the villagers to move during the day.

Em had a problem with the grouping. Moore would be too far ahead to keep an eye on. At least Stewart walked only a few feet from her. She would get a better feel for Rivers—the only positive thing the morning brought her. After they reached camp, she would tell him the truth. He could help her keep an eye on the two Marines. Once he knew his team's involvement in the operation, he would go ballistic. Em just hoped she could keep him calm enough to shut down the operation.

She felt a tap on her shoulder, Rivers got her attention. He used two fingers, pointed to his eyes and then he gestured toward their right. She focused on the spot, but didn't see any movement. She turned to look over her shoulder and shook her head, letting him know she didn't see anything. He nodded and they continued on. Rivers stopped her a few other times, but they made it to the village without incident.

Darkness continued to surround the village when the team arrived. They split up and went to each house, collecting all who would come.

The team gathered in the center of the village.

Rivers nodded to Tran, the interpreter. "Folks, we are taking you to a UN approved base. On the way there, we'll need you to be as quiet as possible. We will do everything we can to protect you, but you need to help us by not falling behind and maintaining a good pace.

Charlie, you're on point. Beta, you keep toward the front. Delta, you're behind Beta toward the middle of the group and Echo, I want you toward the back of the group. I'll bring up the rear to catch stragglers. Let's get to it."

Em watched Rivers pace in front of the group as he waited for one of the men from the village to finish interpreting his words.

The trip to base camp started out easily enough. The sun inched its way up bringing the Marines on high alert, their eyes scanning for the enemy. Em became hyper-aware as she kept watch on the Marines as well. If one of them made a wrong move, she would know. She felt safe with Rivers covering her. When they got to base she would tell him the truth. Her gut couldn't be wrong on this one.

A rustle to her left pulled her up short. She raised her arm alerting Rivers that something seemed off. She heard him whisper through her com.

"Get those civilians to cover now. Echo caught a noise and I'm not taking any chances."

The group moved toward the bush, away from the noise. Em put her back to the group to focus on the woods. She caught a flash of something and yelled.

"INCOMING!"

The Colonel barked orders. "Beta and Delta get those civilians to camp. Charlie and Echo, let's lay some cover."

Em edged back to the trees with Joe to her right. Moore ran to find higher ground. They laid down ground fire so the civilians could make it to base and then she heard the unthinkable—a thud from her left. She turned her head in time to see Rivers fall over. Hard.

“Joe!” Her heart dropped to her stomach.

“Shit.” Joe sounded very calm for a man whose favorite word happened to be fuck. It must be bad.

Em didn’t even think, she ran straight for Rivers. She reached his side, grabbed his shirt, and pulled him toward the trees behind her, the only real cover she could find. He grunted in pain, but managed to crab crawl, helping her with his weight.

A group of men emerged from the opposite wall of trees, firing on Em and Rivers. From his position on a nearby hill, Moore picked off the rebels, one by one. The gunfire switched from them as the hostiles tried to take out Moore.

It seemed like hours went by, but in mere minutes, Em got Rivers behind cover. She wanted to see how badly he was injured, but she didn’t dare until the enemy no longer caused a threat.

Em jerked and ducked down as a bullet hit the tree by her head. She took a breath, and then slowly raised herself so she could get a shot off. She cocked her head, listening for the position of the enemy when she noticed there were no more shots coming from across the way. Moore must have taken care of the last of them. With a sigh of relief, she turned to Joe.

*Oh my God, they shot Joe. There is so much...*

She stopped her thoughts. Em wouldn’t, no, *couldn’t*, go there. She barely knew the man and as far as he knew, she was only a member of his team.

“Joe, are you all right?”

“Wh—what did you just call me?” He gasped through clenched teeth.

Em crawled over to check for Joe’s wound.

“Are you hit anywhere else?”

She ran her hands over his body making sure there were no hidden wounds. The only damage seemed to be to his shoulder.

“To answer your question, I called you Joe, you jackass.”

“That would be Colonel Jackass to you.” He coughed on the words.

“No it wouldn’t, but we’ll talk about that later.” She said absently

She spoke into her com, “Moore, what’s your twenty?”

“On your six.”

“Just who are you, Emily Patterson?” Rivers choked out.

“Hush, we’ll talk about this after you get checked out. Moore, we need to get the Colonel to base so a medic can look him over. He’s got a wound in his shoulder. Can you walk, Colonel?”

He gave her a strange look. “I’ll manage.”

Moore didn’t question her, just leaned down to help Joe to his feet.

The trio struggled back to base camp at a slow pace. Em kept looking at Joe, his face as white as a sheet of paper.

“Do you need to stop, J—um, Colonel?”

“No,” Joe gave a negative shake of his head, “we’re almost there. I can take it.”

She shook her head and muttered under her breath, “Damn Marines.”

Joe stumbled on a root in their path causing Em to fall to her knees. Moore managed to keep Joe upright.

“Fuck.” Joe moaned

“Sorry, Colonel.” She stood back up and they got moving again. His face continued to lose color and she did the only thing she could. She played the girl card.

“I’m sorry, guys, but I need to take a break. Could we sit down for just a minute?”

Joe bit his lip and gave a slight nod.

“There’s a tree trunk over there the Colonel can rest on. You have your canteen?” Moore asked.

“Sure do. Wouldn’t leave on a mission without it.” She grinned at him.

They settled Joe on the ground, leaning him against the tree trunk.

“You want some water, Colonel?” She asked him.

“I could use a drink.”

He stayed stoic, fighting his way through what had to be excruciating pain. She moved to help him with the water, but he took it from her hand.

“Happy now, Patterson?”

“Sir?”

“Do you really think I’m that stupid? Don’t answer that. I know you don’t need a break. You think I’m some weak, wounded man who won’t stop being macho, but that isn’t the case. I know my limits. I’ve been shot before so whenever you’re done with this pretend break it would be nice to get a move on because I want to be with the medic before I pass out. Got it?”

“Yes, sir.”

“My name sounded good coming from your lips.”

She glanced at Moore to see if he paid attention to the two of them.

“What?”

The other man was a few feet away and Joe had spoken softly. She looked at him as he rasped.

“Say it again”

“Your name?”

“Yes. Say my name.”

“We really shouldn’t do this here. We can talk when we get back to camp after the medic checks you out.”

“Say it.”

He persisted and she caved.

“Joe,” she whispered. Right before he passed out.

\* \* \* \*

“He’s waking up.”

“Emily?”

“What did you say, sir?”

Mag struggled to open his eyes. When he did, a man hovered over him.

“What?” Mag didn’t know what happened or why the man hovered.

He remembered stopping so Emily could rest. Well, so he could rest, but then nothing. He tried to move, but pain radiated up his arm and his shoulder throbbed in a steady rhythm.



“Fuck that hurts. Where the hell is my team?”

“Sir, please lay down. You’ve been shot and lost a lot of blood.”

“Colonel Rivers, you should listen to the medics.”

His cock hardened at the sound of Emily’s voice.

“Say my name”. *Oh fuck, what did I do?*

He could hear her whisper in his ear as he drifted off. His name really did sound good coming from her lips and he could imagine her screaming it while he fucked her.

He shifted in the bed and hoped Emily didn’t see his dick tenting the sheet.

“Patterson.” He gave her a sharp nod. “We need to talk.”

One of the medics added something to the bag hooked up to his vein. He ignored her and focused on Emily.

“I know we do, but now isn’t the best time. Too many ears for what I need to say. The medic said you can return to base tomorrow. The rest of the team is at the camp. The villagers are being put up at another one of the abandoned buildings.”

“I’m not letting you get out of talking to me.”

“Don’t worry, sir. I have things I need to say and you aren’t going to be happy about them, but they can wait. Gunny is at chow. He’ll be in when he’s finished to give you the official report.”

“I’ll have Gunny let the team know we’re on downtime with the exception of perimeter watch. We’ll be swapping out duties with the other team.”

“Yes, sir.” She turned and left.

Mag settled into bed. He felt groggy from whatever they’d given him for the pain and he only wanted to close his eyes, but he thought about Emily and who she really was.

*Why am I still thinking of her as Emily?*

He sighed and closed his eyes.

“Hey, Mag. You want me to come back?”

He opened his eyes to see Gun standing at the foot of his cot.

“No, Gun. Go ahead and give me your report.”

“Not much to report. After the gunfire started you ordered Stewart and I to get the civilians to camp. We hot-footed it back and waited for you, Moore and Patterson to return. What we didn’t expect was Moore and Patterson dragging your sorry ass into camp.”

He glared at Gun, but made no comment.

Gun chuckled at him. “When the three of you stumbled in we got you to the medic. They said you were lucky the bullet went straight through and didn’t hit anything vital. Patterson reported in and said the hostiles were eliminated shortly after you were shot. Then humped it back here. Said you passed out on the way in, which is why Patterson practically dragged you in. I thought you said she fucked everything up.”

Mag snorted.

“I don’t know what to make of her, Gun. She’ll tell me yet.”

“Just take it easy there, Mag. It isn’t like you’ll find anything out tonight. The medic said you’d be here at least overnight. Any orders for the team?”

“Yes, I already told Patterson when she was here—”

“She came here to visit you?”

“Yes, why?”

“No reason, go ahead.”

“Tell them they’re on downtime for now with the exception of perimeter checks. We’re swapping off with the other team.”

“I’ll let them know. You take it easy until tomorrow.”

“Yes, sir!” Gun chuckled as he left.

Mag just shook his head and settled into his cot. His thoughts drifted back to the mission. It was his own damn fault he got shot.

His attention didn’t focus on the hostiles, but on Emily. He’d never seen her handle a gun the way she did out on the field. Like she knew what the fuck she was doing. How the hell she’d gone from team fuck-up to his savior in a flash he didn’t know, but he could be thankful. Calm under fire, that’s how she handled herself. No hesitation on her part, she just grabbed him and dragged him to safety. Not only that, she took over control when he fell.

Mag drifted to sleep to the vision of Emily’s green eyes twinkling down at him. He tried to reconcile Patterson and Emily, even in his dreams.

## Chapter Seven

*The Marine Corps doesn't build character—it reveals it.*

“Enter.”

Mag had been waiting for this for a day. Tomorrow the team headed home to Camp Lejeune and he wanted answers before they left. His shoulder still throbbed. He put a hand to it and tried not to rub it. His breath hissed out.

He watched Emily enter the room. She looked stiff and uncomfortable.

“At ease, Lieutenant, and have a seat.”

She sat down in the chair. “How’s your shoulder?”

“I’ll live. Now don’t you have something to tell me, Lieutenant Patterson?”

“That would be Special Agent.”

“Excuse me?”

“I’m Special Agent Emily Patterson from NCIS.”

“Well, fuck me.” He stared at her in disbelief.

“I couldn’t tell you before because your whole team is under investigation.”

He couldn’t say anything. She had stunned him into muteness. He didn’t know what hurt worse, his shoulder or his head. They sat in silence for a moment.

“I’m under investigation? What for?” Mag was proud of how calm he sounded. He wanted to shout and rant. Emily looked tense as if expecting him to explode.

“It isn’t just you, Colonel. It’s your entire team. Someone has been selling women and children into sexual slavery and the investigation led us to your team. I was sent in to figure out who might be behind it. The thought is that no one in your unit could pull this off without your knowledge.” She paused.

“So why are you telling me now? What changed?”

“My gut tells me you can’t be involved. The night you stopped me in the hall, I’d just overheard a conversation one of the men was having. He was talking about a group and adding someone to the list. I don’t have concrete evidence, but I think he was talking about the sex ring. The person has a satellite phone. Do any of the guys on the team have access to one of those?”

“That night after you left, I met Moore and Stewart in the corridor, but wait just a fucking minute. Why should I help you?” Mag was furious.

“You’ll help me because you know this is wrong and because someone in your unit is responsible. Aren’t those two reasons enough to help me stop this? Innocent women and children are being taken from their homes and forced into the sex trade. The women are bad enough, but these sick people are taking children too. We need—”

He held up his hand.

“Enough. I get it. *Fuck!*”

“There is one more thing. NCIS has Parker and Jackson in custody. Jackson agreed to a deal so he has probably already given his statement. Hopefully, by now my agency knows who is behind this mess.”

“What the fuck!” He did explode now. “How could you keep this shit from me? I should have been fucking clued in that this fucking shit was happening in my fucking

unit. *I'm* responsible for what my team does.”

“Col—Joe.” Emily got up from her chair and went to his side, placing her hand on his uninjured shoulder. “Joe, we couldn’t tell you what was going on until we cleared you. I told my partner before we left that I’d be briefing you and bringing you in on the op. You know your men better than I ever could.

“We need to nip this in the bud before any more people are kidnapped. We’re primed to break this down now if we keep our eyes open. There’s an opportunity here I don’t want to pass up. The group of civilians we picked up has some prime candidates.

“What are your orders?”

“Fuck.” Mag ran a hand over his face. “Right before you came in I received a call from the General. We’re to bring the villagers with us tomorrow when we leave. Goddamn it!” He slammed his fist on his desk and winced as pain radiated up his arm to his wound. “This goes right up the chain, doesn’t it?”

“We believe it does. How else could these people be brought into the country?”

“Shit. Just ... fuck. I’d wondered why the General kept sending us on peacekeeping missions.” He said, almost to himself.

“What?” She asked him.

“I’ll help you in any way that I can. I want the sick fuck helping with this out of my unit. Have you cleared anyone yet?”

“I haven’t been able to find proof, if that is what you mean. I know you aren’t involved. At least I *hope* you aren’t involved. The only two under suspicion right now are Moore and Stewart and that’s only because those were the two in the hallway that night. It could be one or both. I can’t rule it out.”

“I need to think about this. I can’t get my fucking mind wrapped around it.”

Her hand squeezed his shoulder and he reached up to put his hand over hers, controlling his grimace as it stretched his wound. Mag turned in his chair so he could face her and then pulled her into the cradle of his legs. With a little tug, she fell into his lap and he did something he’d dreamed of since the confrontation in his office.

He kissed her.

Just a taste. Anything to get his mind off the craziness of the last few minutes. She tensed up until his tongue licked the crease of her lips, then she melted into him and wrapped her arms around his neck. Without breaking the kiss she straddled his thighs and pressed her body against his. She moaned and that was his undoing. His hands went behind her head, holding her in place while he invaded her mouth, his pain fading into the background.

“Emily.” He sighed as he stopped to drag air into his lungs. He moved his hand to her hips and gently rocked against her.

“Oh God, Joe, what are we doing?” She jumped from his lap and backed up until she hit the wall. “We can’t do this. There’s too much at stake.” Her voice trembled.

“Fuck. It was hard enough not kissing you when I thought you were under my command. At least then I had an invisible line I couldn’t cross. Now this shit with the men. How soon will you know what Jackson had to say and if Parker is involved?”

“I should be able to find out soon after we land.”

“We have to bring the villagers with us. My team is under orders. If we do anything different we’ll tip somebody off.”

“Is there a way to keep them safe?”

“I’ll think of something. Are you staying with the team when we get back?”

“I’ll be with you until this is over. We’ll have to watch the civilians closely. Maybe we can catch the culprits in the act.”

“Just remember, for now, you’re a Marine under my command. You’d better act like it. And no more of this fake fuck-up bullshit. Please tell me it was fake.”

She laughed. “Yes. I had to hold myself back and make myself mess up. It was hard with you watching me because I wanted to show you what I could really do.”

“Good. Stop that shit and just be you. No need to hide now that I know.”

“What about the others?”

“After you dragged my ass back to camp, they’re all impressed. I don’t think they’ll question it. If you have to fuck up, I guess you have to, but you and I are going to go to the range when we get back. I want to see what you can do.”

She grinned at him. “Yes, sir.”

He grinned back, for a second forgetting how FUBAR the whole situation was.

“I’d better get back. I’ve been here for too long as it is.”

“One more thing before you go.”

“Yes.”

“We will pick up where this left off. Count on it.”

She blushed and left the room. He was sure his laugh followed her down the hall. He sat back in his chair, his mind going a mile a minute while he processed everything Emily told him.

*Emily. Fuck, what have I gotten myself into?*

\* \* \* \*

*What was she doing in his office for so long? Maybe I should take her now. No, no, I wouldn’t have anywhere to hide her. I’ll wait until we get back to base.*

He headed back to his room. The man couldn’t call the General no matter how much he wanted to. This last group held a few potentials. Getting them now would be easy. The General would have already given Rivers his orders.

*Stupid man, letting us work right under his nose. He got his. Too bad the bullet didn’t kill him.*

He’d seen the way the Colonel watched Emily when he thought no one was looking. He couldn’t have her. Emily belonged to him. He’d have her chained in his basement before too long, at his mercy. He could hear the swish of the whip and her cry as it lashed at her skin. The blood would well up, again and again, until she passed out. When she woke up, he would start all over, his mark on every inch of her body.

His cock tented his pants. He needed to get back to his room before anyone noticed. His roommate was on perimeter watch so he had his own bunk for now and would put it to good use. He wasn’t up for perimeter watch until later. He had time. His door loomed before him. The man shut and locked it. Pants hit the floor as soon as the lock clicked. His cock so hard he had a zipper impression on it. A trail of clothes followed him to his bunk. The bed squeaked when he lay down, but his thoughts were already focused elsewhere. He closed his eyes to shut out any distraction to his fantasies.

*“Get your fucking hands off my woman.”*

*“Stewart, what are you doing here?” Rivers barked at him.*

*“I’m taking back what is mine.”*

*"Please, help me. Don't let the Colonel hurt me."*

*She begged so prettily, her big green eyes had tears welling up in them. Her bottom lip trembled.*

*"I'll save you, Emily."*

*He walked up to the Colonel, pulled a knife from his pocket and plunged it into the man's chest.*

*"Nobody takes what's mine."*

*He turned and grabbed Emily's arm, bent down and threw her over his shoulder in a fireman's carry as the Colonel gasped his last breath. He slapped her ass and turned to take her to the Colonel's desk.*

*"Thank you. You're my hero."*

*He put her down on the desk and roughly spread her thighs. He grabbed her hair and pushed her head back.*

*"Ow, that hurts."*

*"You're mine and I'll make sure you remember it, you slut. Now say my name like you said his."*

*"Kyle, oh Kyle, please, don't hurt me."*

*"Shut up, bitch. You'll like it."*

*He tugged on her hair again and she whimpered. He knew she liked it. He took her mouth in a punishing kiss, drawing blood from her full lips. He nipped them again for good measure.*

*He stroked his dick, holding it tight, the way he liked it. He started to pant as his fantasy played itself out.*

*Still holding her hair tight with one hand, he used the other to unfasten her pants.*

*"When we get home, you'll be naked all the time. No more clothes to get in our way."*

*She whimpered again.*

*"Now lift your hips, bitch, and help me get these damn pants off."*

*Emily didn't respond right away so he slapped her across the face.*

*"Do what I say, when I say it."*

*She started to struggle, but he stopped that by slapping her again.*

*"Do you want to get punished so soon? I thought we'd wait, but if you're going to disobey, I'll start now."*

*She tried to shake her head, but he still held her hair tight.*

*"That's what I thought, now lift those hips."*

*This time she complied. He only tugged her pants down. He wanted her underwear on for now. He stroked her pussy through the cotton of her briefs.*

*"Why aren't you wet for me slut? Saving it up for the asshole on the floor?"*

*"No, no. You're my hero, but you're being a little rough. Could we slow down?"*

*He slapped her again. "You'll like it how I say you'll like it. Got me?"*

*"Yes, Kyle."*

*"That's what I like to hear. Now tell me you like it rough. Beg for it."*

*He ripped her panties off her and pinched her clit making her hips raise up from the table.*

*"More Kyle, I like it r—rough"*

*"Good girl."*

*He rewarded her by tearing her blouse off and pinching her nipples. He leaned down to nip and them and then he bit her, hard.*

*"No, Kyle. Please, that hurts."*

*He didn't answer. He released her hair and pulled his pants off. His cock was ready for her.*

He pumped his dick faster and faster. He imagined that his hand was her pussy, tight and warm.

Kyle spilled his seed over his hand when dream Emily screamed. It would be music to his ears to hear it in real life, to have her beg for him.

There was a knock on his door and the knob twisted. He slowed his breathing down and got himself under control and pulled his blanket over himself.

"Stewart, you want to go for chow. Hey, why is the door locked? You knocking one off in there?" Moore chuckled on the other side of the door.

"I'll meet you there, Moore." He was glad his voice remained steady.

"Sure, whatever."

He heard the man's footstep fading away. He couldn't wait to be out of this stupid unit. If it wasn't for his uncle, he'd still be at his cushy job back home. He threw his blanket off and grimaced at the wet spot.

"Damn it."

He walked to his clothes basket and wiped off with a dirty shirt. He'd have to do laundry soon. His thoughts drifted back to the lovely scream Emily had given him. He hoped she sounded as wonderful when he acted out his fantasy. By this time tomorrow she would be his no matter what his uncle said. That fat bastard kept trying to get him to take one of the village girls they took, but they didn't have the same spark as Emily. There was something about that woman, she called to him.

Kyle's stomach rumbled and he chuckled. Maybe he'd see her at chow.

\* \* \* \*

Relief flowed through Em. Telling Joe about who she was lifted a weight she didn't know she'd been carrying. He would be a good ally to have. He believed in honor, courage and commitment, the core values of the Marine Corps. He not only believed them, he lived them.

Em wanted to get some chow before perimeter duty. When she walked into the building being used as the mess hall she saw Stewart sitting in the corner by himself, the rest of the room empty save the cooks.

She walked up and got her tray. With not much to choose from, she took what they had and headed for Stewart.

"You mind if I sit here?"

"Sure, have a seat Em—um Patterson."

"Oh, it's okay, you can call me Em or Emily. It's just the two of us."

"I should probably call you Lieutenant."

"I won't tell if you won't." She smiled at him and took a bite of her food.

*Not too bad.*

He grinned back and then glanced down at his tray, like he was embarrassed. Could he really be involved? He seemed so young. She swallowed her bite and asked Stewart a question.

“So, Stewart, why the Marines?”

“You can call me Kyle, Emily.”

“Okay, Kyle, why the Marines?”

“I didn’t know what I wanted to do after high school. They’ll pay for college so all in all, it was a good situation.”

“Do you know what you want to do now?”

“I’m still not sure. I might be a lifer, but I still have time to decide. Why are you a Marine?”

She took a second to remember her cover story, by taking another bite of her food.

“I wanted to follow in my dad’s footsteps, although he is against it. I wanted to prove to him and the rest of my family that I could cut it

So far I’m not disappointed. It’s been hard, but I’ve enjoyed the challenge. Of course, I didn’t expect I’d have to haul a wounded man back to camp.”

Stewart snorted.

“What, you don’t like the Colonel?”

“Um, what? No, I like him just fine. I don’t know much about him. I’m too new.”

Em looked at her watch. “Shoot, I have to go. I’m on duty in a few.” She wolfed down a few more bites.

“Me too. You’d think one of the other teams would be scheduled. We’re leaving tomorrow.”

“True. I was wondering why we only had a short mission. The other team has been here for months.”

“I have no idea. I’m the low man on the totem pole.” He chuckled.

“I hear you there. See you out in the field.” Stuffing down the rest of her dinner, she put her tray away and headed outside.

Em didn’t mind perimeter watch. It relaxed her to be out at night under the stars supervising the men. Maybe she could forget for just a bit about the horrible things happening around her. Hopefully, Joe could help her catch the culprit in the act. That would be the ideal situation. Knowing her luck, that wouldn’t happen. She couldn’t wait until they got back to base. Tomorrow they would round up the villagers and take them out of the country. Em had no idea who issued the orders or how they convinced the powers that be to bring the people into the United States. Someone had a lot to answer for.

The Marine on duty saluted her.

She returned the salute. “I’m here to take over.”

“Yes, ma’am.” He turned and marched toward the barracks.

Em started her perimeter check with a stroll along her appointed area, looking out for the men on duty. Her thoughts strayed to the kiss she’d shared with Joe. The hunger in his touch left her wanting more. It was too dangerous, but her body didn’t care.

She tripped on a branch and knew she had to get her mind off Joe and onto the mission. The hostiles still existed. She couldn’t afford to let her guard down. Again, too much was at stake.

A movement came from her left. She turned and shined her flashlight. Not seeing anything, she switched it off and continued her walk.

Em reached the end of her assigned area and turned to make the return trip. She had to keep her mind sharp, the repetition of the walk could bore her. Screwing up this late in



the game wasn't an option. Joe had already told her that.

*Joe.*

She sighed. It was going to be a long night.

## Chapter Eight

*United States Marine Corps—no promises, no shortcuts.*

Em jerked out of sleep, held her blanket to her chest and frantically looked around the room.

*What the hell woke me up?*

There it was again. Someone knocked at her door. She released the breath she held.

“One minute, please.”

The knocking stopped. She went to the door and yanked it open.

“What the hell do you want? Oh, sorry.”

Joe stood on the other side of the door. She swallowed a couple times to keep the drool from leaving her mouth. His hair wet from a recent shower, his white tank top molded to his body, his shorts very short showing off his muscular legs. He was sex on legs. When she realized she was staring, she pulled her eye off his cock as it started to swell.

“Can I come in or do you want me to stand out here while you ogle me?”

Her face went red, she could feel the flames race over her body. Em stepped back and let him enter the room.

“Wh—what did you need?”

The door clicked shut and Em turned. She leaned against it waiting for him to speak. He took his time as his gaze moved over her from head to toe. Now more than her face was hot. It was then she noticed she wore the same thing he did. She lifted her chin. Em wouldn’t back down from his stare.

“I wanted to talk to you about your mission. I didn’t want to wait until tomorrow. The team should be asleep so I knew now would be a good time.”

“Anything in particular you’d like to know?”

“What led you to my team? Why were you so sure it was one of my men?”

“Your team was in the area where our witness claimed they were kidnapped. No other team was in the vicinity and they described their captors as Marines. The women said they were rounded up in their village by a group of men. They arrived in the United States and were immediately taken to a small room by one of the soldiers and locked up. The man they described could have been Jackson or Parker so we picked both of them up on the off chance it was one of them and we could get them to break.”

Joe gave a weary sigh and sat down on her bed.

“I just don’t want to believe it. I want to go and confront the men, make them tell me what is going on. Beat it ou—”

“You can’t d—”

He held up a hand. “I know I can’t really do that, but I want to. You don’t know how fucking bad I want to. I have to trust these men with my life and those of innocent people and now in the back of my mind I’ll be wondering which fucker is so sick they’re selling people.”

“Maybe I shouldn’t have told you.”

“No, you did the right thing. I know these men. I’ve trained them all to a certain

extent. You'll need the inside edge to stop the fucker."

"I don't think we have to worry about anything until we land. Once we're on US soil we'll need to keep a sharp eye on the men."

"Agreed. I'll let you go to sleep now. I know you haven't been off shift long and we leave early tomorrow. I just wanted to let you know, I'm on board."

He gave her a sharp nod, rose from the bed and left her room, barely glancing at her as the door opened and closed softly behind him.

Em released a breath she didn't know she'd been holding as she watched him leave. She didn't know what she'd expected. She knew what she wanted, him to kiss her again. To feel his rough lips slide gently over hers, his tongue force its way into her mouth—not like she would fight him.

She walked to her bed and lay down. A weary sigh left her lips. This mission was proving harder than she'd expected. The emotional drain was high. Of course, that part had nothing to do with the actual mission and more to do with a certain Marine she couldn't stop thinking about.

Em closed her eyes and all she could see was Joe. She wondered what he would look like naked. She licked her lips as she pictured him stripping for her. Shit, she needed to stop fantasizing and go to sleep. Too much rested on what happened when they got back to base. With luck, tomorrow would end her assignment as she could get back to real life.

Her thoughts returned to Joe. She wanted that man like there was no tomorrow. She fell asleep with his name on her lips.

"Joe..."

\* \* \* \*

*What the hell is going on!*

Kyle stood in the shadows and watched the Colonel sneak out of Emily's room. Emily belonged to him. If the Colonel touched her, he would have to die.

Kyle walked up to Emily's door and placed a hand on it.

"You're mine; no one else can have you." He whispered.

The urge to break down the door and make Emily his was strong. His hand reached for the doorknob, but he stopped himself.

He backed away and went to his room. Opening the door, he saw his bunkmate sleeping, the snores giving the other soldier away. He went to his bunk and reached under it for his duffel bag. Inside he'd hidden his satellite phone. Tossing the phone back and forth in his hands, Kyle contemplated calling his uncle. The man could have an idea on how to eliminate the Colonel. If the magnificent Magnus had died on the mission it would have made things easier. He hated seeing Emily's hand on that man's body, even if it was only to bring him to the medics. The first thing he would have to do when Emily became his was scrub her down, maybe use some bleach to cleanse her of the Magnus taint.

What kind of man called himself Magnus anyway?

The phone in his hand slipped through his fingers. He made a grab for it, but it fell to the floor. Kyle looked over at the sleeping man, but the guy didn't move. He reached for the phone and put it away. There would be time enough to call his uncle tomorrow. He would meet them at the plane and retrieve the people who met the criteria for his program.

He settled back into bed, placed his hands behind his head and looked up at the ceiling. Kyle didn't risk fantasizing about Emily; no matter how hard of a sleeper his bunk mate happened to be he didn't want to be caught doing the knuckle shuffle.

Instead, he turned his thoughts to ways of killing the good Colonel. Something bloody sounded good. Face-to-face with a knife maybe. If he cut the man's throat just right, he could swim in the blood. Maybe even baptize Emily in it. Or, he could force Emily to kill the man. That might be even better. He would give her the knife and cradle her hand in his. They could slice him together and play in his blood.

Maybe a gun would be a better idea. Did he want the Colonel to see him coming? Kyle wasn't as good of a shot as Moore, but he could hit what he shot at. Yeah, he wanted to look the man in the eyes when he killed him. Let him know why he must die. It would have been fine if the fucker had kept his hands off Emily, but he had to touch her.

*Beep, beep, beep.*

Kyle bolted out of bed and grabbed for the phone he'd put under the bed. He looked over and the other man still slept. He crept out of the room and rushed to a secure spot to take the call.

"Why the fuck are you calling me now?"

"Sorry, son, but I had to get some information to you."

"What if I was away from the phone?"

"You weren't so shut up and listen. We've been compromised."

"What?"

"You heard me right, we've been compromised. NCIS has one of our men. He's being taken care of, but we don't know how much he's said. I wanted to warn you to be careful."

"Is the drop still happening?"

"As planned but we need to be extra careful. I'm sending more men in to keep watch, just in case they know our plans."

"How much did this guy know?"

"Enough to put us all away."

"Damn it!"

"Don't worry about it. Like I said, we've taken care of it."

"Fine. I need to hit my rack before someone sees me out here. I'll talk to you after we land."

"Be careful."

He turned the phone off and stared off into space for a moment. This could alter his plan a little. If NCIS knew about the operations they could stop his taking Emily as his own and he couldn't have that. His time frame would have to be upped.

*I'll have to take her when we get back to base.*

Kyle frowned. He didn't like having his plans changed.

\* \* \* \*

"Let's hustle people. Tran, tell the villagers it will be fine and get them in the trucks. Moore, help load them. Patterson, what the hell are you doing back there? Get in gear."

Mag just wanted this all to be over. It might mean training a new crew, but he didn't care. If some sick bastard was selling people, they needed to be taken down. And if they were using his team to do it, he wanted to be in on it.

“Gun, what are you waiting for, an invitation? Let’s go.”

Gun walked up to him, “What’s got your panties in a bunch?”

“I just want to get home and out of this place.”

“But what’s the rush? I’ve never seen you this way.” Gun indicated his shoulder. “Your wound bothering you?”

“What? Oh no, that’s fine. I’m just tired, Gun.”

He hated not telling his best friend what was going on. The sooner everything was over, the better he’d feel.

“Just calm down a little, Mag, we’ve got time.” Gun slapped him on the back and went back to helping the villagers onto the trucks.

Lost in thought, he didn’t hear Emily come up beside him and jumped when she spoke.

“Just breathe. Sorry, I didn’t mean to startle you but you need to relax. You’re making the guys jumpy. We can’t let them think anything is wrong.” She whispered.

“It’s hard when I just want to rip into them and get to the bottom of this shit.”

He ran a hand down his weary face and sighed. He was doing too much of that lately and it mostly had to do with the woman standing beside him.

“We will get to the bottom of this, but we’ll do it my way. I’ll go help the guys.”

She walked off and he watched her ass swaying in her BDUs. Something really was wrong with him if he thought she looked sexy in her uniform.

*Fuck. I need to get a life or get her into bed.*

He went to his bunk, grabbed his duffel and headed back to the trucks. It was time to go home.

On the flight back, he kept an eye on his team. He really didn’t know what he was looking for. Nothing Jackson did looked out of place. Hell, he liked the guy. They had poker nights together; he’d gone to the guy’s wedding. How could he be so wrong?

Mag closed his eyes and leaned his head back. It would be hours before they got back to base. They would need to be debriefed and then he could get Emily to a phone. He’d put together a plan to get the civilians back home with the help of a few contacts. There was no way he would allow them to be taken and sold. This wasn’t the first time they had brought civilians home. Why didn’t he question this all before?

*You followed orders, that’s why.*

He looked over to where Emily sat. She slept like nothing mattered. As a matter of fact, he looked around him and almost everyone slept.

*Could someone guilty of such crimes sleep peacefully?*

That weighed on Mag the most, the fact that whoever was behind this could sleep peacefully and have not a care in the world. What kind of man did it take to sell children? The women were bad enough, but the thought of innocent children being sold for sex broke his heart. He looked back at a little girl clutching a teddy bear and curled in her mother’s lap. No way would he allow that girl’s innocence to be taken from her.

The plane hit a patch of turbulence; he clutched the arm rest and took a deep breath. Flying was never his favorite thing to do, but he tolerated it. He would rather be on the ground fighting or training.

He settled back into his seat and tried to relax while fine-tuning his plan. He didn’t even worry when thoughts of Emily took over. He really needed to do something about her. She always seemed to be right there no matter what he was thinking. Maybe after

things wrapped up he could take her out and really get to know her.

*I wonder how good she would look in my bed.*

He drifted off with images of Emily. It started out as a dream and turned into a nightmare when he looked down and saw her bloody broken body at his feet.

Mag jerked awake and frantically looked over at Emily. She still slept peacefully. He shook it off and went back to sleep.

## Chapter Nine

*Marines never die—they just go to hell and regroup.*

The plane landed and Em worried about the villagers' safety. She didn't think Mag would let anything happen to them either, but she still couldn't count on anyone but herself.

"Patterson, get your ass back here and help. What the fuck are you doing over there?"

So he wanted to play it that way, fine by her.

"Coming, sir."

She stood next to him and almost jumped when he leaned down to whisper into her ear.

"I'm sending everyone back to base. Watch for reactions. You and I will get these people settled. No fuckin' way am I letting them be sold when I just saved them for death."

She nodded and put her focus on the other three members of the team.

"Gunny, take Moore and Stewart back to base. Patterson and I have this. We'll meet at zero five hundred for debriefing."

Gunny gave Joe a strange look, Moore didn't seem to care one way or the other, and Stewart was blank. No clues there.

"Yes, sir."

Em watched the three men march off the plane.

"Where the fuck is the interpreter?"

The women were starting to get antsy and walked to the door.

"Patterson, stop them. I don't care how you do it, but they can't get off the plane until I'm ready. I'm going to the cockpit."

"Yes, sir."

She rushed to the exit and held out her hand to stop the people from rushing the door. The interpreter finally joined her and managed to calm the villagers.

"Would you please direct them to their seats? I'm not sure what the Colonel's plans are. They don't have to sit down, but we need to get some order here. I'll go see if I can find something for them to snack on."

She waited until the man translated the instructions and the people headed to their seats. She made it to the cockpit door just as Joe walked out.

"What's going on?"

He looked out at the people by their chairs. "I had to call in a few favors, but I was able to get these people on a flight home."

"Really? How? When?"

He gave a little laugh. "Yes, really and right now."

"How did you explain it? We can't give anything away that might scare away the perpetrators."

"Don't worry, this was a personal favor. No one in my chain of command is aware of what's going on. This plane will take the civilians back as soon as the new pilot gets here,

then we can disembark and head back to base.”

“Sounds good to me, but I need to get to a phone soon. David might have a few answers for us.”

“You can go now if you want. I’ll wait.”

“No, I’ll wait with you. As long as we get these people home, I’m happy, for now. What about the interpreter? Do you think he could be in on it?”

“He could be following orders, but he’s going back too. By the time they land you should have made your call and we can get this shit over with.”

“How long until the pilots get here?”

“About five or ten minutes.”

“We should get them something to eat. It’s going to be a long trip. Especially for the kids.”

“I told the men to bring some food for the passengers. I don’t want them to risk landing before they get to Sri Lanka.”

“If the person behind this goes to their contact we could have a problem getting the plane off the ground. We still don’t know how high up this goes or if the agency shut them down or not.”

“It’s a chance we’ll have to take. It shouldn’t be long now. When the other pilots get here we’ll release these two.”

The interpreter walked toward them. “We go now, yes?”

“Sorry, Tran. There has been a change in plans. As soon as everything is situated, we’ll let you know what’s going on. Go ahead and sit down. It should be just a minute.” Joe spoke softly to the man.

The man looked back and forth between the two of them before he took a seat.

“This could get tricky, Joe. Are you prepared?”

He took her hand in his and gave it a quick squeeze. “I think between the two of us, we can take care of it. You have your sidearm, just in case?”

She turned to look at him and the heat in his gaze was almost her undoing. She wanted to kiss him. The need so great she leaned in toward him, her lips opened slightly. Her eyes widened when he looked at her mouth and licked his lips. A door creaked behind them and they jerked back from each other.

“Sir, the other pilots are here. Ground control just called up.”

“It should only be a few more minutes and we’ll release you.”

“Thank you, sir.” The man went back to the cockpit to wait.

“Would you like to be there when I call my office?”

“Yes. We’ll go to my office to make the call. There will be fewer ears to worry about that way. I have to call the General tonight but I’ll do that after you make your call. His reaction should be interesting. He is the one who ordered me to get these people here.”

“That can’t be good. If he’s involved that could make problems for you.”

“Don’t worry about me. Here are the pilots. Let’s get this show on the road.”

She watched Joe move toward the two men walking up the stairs.

“Magnus! How the hell are ya, old man? Todd said you needed us and I told him it must be for something interesting so sign me up.”

Joe laughed in a way Em had never seen before. He let down his guard for these two men. He pulled the other man in for a hug and a slap on the back.

“Fin, you dog! TMan didn’t tell me he was calling you in.”



They backed away from each other and the man named Todd joined them. More handshaking and male camaraderie before Fin noticed her.

“Who’s the hottie in uniform?”

*Was that a growl? What the hell?*

Em walked toward them. “Lieutenant Emily Patterson at your service.”

She used her cover name and Joe glanced toward her and gave her a little nod.

*Like I really need his approval.*

She tried not to laugh at herself or at Joe. The sexual tension between the two of them was going to her head.

“Yes, ma’am! Captain Fin O’Malley and Major Todd Smith at *your* service.”

This time she did laugh and held out her hand.

“Stop drooling over Patterson and get out of here.”

“Yes, sir.”

There was laughter in the Captain’s voice as he spoke to Joe. Em just smiled as the two men waved to her and went into the cockpit to relieve the other soldiers. Joe walked toward the interpreter to let him know what was happening.

“But Colonel, we told new homes here.”

“I’m sorry, Tran. It was a lie and I need to get you home. Let the others know. We’ll be leaving and you’ll be on your way home soon. My men have orders to see you settled in the Marine camp so you’re safe. Don’t let these people go back to the village yet. Do you understand?”

The man didn’t look happy, but he nodded and returned to his seat.

“Let’s roll, Patterson.”

The two exited the plane just ahead of the pilots and headed to the HumVee Joe’s friends left behind. They waited for the plane to take off and then headed to the base. They didn’t talk much. That was probably a blessing. Em really didn’t know what to say. She wanted this whole thing to be over with, then maybe she could give into the feelings she’d been having for Joe.

“You done daydreaming, Emily? We’re here.”

“What did you say?”

“I asked if you were done daydreaming.”

“No, what did you call me?”

“Emily.”

“I like hearing you call me Emily instead of yelling Patterson at me.” She said with a smile.

“I like calling you Emily. I told you, we weren’t finished. Let’s get these phone calls out of the way and then maybe we can really talk.”

“Yes, sir.”

They grinned at each other and headed for his office.

\* \* \* \*

Mag didn’t know who made it to the office faster, him or her. He just hoped he could keep his hands off her while she remained undercover. He closed and locked the door behind them. Wicked thoughts about Emily sitting on his desk with him between her legs, his cock buried so deep, her head thrown back as she screamed his name assaulted him. He had to reach down and adjust himself.

*Fuck he wanted her.*

She went behind his desk and reached for the phone. Mag was just happy she wasn't looking his way. He willed his dick to go down.

"Agent McMichael, please."

There was a pause while the call went through. She turned to look at him and her eyes darkened as they traveled down his body. He loved her eyes on him. She turned away and spoke into the phone.

"I'm waiting for good news, tell me you have some."

There was another pause.

"Tell me you're kidding, David." She paused again and sat down hard into his chair.

Something wasn't right and he hated the wait. Ten minutes later she put the phone back on the hook and let her head rest on his desk. He walked toward her and placed his hand on her back, rubbing it a little for comfort.

"What's wrong?"

"Jackson's dead."

"What the fuck!"

"He was in his holding cell after his talk with his lawyer. A couple agents went down to bring him to the interrogation room and they found him hanging from the ceiling. It looked like suicide at first, but the ME declared it a murder. It had something to do with the angle and the knot in the sheets. I don't know. I just know that Jackson never got a chance to give names. Goddamn it! We're back to square one."

She slammed her hand against the desk in anger.

"Not totally." Mag said calmly.

"How can you say that?"

"We took away their cargo. Someone is going to come after us. We were the only two around when that plane took off with what they would see as their money. We just have to wait and see who comes after us. I'll make my call to the General now and see what he has to say. Why don't you go back to your room? Wait."

He went to his desk, grabbed a pen and some paper and wrote down directions to his house.

"Here take this, and meet me at my house in about an hour. I'll report what the General says and we'll make plans from there. Sound good?"

Her shoulders slumped a little, but she nodded her head and took his address. She looked defeated as she left his office. He put her in the back of his mind as he made his phone call.

The General could pose a problem. He needed to have his cover story just right. If he was in on the kidnappings then Mag had no problem lying to the bastard. He just hoped that someone else pulled strings the General knew nothing about.

Mag closed his eyes and picked up the phone. It was time.

"General Potter's office." The pleasant voice greeted him.

"Is the General available?"

"Yes, sir. May I tell him who's calling?"

"Colonel Rivers."

"One moment, sir."

The hold music irritated him. He just wanted to get this over with.

"Potter."

“Hello, sir, this is Colonel Rivers. I’m calling in with a report of our activities.”

“Go ahead, son.”

He gritted his teeth. He hated it when the General called him son.

“We liberated the villagers. On the way back to camp a firefght broke out. I was shot, but it was a through and through. The medics patched me up and we caught a ride home.”

He paused to wait for the General’s response.

“And the villagers? Are they settled for the night?”

“Settled sir?”

“Yes, in the quarters we prepared.”

“I don’t understand, sir. I received a message to send them home after we landed. They’re on their way back to their country.”

“Who the fuck ordered that?”

“It was a three star, sir. I just followed the orders and came straight back to be debriefed. Tomorrow I’ll debrief the team. Is there a problem?” Mag played it cool.

He didn’t like lying to the man. He respected him but in the back of his mind he had a bad feeling the man was up to his neck in trouble. His reaction didn’t ring true. The General sounded too upset.

“No, no problem. Do you have the orders?”

“No, I don’t have the physical orders. An aide came onto the plane when we landed, showed me the orders and left.”

“I’ll look into it. You followed an order, that’s all you can do. I’ll be calling you tomorrow. I might have to come down to your base.”

“Yes, sir. Permission to speak freely?”

“Go ahead.”

“Why was it so important that the villagers come here?”

“That’s need to know, Rivers. Is that all?”

“Yes, sir.”

The click in his ear signaled the General hung up the phone.

Well, fuck! The General had to be involved. There was no way around it. But did it stop with the General?

On the drive home he thought about all that happened in such a short time. A man who held his trust had just broken it with three little words: *need to know*. But how the hell were they going to get proof that the General was involved? They didn’t even know who the inside man was. He would have to keep a closer eye on the men. He had no other option. Someone would be seriously pissed when the villagers were not in the housing that had been set up.

Before he knew it, he arrived at his home. Mag pulled into the garage and went inside to pick up a little before Emily got there. Although it really didn’t matter; they were only there to talk strategy.

*Nothing else, talk only. Who the fuck am I kidding?*

His house looked spotless. He didn’t come home a lot because he spent so much time at the base with his team during training. Plus, he liked things tidy. He ran up to take a quick shower before she showed up. He wanted to change into something more comfortable.

Mag went back downstairs dressed in jeans and a t shirt, leaving his feet bare. He

checked the fridge to see if he had any beer. He really needed a drink.

There was a knock on his door. He looked down at his watch. *She's early.*

The knock sounded again. "It's me."

"Come on in. The door's open."

He turned and couldn't stop staring.

*Fuck.*

## Chapter Ten

*Force Recon—penetrates deeper, stays longer, and carries a bigger load.*

Mag stalked toward Emily. She would be his, damn the consequences.

"We shouldn't do this," she whispered as she backed away.

"Say my name." He didn't back down.

"Col—"

"You know what I want, Emily."

"Joe." She sighed.

He growled. He loved the sound of his name falling from her lips. He couldn't wait to hear her scream it as she came. He continued toward her.

"I'm going to fuck you, Emily. It isn't going to be gentle the first time. Maybe not even the second. I need to be so deep inside you I don't know where I end and you begin."

"God yes." She moaned.

Her back hit the wall. She had nowhere to run, not that he would let her. Mag reached her and put his palms on the wall, ignoring the pain in his shoulder. He caged her in. He pressed his body to hers, loving the soft feel of her breasts against his chest. He wanted more, needed to taste her. She melted into him; he wrapped his arms around her so she didn't fall.

Her lips looked ready for him to taste. Her tongue peeked out to wet her lips and he had to kiss her. He pressed his lips to hers and his tongue demanded entrance into the warm haven of her mouth. She let him in. He rewarded her with a gentle nip to her lip. He nibbled and sucked his way inside. She tasted so sweet. He couldn't get enough.

He broke the kiss and trailed kisses down her jaw until he reached her neck. He needed another taste. He bit her then laved the sting with his tongue. When she didn't protest, he nuzzled his face into her neck and inhaled. The light vanilla scent mixed with a smell that was all Emily went straight to his cock. He pulled her tighter against him and mumbled against her throat.

He heard her whispered, "What?"

He backed up so she could hear him, "Clothes off. I need to feel you. Take them off or I'll tear them apart."

They were both panting when he backed away to watch her strip. Emily ripped her clothes off, their need too great for either of them to take their time. There was no slow and soft with them, not this time. Mag groaned when Emily stood before him in her bra and panties.

"Fuck," he breathed. "You're so sexy."

Then she did something that made Mag want to slow down and savor her. She smiled. Not a man-eater grin, but a shy smile. She looked at him like he was the only man in the world. He placed his palm over his heart afraid it would beat right out of his chest.

She unhooked her bra and let it drop to the floor. Emily reached for her panties next, but Mag stopped her.

"Leave the panties on and get over here."

She looked over at him. "But, Colonel, you're wearing too many clothes. Your turn to strip."

He started to take off his clothes.

Emily leaned back against the wall. She teased him by running her hands over her breasts in slow circles stopping every now and again to pinch her nipples, her gaze never leaving his. It should be his hand plucking her nipples. Mag wanted to lick them to see if they tasted as good as they looked.

He ripped his shirt over his head, careful of his wound, and tossed it behind him. Next he peeled his jeans off, going slow as he eased the zipper over his throbbing cock. He stood in his boxer briefs ready to ditch them too when he saw Emily's hands stop.

"Wait." She pushed herself off the wall and sauntered over to him. "Let me help with those."

She knelt in front of him; he swallowed and tried to stay in control. His eyes closed when her hands brushed against his cock. He didn't think he could get any harder. He ached for her.

Emily slid his underwear off and he sucked in a breath as cool air flowed over his heated body. Mag's eyes opened when Emily's tongue traced an imaginary line up his leg. He groaned when she reached his balls, panted when she took them in her mouth.

"God yes." He cradled her head in his hands.

He needed to take back some control. This was his show and if her lips wrapped around his cock he would explode like a teenage boy his first time. He reached down and dragged her up his body. He held Emily against him for a second before he picked her up and carried her upstairs to his bed, his injury forgotten. Nothing would make him let her go. She was his. She curled into him and wrapped her arms around his neck, her breath warm against his skin. He almost dropped her when she licked his neck and then gave his wound a light kiss.

"Poor Joe. Does it hurt?" She ran her hands over his shoulder.

"Right now, the only thing hurting is my cock." He grinned at her.

She smiled back and his dick jerked, ready for action. His bed had never felt so far away.

Once in his room he laid her down and she turned to crawl into the middle of the bed, her pert ass wiggling, enticing him to touch it.

"Stop."

She followed his command, looked over her shoulder and cocked an eyebrow at him. "Yes, sir?"

He groaned, liking the way she followed his orders. He knelt on the bed making his way to her. She didn't move. Her silky pink panties were another reminder of how well she followed his orders. He stopped when he reached her and sat on his haunches. He caressed her ass, drew back and slapped her in a quick short stroke. She shifted a little and an odd whistling sound emerged as she sucked in air.

"You like that don't you? Naughty, naughty, Emily."

He caressed her ass again, enjoying the heat through the satin. He allowed his hand to drift to her pussy. Even covered he could feel how wet he'd made her.

"You're so fucking wet. You're ready for me aren't you, baby?"

She whimpered and nodded her head, rocking against his hand. He tapped her ass and motioned for her to roll over. Her legs spread wide, ready to cradle him, he bit his lip

at the sight. He inched closer until he could reach what was his. He ripped her underwear off and she groaned.

"Please, Joe."

"What do you want, baby? What do you need?"

"Fuck me. Please, Joe. Please. I need you inside me, now."

"Not yet. I need to taste you."

Mag shouldered her legs farther apart and lay down between them. He licked the inside of her thigh making small circles on his way to her pussy. Once there he buried his face so he could smell her essence. He groaned and licked his way to her clitoris.

"I love the way you taste. Emily, so fucking good." He mumbled against her pussy.

Mag used the tip of his tongue to play with her clit. He loved how she moaned and twisted under him. He worked his way back to her hole and slipped his tongue inside mimicking the act of fucking. She twisted against him.

"Joe, I'm gonna... Oh. My. God. JOE!"

Her thighs clinched against his head holding him in place while she came on his tongue.

When she relaxed he crawled up her body, leaning down enough so he brushed against her heated skin. He loved the way she looked at him, dreamy and relaxed. He didn't know what he needed more, a taste of her lips or the feel of her wet pussy wrapped around his cock.

Mag reached over to his nightstand and opened it, never taking his gaze from Emily.

"I'm not done with you yet."

"Thank God. I need you Joe."

He fumbled around until he found what he was looking for. He leaned in and brushed his lips against hers. She whimpered and he deepened the kiss, letting her taste herself. His tongue swept into her mouth. He loved the way she tasted and couldn't get enough. He rocked his body, rubbing his cock against her pussy. He backed up and looked into her eyes.

"I need to get inside you so bad."

"What are you waiting for?" She gave him a cocky grin.

Mag smiled back at her and tore into the condom. After a little struggle he was ready. He grabbed her hips, tilting her just a little and buried himself balls deep. She was so wet, he slid right in. He had to stop for a second or it would be over far too fast.

He rested his body against hers, holding himself so his full weight wasn't on her. Mag leaned in so their foreheads touched and looked into her eyes, her face flushed. Her breathing ragged. Emily wrapped her legs around his waist and he was lost.

"Emily."

"Move. Please Joe, move."

He pulled back until only the head of his dick remained inside her.

"No!" she groaned

Mag slammed back in and she moaned.

"Yes, harder. Joe, I need ... oh, more."

She panted and continued her chant.

"Hold on to the headboard." He managed to growl.

He continued to move, faster and faster. She put her hands above her head and her breasts pulled back.

He leaned down to suck her nipple into his mouth and groaned. She tasted so sweet. He moved to her other nipple to give it the same attention. He felt his balls tighten and he continued to move in and out.

“So tight.” She milked his cock and he groaned. “Soon baby. Soon. Come with me.”

He moved her legs over his shoulder and ran his hands down her thigh until he felt her clit. He rubbed in little circles and she moaned. He could become addicted to that sound.

“Joe ... Joe ... Joe...” she chanted his name over and over as she came.

He couldn’t talk, he was so close.

“Emily!” he shouted as he filled the condom.

Mag continued to move until he softened and slipped out of her. He rolled to the side so he didn’t crush her. Neither said anything as they tried to slow their breathing.

He glanced over at her and gave her a little wink. “I’ll be right back.”

She nodded and closed her eyes. He chuckled and he went into the bathroom to take care of the condom. He grabbed a washcloth and ran it under warm water so he could take care of her. He entered his bedroom and stopped to stare. She looked so good in his bed. He made his way to her and used the warm cloth to clean her off. Emily had a small smile on her face, but she didn’t open her eyes. Once they were both taken care of he tossed the cloth on the nightstand and got into the bed.

“Under the covers, babe.” He pulled them up so she could crawl under them, then he pulled her into his arms wrapping his arms around her waist pulling her ass tight against his soft cock. He hardened, but ignored it to hold her close. She wiggled her ass and he tapped her on the thigh.

“None of that. Rest. We have a lot to talk about. But, nap first.”

She sighed, but nodded.

He drifted off to sleep with her scent wrapping around him.

\* \* \* \*

Emily wrinkled her nose and swatted whatever it was that tickled her. There it was again.

*What the hell?*

Her eyes opened to a sight that made her smile. Joe was above her looking down. There was a twinkle in his eyes as he ran his finger lightly down her nose.

“Hello.” He whispered.

*Damn he is so sexy and so mine.*

“Hi” she whispered back.

He winked at her.

*Cocky bastard.*

She giggled and slapped a hand over her mouth. He grinned. She liked this side of Joe. Of course, she really liked the side he showed her earlier too. He settled back down on the mattress and dragged her on top of him. His cock nestled against her, rock hard. She wiggled against him. His hands grasped her ass and helped her settle into a rhythm. They both moaned.

“Babe, we can’t. There is too much to do. We have to talk.”

She rested her head on his shoulder. God she wanted him again.

“I know.” She sighed. “After?”



“Hell yes.”

“Thank God.” She wrapped her arms around him and gave him a hug.

“If we’re going to talk, I need to get you out of bed or I’ll be inside you faster than you can say ‘take me’.”

She gave him a light slap on his chest and she shifted off him. “How’s your shoulder? We didn’t rip the stitches last night, did we?”

He looked down at his wound and shook his head. “No, it’s fine. It hurts a little, but I’ll live.”

“Good. Bathroom?”

He pointed to a door off to the right. She looked around and then remembered that her clothes were downstairs. She tugged on a sheet on the bed and wrapped it around her, shuffling her way into the bathroom. She closed the door behind her and leaned against it.

*What have I done?*

If someone found out about the two of them it could mean her job, but somehow she couldn’t muster the desire to panic. She felt too good. Emily washed up and left the bathroom to find Joe standing by a dresser in just a pair of jeans. They molded his ass in a way that made her mouth water. She walked over and grabbed it in her hands, giving him a little squeeze. He turned and she ran her hands over his chest. Last night she didn’t get a chance to really explore his body, now she couldn’t keep her hands off him.

Joe groaned, “Emily.”

He pulled her to him and wrapped his arms around her. She stood on her tiptoes as his head leaned down, they met in a kiss. Her hands trapped between them, she could only take what he gave. She moaned as he took his time, exploring her mouth, his tongue learning every inch. She opened to him as the kiss deepened.

They both moaned. Joe pulled back from the kiss and she wrapped herself around him.

After they both caught their breath, Joe let her go. Her sheet had fallen sometime during the kiss and she could feel Joe’s gaze travel her body.

“Christ, Emily, you make me ache.”

She bit her lip to hold in her whimper. She wanted this man. Once would never be enough.

He turned back to the dresser and rested his hands on the top before opening a drawer and pulling something out. When he turned he held out a shirt and a pair of shorts.

“Here, put these on or we’ll never talk. I’ll meet you downstairs.”

He grabbed her for a quick kiss and then left the bedroom. Emily made it back to the bed before she collapsed.

“Why now?” she asked the empty room, not expecting an answer.

Joe made her all tingly and hot, she hadn’t felt this way in a long time. She felt like she could be his equal and wanted him to get to know the real her. Sure, she stuck to the truth for the most part while undercover, but there were things she wanted to share with him. Now wasn’t the time and she wanted to cry, but time wouldn’t allow it.

She got dressed in the clothes Joe left behind. Em had to get her mind back on target and stop focusing on how nice Joe’s ass was. He’d spoken to the General and she was curious about what he had to say. Plus she had to get back to base. Maybe one of the guys would give something away. Someone had to have noticed the villagers were not in the house the military had set up.

Comfortable in Joe's clothes she opened the door and went downstairs. She followed her nose to find him at the stove. Em stopped in the doorway to just watch him. He didn't put a shirt on so he stood in front of the stove in only his jeans.

"You hungry?"

"How did you know I was back here?"

"Your footsteps coming down the stairs. As I recall, you're the only other person in the house." He chuckled.

"Very funny. And yes, I'm hungry. What're you making?"

He turned to look at her over his shoulder. "Nothing fancy. Just an omelet. I can't make much more. I had a buddy of mine drop off some supplies tonight. I was afraid I wouldn't make it to the Exchange before they closed."

"When did you have time to call him?"

He laughed, "I have my ways."

She shook her head and went to stand close to him; she felt the urge to touch him and gave in. She ran her hands up and down his body. Needing a little more she wrapped her arms around his waist and laid her head against his back, snuggling into him. He leaned back, just a little then turned in her arms. She loved how safe he made her feel. In such a short time he'd showed her what an honorable man he was.

Em closed her eyes when he started to run his hands up and down her back. She sighed and stepped back. He didn't break his hold, but stared down at her.

"I could stay in your arms all day, but we have work to do." Her stomach growled and she laughed, "And I guess I'm pretty hungry."

Joe pulled her back in for a quick kiss and dropped his arms. "Yes, ma'am."

"Oh, I could get used to that."

He smacked her ass and turned back to the stove. She stuck her tongue out at his back and moved to the small table in the kitchen. She had laughter that wanted to bubble out, but she held it in. Happiness had been out of her reach for so long that it felt good to enjoy the moment. She knew it wouldn't last. It never did.

They might have a shot if they could wrap up this case, but who knew how long that would take. Now that they couldn't use the villagers as bait they'd have to think of something else. Talk about a snafu. She still had to report about the civilians. Hearing Jackson died under suspicious circumstances moved her focus elsewhere for the time being.

Joe put a plate in front of her and sat down at the table.

"This smells good."

"Thanks. Dig in. We can talk after we eat."

"Sounds like a plan to me."

They sat ate in silence, but it wasn't awkward. Em could describe it as comfortable, like they'd done this a time or two before. Another thing she could get used to.

She pushed her plate away. "That was good. Thanks Joe."

"Anytime, babe." He grinned at her.

"I like this," she waved her hand between them, "you know?"

"I do know. I like it too."

"You know what else?"

"What's that?"

"I think this is the longest I've been in your presence without hearing the word

fuck.”

He threw his head back and laughed. She grinned.

“You must be good for me then. Don’t let it get around.” He gave her a mock scrawl.

“No worries.” She laughed.

He sighed. “We should talk now.”

“I know. What did the General have to say?”

She didn’t see a reason to wait and dug right in.

“When I asked why the villagers needed to be brought into the country he said it was need to know. Could be it goes up higher and he has no idea or he’s in deep, still no clear answer.”

“What did he say when you told them they were headed back?”

“He sounded a little upset. I told him a three star ordered them back home. He did say he might have to come down here. I guess we’re on a wait and see.”

She put her head down on the table. “It just can’t be easy, can it?”

“Sorry, babe. We should get back to the base. Or you should. How did you get here?”

She lifted her head up. “Called a taxi and met them off base.”

“I’ll take you back.”

“I don’t think that would be a good idea. We can’t be seen together. It wouldn’t look good for either of us.”

“Damn it.”

“What, no fuck?”

“I think we took care of that earlier.”

She just shook her head. “I’ll call a taxi and get back to base, get a little shut-eye before your briefing tomorrow.”

He got up, walked around the table and pulled her out of the chair.

“I don’t like that plan, but it’ll work.”

Joe’s arms wrapped her close to him. They stood that way for a minute, just taking each other in.

“I should call.”

“I’ll do it while you get dressed. If I get near you, we’ll be back in bed before I can say fuck.”

“Stop!” she chuckled.

She kissed the easiest available skin, which happened to be his chest and ran from the room when he made a grab for her. She picked up her clothes on the way up to his room and closed herself into the bathroom. Em looked into the mirror above the sink.

*Happiness looks good on me.*

## Chapter Eleven

*If you weren't there then shut up.*

Kyle watched Emily walk onto the base. His ears were still ringing from the dressing down his uncle had given him. Like it was his fault the stupid villagers got sent home. It was not like he could disobey a direct order. He had to go back to base. After he shook off the others he went to the drop point only to find empty housing. He called his uncle to find out what to do next and then everything became his fault.

Magnus was behind this clusterfuck, he knew it. His uncle planned on contacting General Potter. Not that it would do him any good. Now they had to fix the problem before it got out of hand. Magnus' team would have to be dealt with, but not before he got his hands on Emily. The rest of the team could die for all he cared, but Emily would not be with them. Kyle had to get ready for the transfer he knew would be coming. It wasn't the first time he'd changed squads and it wouldn't be the last.

Emily moved closer so Kyle backed into the shadows. She looked different, happier. Where did she go? Why did Magnus want *her* to stay behind? Had they been together this whole time? No, he remembered her back at base and then she left wearing civvies. Kyle would have to keep a better eye on her. The orders should come down in the next couple days.

She passed by him and stopped. Then she backed up. "Kyle? Is that you?"

*Shit.*

"Yes ma'am."

"It's okay, we're off duty, and you can call me Emily. What are you doing sitting in the dark?"

"It's a nice night and I needed a little air. Where are you coming from?"

"I went into town for a couple things."

"Shopping? You didn't find anything you liked?"

"What?" She looked down at her hands. "Oh, no, I didn't go shopping. I went in for a bite to eat and needed to just get away from the base for a bit."

"I see. Did you and the Colonel get the refugees settled?"

"Settled? I don't know about that. I'm sure the Colonel will tell everyone at the debriefing, but they were sent back."

"I thought we had housing for them here?" Kyle hoped his anger didn't show through.

"We got an order saying to send them back. That's all I know. The Colonel isn't very open. There was a pilot switch out and then the Colonel barked the order to get off the plane. I did and then he dismissed me. Who knows, we just follow orders, right?"

She had a weird look on her face and Kyle couldn't read it. At least she didn't lie.

"Weird. Maybe he'll tell us more tomorrow."

"Maybe. Well, I'm off to bed. It's been a long couple days. See you in the morning Kyle."

"Night ... Emily."

She smiled and walked off. He watched until she disappeared.

This was an interesting development. Were there really orders or was Magnus on to them? If he knew something, he'd have to be terminated. Kyle looked around and didn't see anyone so he bent down to the pack he had resting by his feet and pulled out his satellite phone.

"Clagg."

"Uncle Hank, we have a problem."

"I think I know that, junior."

"Not just the villagers being sent away."

"I know that too. I talked with General Potter a couple hours ago and he said the Colonel might be a problem."

"Was he really ordered to send them back?"

"We're looking into it now. General Potter is heading to your base now. The good Colonel may just have to have an accident."

"I could handle that."

"Be on standby and keep your phone close. I'll call when you have the go ahead."

"Yes, sir."

His uncle hung up and Kyle stashed the phone back in his bag. He couldn't contain the smile that spread across his face. He had the perfect plan. He would kill Magnus and frame Emily. Then she couldn't escape him or he'd hand her over to the police. It would be a win-win situation.

Kyle picked up his bag and whistled as he headed to his bunk the plans already formulating in his mind.

\* \* \* \*

Yawning, Em came awake with a smile on her face. Her dreams echoed her evening with Joe. It could be all a big mistake, but for now, she wanted to savor her thoughts of him. She left the bed and stretched, her body aching in places it hadn't in a while. He made her feel wonderful and she wanted to get this case wrapped up so she could get to know him better. The sex was great, but she felt a greater pull to the man.

One of the best things about Mag was his loyalty. She hated how the investigation had to be pulling him apart. He trusted all of his men and there was at least one trader among them. Jackson may be dead, but he'd still betrayed Joe. She didn't want to think about his reaction if there was another plant in the team.

General Potter didn't help matters with his vague answers. Em would have to call David again today and see what was going on with the investigation and let him in on the call Joe made to Potter.

No evidence pointed to Potter, but his reaction caused suspicion. Would it stop with Potter if he was involved or did it go even higher up? Her investigation felt like a wash. She'd yet to learn anything. With the villagers headed back home, she'd lost her chance to catch someone red-handed.

Now she had to watch Joe. Once it was discovered that no order came down sending the plane back to Sri Lanka, they would go after Joe, figuring he knew something. One of two things would happen. Either they would ask Joe to join them or they would kill him. The latter worried her. He'd already been hurt once in field and she didn't want to see him go down again. Em didn't think anyone would come after her. The cover story worked and she'd only stepped out of character with Joe.

Kyle seemed a little too interested in her. Maybe she would talk to him after the briefing. She looked at the clock. If she wanted a shower, she would have to rush. Of course, it would look good showing up late.

Picking up her toiletries, she headed to the showers. When she got there, she knocked to make sure it was empty before she entered. Not hearing anything, she stepped into the showers and picked the stall farthest away from the door in case one of the guys stumbled in.

Em rushed through the shower. She dried off and put her clothes on. She should have time to spare. Her stomach grumbled and she wanted to eat before the meeting. She all but ran back to her room, almost crashing into Moore.

“What’s the rush there, Patterson?”

“Wanted to get some chow before the debriefing.”

“Want company?”

“Sure, let me stash my gear. Meet you there?”

“See you in a couple.”

They went their separate ways. Em wanted to see if he would be as curious as Stewart. If not, she might have a lead to work. Kyle could have just been curious, but he’d asked specifically about the civilians. It could be nothing, but she needed to check it out. Lunch should prove interesting.

Moore had a table when she got there so she got her food and headed his way.

“Hey ,Patterson.”

“Moore.” She nodded at him and sat down.

“So, how did you like your first mission and when are we going to hit the sheets.” He bit into a piece of toast.

She just looked at him in shock. “What—I ... Um...”

He laughed. “Relax, Patterson. Sure you’re hot and all, but you are an officer. I know I can look, but not touch. Have to give you a hard time or you’d worry something was wrong.”

She pointed her fork at him before she speared some of her fruit, “You’re bad. You know that, right?”

“Yeah, but you like me.” He waggled his eyebrows at her.

She shook her head, but continued to eat. “Maybe a little.”

“You were great out there, ya know?”

“Out where?”

“On mission. You held your own. With as many fuck ups as you made during training I was worried ... until you saved the Colonel. You kicked ass.”

“Thanks, you weren’t too bad yourself.”

“What changed?” He took a bite of his eggs.

“What do you mean?”

He finished chewing and spoke, “Why fuck up all month only to dominate in the field.”

“I don’t know. Adrenaline? I knew I couldn’t let the Colonel down. We had all those people counting on us then the Colonel was shot. I did what I had to. It was ... real. You know?”

“Yes it was. I wanted to let you know you can have my back any time.”

“Thanks. I’m glad I stepped up. I’m sure it won’t be long until I hear the Colonel

yelling my name for doing something wrong. Speaking of him,” she looked at her watch, “We should finish up and get to the meeting.”

They finished breakfast and headed to the squadron meeting room. They were the first two to arrive. Em hoped she could keep it cool when Joe entered. Her talk with Moore went well. He could still be involved, but her gut told her no. He never once asked about the villagers. He focused on the mission and her place in it. After the meeting, she would give David a call. See where he was at on his end of the investigation.

Joe walked in and she held her breath for a moment to see how he would play it. He looked right over her and settled into his desk while they waited for the others. In short succession, Roberts and Stewart entered.

“Let’s get this meeting over with. After the briefing you are on a mandatory two week downtime. We’ll still have PT and training exercises, but we won’t be going on any missions. I’ll post a schedule. Now, the mission. We’re all alive so I consider it a success. The counselors are available for any who feel they need to talk to someone. Of course, my door is always open as well. Moore and Patterson are to be commended for the action taken with the hostiles. Gun, you and Stewart are also to be commended for getting the villagers to safety.

“We did have a change of plan, end mission. The civilians were sent home. They will go back to our place until the rebels have been expelled from that area. Any questions?”

Silence greeted Joe’s words.

He waited a couple minutes and continued. “If you have no questions you’re dismissed. Patterson, please stay behind.”

The others left the room. On the way out, Moore whispered to her, “I’m sure it’s to thank you, not yell.” He winked at her.

Em just shook her head. She was starting to like him.

When the last one left, Joe went to the door and shut it. He turned to look at her and winked. It took all of her control not to rush him and kiss him.

“You look good in uniform.” He walked toward her.

“You don’t look to bad yourself, Marine.”

He didn’t stop until they were close enough to kiss.

“I missed you this morning.” He whispered against her lips.

“I missed you, too, Joe. What are we going to do?”

He leaned his forehead against hers and let out a sigh. “I don’t know Emily. You’re no closer to shutting this ring down than you were when you got here. The only lead you had is dead. And where does that leave us? We can’t be seen together at least not until you’re off the job. The thing is, I want to see you, Emily. Yesterday wasn’t enough. I’d like to get to know you more.”

He leaned in and took her lips in a kiss. Gentle and soft, he stroked his lips on hers. She sighed and opened up to him. His tongue brushed over her mouth, she sucked until he slipped it inside.

Emily moaned and pushed back, just enough to end the kiss. “We can’t Joe. Not here.”

“I know.” He pulled her against him, resting his chin on the top of her head.

She snuggled into him. Em loved the way she felt in his arms, warm and safe, like it should be.

"I need to call David back. He needs to know about the General. I need to know if Parker is dirty. But all I want to do is stay here and let you hold me. To kiss you and ... we can't."

He rubbed his hands over her back. It soothed her.

It was his turn to pull back.

"Let's go to my office and you can call your partner. Maybe we can work something out so we can go to dinner tonight."

"I'd like that, Joe."

He turned from her and walked to the door, all business again. She followed a few steps behind him. She couldn't look too eager. Joe's office was only two doors down. They entered and Joe gestured toward the phone.

"Go ahead and make your call. I'll keep watch on the door. We shouldn't be disturbed."

She nodded and went to the phone. She sat in Joe's chair to watch him while she made her call. It didn't take long for the phone to be answered.

"NCIS, how may I direct your call?"

"Agent David McMichael, please."

"One moment."

The hold music didn't last.

"Agent McMichael."

"Hi, David. It's Emily."

"I'm glad you called in. Are you in a secure location?"

"Yes and I have a little information for you. It isn't much though. I was hoping you had more for me."

"We don't have much here. Parker still isn't talking. We don't think he's involved."

"How much background have you done on General Potter?"

"We haven't gone too deep. We focused on the Colonel and his team first. Should we?"

"Yes. Joe ca..."

"Joe?" David voice held a hint of something she couldn't name.

"Yes, Joe Rivers."

"When did you start calling him Joe?"

"After I brought him in. Is this going to be an issue?"

"No, just ... watch yourself, Emily."

"Whatever. Let's get back to the case. Joe spoke with the General yesterday, after I called you. He wasn't too happy that the villagers were sent home."

"WHAT?"

"We. Sent. Them. Home. Understand now?"

"What in God's name possessed you to do that? They were the best bait we had."

"We have new bait."

"How do you figure?"

"Joe and I were the last two seen with the civilians. They'll come after one of us after they figure the orders Joe fabricated aren't true."

"I don't like it."

Emily watched Joe pace back and forth in front of the door. He seemed on edge as he listened to her end of the conversation.



"You don't have to like it, David. Joe didn't want to put the villagers in danger any more than I did."

"What if it's a trick? He could be playing you, Emily. Maybe he sent them back so he wouldn't get caught in the act."

"I don't believe that, David. If you were here you'd feel the same way. There is someone else I want you to look into. Private Kyle Stewart. I talked to him yesterday and he asked a few questions about the villagers. It could be nothing, but it warrants looking into."

"Maybe we should pull you from the case. I don't think you're seeing things too clearly right now."

"Fuck you, David. I'm seeing things just fine. The team is on a sort of leave for two weeks. We'll see what happens when we're finished. Joe said the General might be making a trip down. It could be just what we need. If you can't get to me on Stewart or Potter, talk to Joe. I trust him, David."

She looked at Joe while she spoke. It might be silly, but she did trust him, with her life.

"Keep in contact, Emily. I want to know what is going on every step of the way. Watch your back and stay safe. If I feel like things are going too far, I will pull you. Do you understand?"

"Just get me the information I need, David." Em hung up the phone.

"That didn't sound good." Joe said.

"It's fine." She said with a sigh. "He's just worried about me."

"Is there something between you two?"

"God no!" she laughed. "He's like the brother I never wanted."

"Good because you're mine."

"Like you Tarzan, me Jane? Calm down, caveman."

"You know it. What's this about Stewart?"

"He saw me come back onto base last night and it looked like he was hiding out in the shadows. When I acknowledged him, he asked if the villagers were secure. It just didn't feel right. I also talked to Moore, this morning at breakfast. His response was more what you would expect. He just talked about the mission."

Joe sat down on the desk and faced her. He held out his hands, she took them and he pulled her up to stand between his legs.

"All we can do now is wait. How about we forget about this for a night and spend a little time getting to know each other?"

She wrapped her arms around him and rested her head against his chest. His heart held a steady rhythm. She closed her eyes as she listened to it.

"I like that, but how do you suggest we go about it?"

"We could drive to the next town over. Most of the men stay around here when on leave. We could have dinner then maybe dessert at my place."

She grinned at him, "Dessert huh? What did you have in mind?"

"I was thinking a little Emily à la mode."

She laughed. "I don't even want to know what that is, but I like it. Okay, what time should I meet you there? We should pick a place now. It isn't like you can pick me up."

"Meet me at the gas station down the road and we can leave from there. That should work."

She gave him a quick kiss and pulled away.

“I’ll be there. I should go back to my room now. I don’t want the others to be wondering why I’m spending so much time with you.”

He pulled her back for another kiss. “Go, before I bend you over the desk.”

She swatted at his chest and walked out the door already thinking about tonight. Tomorrow was soon enough to get back on the case. The villagers were safe for now and Joe was right, they could only wait now. She smiled a little as she thought about Joe. She didn’t even see Kyle standing by the conference room. She almost ran into him.

“Oh, sorry, Kyle. I didn’t see you there.”

“That’s okay.” He walked away from her.

She walked on, a little frown on her face.

*How long has he been out here? What did he hear?*

She continued on to her room hoping David would have something for her tomorrow, then her thoughts returned to Joe.

## Chapter Twelve

*Be safe—sleep with a Marine.*

*This can't be. I had to have heard wrong.*

Kyle hurried away from Emily. He needed to think.

*Who is she?*

She had to be an MP or something. Why else would she be talking to the Colonel about the General? And did she say it was the Colonel who sent those people back? And she called him Joe. That couldn't be good.

*Focus and breathe, damn it.*

He reached his room and paced from one end to the other. First, he had to let his uncle know the General had been compromised. Then he would set stuff up so he could take Emily tomorrow. He wasn't waiting any longer. Not when she was going out on a *date* with that idiot. What did she see in him? He was a stupid jarhead with no thoughts of his own. He lived to follow orders. How could he be good for Emily? She was his.

*If my uncle doesn't approve my transfer or give me leave, I'm going on my own. She can't be left in the Colonel's clutches.*

He searched his room for the phone, the plans for Emily whirling around his head.

"This better be good, junior."

"Yes, sir, it is. I have news."

"Didn't we go through this already? What do you want me to do, come down there?"

"No, sir. But the General has been compromised."

"Explain yourself."

"This evening I overheard the Colonel talking to someone about the General and how he could be involved. I didn't hear the whole thing, but I did catch that it was the Colonel's idea to send the villagers home. He knows too much."

"Put your plan into action. We can't have anyone else learning about us."

"I'll need emergency leave. Can you fix that for me?"

"You'll get what you need. Do you need anything to take care of Rivers?"

"Things are set on my end. As soon as I get the leave orders, I'll carry out my plan. Tomorrow night Rivers will be gone. When does the General arrive?"

"He'll be on base day after tomorrow. There was a delay, it works in our favor."

"Thank you, Uncle Hank. I'll contact you when I'm in the clear."

"Don't screw this up."

"No, sir, I won't."

Kyle threw the phone on his bed. He'd have to make a trip into town to get the supplies he would need. Emily would need to be subdued for the trip. Killing Rivers would be easy. He'd use Emily's weapon. He'd have to watch his fingerprints, but that shouldn't be a problem.

His biggest concern was getting off base after Rivers was down. He'd have to take the man out in his office.

*Shit, I need a van.*

He calmed when he remembered his offshore account. A quick call and he could

have the money wired to him tomorrow in enough time to buy the van and the other equipment he would need.

First, pack. He went to his closet and pulled out his duffel. He didn't have much here at the base. Being new, he didn't have time to accumulate things. That happened a lot. Most of his personal belongings he left at home in Hawaii, his "other" identity. He only played warrior when his uncle needed him to.

He would be glad when his assignment was over. Kyle had a room set up that would be perfect for Emily. He shuddered as he imagined her chained to his wall wearing his mark. He had a special whip he'd like to try out on her. He knew she would love its kiss.

Kyle's cock started to throb and harden. He couldn't afford the distraction right now. His focus needed to be on the task at hand. Dispose of Rivers and take Emily, then he could daydream. Hell, by then he wouldn't have to dream, he'd have the real thing.

A knock on the door caused him to stop what he was doing.

"Stewart, you in there?"

*Fuck, it's Moore.*

"Yeah, hold on a sec."

He shoved his duffel under his bed and went for the door.

"What's up?" He opened the door.

"I was headed to town, wondered if you wanted to go."

"Shoot. I can't. Not right now. I have to finish a couple things and I'm expecting a call from home. Next time?"

"Sure, man. Take it easy."

He watched Moore head down the hall and when he couldn't see him anymore he shut his door. He pulled the duffel back out and finished throwing his clothes in. When that was done he looked around to make sure there was nothing left behind. He sat on his bed, turned on the TV to wait for the knock on his door.

Later that night, he heard it. He answered the door. Gunny was on the other side.

"Yes, sir?"

"The Red Cross is here. They have some news."

He tried to play it just right. "Is something wrong?"

"I'm not sure, let's go up to headquarters and they can fill you in."

"Yes ... of course. I'm right behind you."

They traveled the short distance in silence. Once there, one of the members of the Red Cross waited for them.

"Kyle Stewart?"

"Yes, that's me." He stepped forward.

"We have news that your father is very ill. We're arranging a flight for you now to get you home. Your unit command will inform you on your leave time."

He sat down in the nearest chair. "Thank you, ma'am."

"You just take care, soldier. We'll get you home."

She left and he sat for a moment before getting up to leave.

"Gunny, I'm going to go pack. I—I need to get ready."

"Go do what you have to. Either myself or the Colonel will let you know what time you'll be leaving."

"Thank you."

He turned and walked away, trying to hold his grin in until he got to his room. He

loved his uncle and this was only one of the reasons why. As long as he got a late flight, things would go smoothly. Of course, he had no plans of actually being on the flight. Once his orders came through and he was gone, Kyle Stewart would be no more.

\* \* \* \*

Em bit her lip as her nerves raced through her body. She shouldn't be. The two of them were naked together the night before. She looked in her closet. Not really much there for her to wear so she would have to make do. She pulled on a pair of jeans and a nice top; hoping he didn't want to take her anyplace fancy.

Her purse lay on her dresser; she grabbed it on her way out the door and put her cell phone in her back pocket. She rushed out because she didn't want to be stopped by any of the men. The gas station wasn't that far, she'd walk there. The night held a slight breeze and the trees swayed in the wind. The sun was setting and looked so beautiful with all the reds and oranges lighting up the sky. The stars should be bright, a perfect night for a date.

Anxiety coiled in her belly. She really didn't know much about Joe. It would be nice to find out about the man behind the Marine. But was he worth it? If the sex was anything to go by, then yes, he was.

The butterflies started to dance in her stomach the closer she got to the gas station. He was right where he said he'd be. That didn't really surprise her. She looked around to make sure no one followed her and then walked closer to Joe.

"You came."

"You had doubts?" He asked.

"Not really. I'm just more nervous than I thought I'd be."

"Nervous? About what?"

"Never mind, it's nothing. Let's just go to the restaurant."

He gave her a look that said the conversation wasn't over. Em headed for his truck. She paused for a second as he raced around her to open the door. She smiled at him before getting settled. She liked this side of him. He seemed to have many and she enjoyed discovering them.

Joe started the truck and pulled out of the gas station. "There's no need to be nervous, you know that, right?"

"Put yourself in my place. For the last month you've ridden my ass so hard I was looking for burn marks."

He shot her a quick look with an eyebrow raised.

It took her a second to realize what it was she'd said.

"Oh my God! That isn't what I meant and you know it!" she swatted at his arm.

Joe gave a low chuckle that made her skin tingle.

"My job is to make sure that every man under my command makes it out of any given mission alive. You were fucking up. Thank God it was on purpose."

"I'm not a Marine, but I can hold my own. I hated every minute of it."

"Looking back I can tell. In the moment I was so upset I didn't take it all in."

"I tried to keep myself reined in, but then you would get this look and I wanted to do my best. What eventually gave me away? It was the firing range wasn't it?"

"That was one instance. You had me confused; fuck if I could figure out what was going on. Was any part of your cover true?"

"Yes. My dad is a Marine. Not active any more, but a Marine through and through. I

tried to keep true to myself. That helped me keep everything straight. Of course the only things you really know about me were in my jacket.”

“I want to know more.”

“Me too, but should we really be doing this?”

“Fuck no, but that won’t stop me.”

“We’re so screwed.” She said

“I hope.”

“Have you always been such a flirt?”

“When the mood strikes.”

“Well, I’m enjoying it.” Em smiled.

“You aren’t supposed to hate it.”

“You gave your mom fits, didn’t you?”

“I could be a handful.”

Em just laughed and shook her head, picturing him as a little boy with his dimples flashing as he tried to get out of trouble.

*Bad road to go down, don’t think of the future, think of now.*

The restaurant wasn’t that far and took no time to get to. Joe parked and turned toward her.

“I may come off as a hardass on the field, but if I don’t, people die. We’ve got some chemistry going for us and I want more Emily. You make me so hard that I have trouble thinking and I can’t get enough of your mouth. It’s all I’ve been able to think about.”

Joe leaned in and she met him halfway, their lips tangled. She opened to him, sucking his tongue into her mouth. She ran her tongue along his. He pulled her close and pressed his body to hers. She wrapped around him and didn’t want to let go. They both panted as they separated.

She laid her head on his chest. “We can’t do this out here, Joe.”

“Yes we can.”

“Joe!”

He tried to bring her back into his kiss. “Let’s skip dinner and go straight for dessert, my place.”

Just then her stomach rumbled.

“You said dinner. I want dinner.”

He sighed and rubbed her back in small circles. “You’re right, I did. Can’t have you starving, you need to keep your strength up for later.”

She grinned and closed her eyes for a second to enjoy the feeling of being in his arms.

“Let’s go, Patterson.”

He stepped out of the truck and came around to her side to open the door for her. He held out a hand to help her out of the vehicle. Joe led her into the restaurant with his hand on her back.

They settled in at the table, took a quick look at the menu and placed their order.

“So, Joe, why the Marines?”

“I didn’t have a choice really.”

She waited for a second and he didn’t add to his statement.

“That’s all you’re giving me?” she laughed.

He shrugged his shoulders, “Not much of a story really. My ma died when I was

fifteen. My old man couldn't handle me and kicked me out on my eighteenth birthday. I didn't have anywhere to go so I enlisted. The Marines sounded better than starving so I joined."

Em put her hands over his and leaned in. "I'm sorry Joe."

"Don't be. That was a long time ago. I have my family, the core."

"It's funny to hear you say that. My dad feels the same way. His buddies are always coming over for poker night or he's hanging out at the VFW."

"I think I'd like your dad."

She smiled. "I think he'd like you too."

"Same question to you. Why the NCIS?"

"Hmm ... I didn't want to be a Marine and my dad didn't want me to go that route either, but I knew I wanted to go into the military. I joined the Air Force with plans of heading to the FBI, but I liked what the NCIS offered more. I still get to deal with the military more than I would if I'd joined the FBI. It just fit."

"The Air Force, huh? I probably shouldn't tell you what we called women in the Air Force then should I."

"You wouldn't be telling me anything I don't already know. I think the most popular one is Air Mattress."

He had just taken a drink of his water and covered his mouth as water shot out. "I'm sorry. You should come with a warning. Yeah, that's a good one."

Their meals arrived and they enjoyed eating in a comfortable silence. Em caught Joe glancing at her over the course of the meal. The longer they sat there, the hotter the looks got. She bit her lip as their eyes met.

"I'm done and ready for dessert." She winked at him.

He winked back and signaled for the waiter. He made her feel happy and safe. Not many men could do that. Joe also excited her and Em couldn't wait to show him how much when they got back to his place.

## Chapter Thirteen

*Mess with one Marine, you mess with them all.*

Mag didn't know who walked out of the restaurant faster, him or Emily. Dinner had been nice, but he wanted her under him and naked. The truck couldn't move fast enough and it seemed like he hit every red light from the restaurant to his apartment. A few lights to go and he heard a click. He turned to look at Emily and saw her scooting over to him. The sound must have been her seatbelt.

A horn blaring behind him caused Mag to focus on the road. She got close enough to nuzzle his neck. Mag's eye's started to close as she licked him.

"Damn Emily, we're almost there and you're going to make me wreck."

She gave a husky laugh and moved away just a little bit. Mag sighed until he felt her hand creep into his lap and his sigh turned to a moan. She stroked his cock through his jeans and he stepped on the gas.

"Slow down, Joe, I'm not going anywhere."

"Keep that up and I won't be going, I'll be coming. Then where will you be?"

He winked at her and she moved her hand back a little and worked her way under his shirt.

"I guess I'll just have to get you worked back up again. Think you're up for it?"

Distracted, he didn't have time to stop her before she leaned down to kiss his stomach. It was a good thing he pulled into the parking lot. He threw the truck into park and dragged her up to claim her mouth as his.

"I need you naked and I don't want to give the neighbors a show." He panted as he dragged Emily out of the truck. He took her by the hand and ran to his front door.

She didn't offer any resistance as he rushed her through his door. He barely had it closed before she turned and slammed him against it, her mouth rough on his. Her hands reached for the button on his jeans, his went for her shirt. They fumbled for a few seconds but Mag was ready to take control again.

He broke the kiss, put his arms under her ass and picked her up; she wrapped her legs around his waist. The couch looked good for what he had in mind. He backed her into the couch and she dropped her legs. Kneeling down, he made quick work of her pants. The need to touch and kiss pulsed through him. Mag nibbled her toes and kissed her calves, her thighs and any part he could touch on his way to her core. She threw her head back when he licked her pussy, he watched her as lapped at her clit. He sucked it into his mouth making her moan.

"Please, Joe, don't stop."

She had one hand in his hair, the other supporting herself on the couch. When he bit at her clit she brought her other hand to his head, using him for support. He felt her hands start to shake. He didn't let up until she came on his tongue. She tasted so sweet.

Emily dropped back on the couch; he stood and picked her up.

"Let's take this upstairs."

She curled into his arms leaving small kisses anywhere she could reach.

"The things you do to me, Joe, they should be illegal."



He chuckled and climbed the stairs to his room. He placed her gently onto the bed and kissed his way back up her body. He reached her lips and settled between her thighs. He felt so right there.

“I need to be inside you, Em.”

“I’m not stopping you, Joe. Take me, I’m yours.”

He groaned at her words and reached for a condom out of his side-table. He sheathed himself and eased into her warmth until he was balls deep. He wanted to savor this moment. She clenched around him and he wanted to pound into her for a fast release, but he made himself stop.

“Damn it, Joe. Move. I need to feel you.”

“If I move now, it will be over too soon. I want more this time.”

He took her hand and kissed her palm before entwining their fingers. He did the same with her other hand and stretched their hands above her head. He set a leisurely pace until he couldn’t stand it anymore. Her whimpers drove him to the edge.

“So good, Em. It’s so good.”

She mumbled something, but he didn’t understand her. He started to lose his pace.

“I can’t hold back,” he panted. “I’m gonna come.”

She whispered in his ear. “Come for me, baby. Come for me. Oh God. Joe ... I’m ... I—”

Emily shuddered around him, milking his cock. That was all it took. Mag threw his head back and screamed Emily’s name as he came. He collapsed on top of her for a second before rolling to the side, bringing her with him.

They stayed wrapped in each other’s arms and drifted to sleep.

Emily’s sigh woke him up.

“I need to get back to base, Joe. I don’t want to be missed.”

“I’ll drive you back.”

“I should probably get a cab again. I don’t want anyone to see us together, at least not yet. That way we don’t have to answer any questions.”

“You’re right. I’ll go call the cab while you get dressed.”

He left the room and tried not to think about how his chest ached as he left her to get dressed.

A car pulled up front and stopped. Mag walked Emily to the door. He opened it and gave her a kiss.

“I’ll see you in the morning.”

“No you won’t,” a voice from outside said.

Mag looked over to see Private First Class Stewart standing at his door.

“Kyle, what are you doing here?” Emily sounded calm.

Stewart pulled out a gun and aimed it at Mag.

“Why don’t you put that gun away, son?”

“Don’t call me son, you bastard. You can’t take what’s mine and think there will be no consequences.”

“What are you talking about, Kyle?” Emily whispered.

“You stay out of this, Emily. This is between me and the Colonel.” Stewart waved the gun between the two of them.

“Just what is it you want, Private Stewart?”

“You need to back away from Emily. Emily, you need to come by me.”

“Kyle, I’m going to stay right here until you tell me why you’re standing there with a gun trained on the Colonel.”

“If you don’t come over here I’m going to shoot the Colonel. I’ll start with his leg and keep shooting until you’re standing beside me.”

Mag squeezed Emily’s hand and gave her a little nudge in Stewart’s direction.

“What now, Stewart?”

“Now I kill you.”

“What? No, you said if I came to your side yo—”

“No, Emily, I said I would shoot him if you didn’t. I never said I wouldn’t kill him.”

“It’ll be okay, Emily. Just do what he says.”

“She is no longer your concern, Colonel.”

“Joe...”

“Don’t you call him that.” Stewart slapped her face.

Mag moved forward and Stewart swung the gun in his direction and fired. Emily knocked Stewart off balance and the shot went wild.

“I’ll do what you want, Kyle. Just don’t kill J—the Colonel.”

“Of course you’ll do what I say. You’re mine now.”

Mag made a move again and Stewart fired.

Mag went down, darkness washed over him.

“Emily...”

\* \* \* \*

“Joe!” Emily screamed and Kyle slapped her again.

“You will not say his name. Don’t worry. I’ll cleanse you and you’ll forget that bastard’s name.”

Kyle dragged Emily to his car.

“We’ve got to help him, Kyle. He could be dead.”

“I don’t give a fuck. I hope he is dead. He dared to touch you. He defiled you.”

“But I’m not yours, Kyle. Why are you doing this?”

“You would have been mine a lot sooner if that idiot hadn’t shipped those damn people home.”

“The people? You mean the villagers from Sri Lanka?”

“Yes. My uncle was pissed. But I don’t give a flying fuck. I have you and that’s all that matters.”

“Talk to me, Kyle. I can help you.”

He slapped her again to shut her up. He couldn’t handle her talking. He should have brought the tape, but once he saw her walk off base he knew he had to follow. The time was right. He hadn’t been wrong. He smiled. Everything would be okay now.

“You will only talk when I tell you to. You will shut the hell up and you’d better not speak his name to be again. Do you understand?”

“There’s something you should know first.”

He slapped her again. “I asked if you understand. That only requires a yes or no answer.”

She held her hand to her cheek and looked at him with tears in her eyes. He smiled again and his grin widened when he saw her shudder.

“Yes.”

“That’s more like it. We’re going to get along just fine. Now get in the car.”

She looked back at the Colonel as he shoved her into the car. He grabbed the rope he’d put in his back pocket and tied her hands. Once her hands were secured, he shut the door and walked to the drivers’ side.

Once inside, he turned to look at her. She tempted him so; he needed to feel her, to taste her. He leaned over and she shrank back. He’d have none of that. Kyle grabbed her hair and pulled her close.

“You’d best get used to my touch. You’re mine in every sense of the word. I’ll do with you what I wish.” He hauled back and slapped her again. His cock hardened. He inched closer to her and licked her cheek. She tasted good. He wanted to mark her. Kyle looked her up and down and decided on her shoulder. The lick started things off and then he nibbled to work himself up to the bite. She screamed and he shuddered, almost coming right then and there. He soothed his mark with a kiss as a reward for her screams.

“Kyle, please don’t do this. I can help you. Let me help you.”

He elbowed her in the face. “Your learning curve is going to be the best part of this whole experience.” He reached over and slammed her face into the console until she passed out. He couldn’t have her screaming and carrying on while he drove them out of here.

His cabin was all set up and ready for them. He thought of the toys he had stashed at the cabin and licked his lips in anticipation. Emily’s face was already red from his slaps, her skin so pink and rosy. She would look so pretty with his marks all over and a red glow from his hands. He wanted to see the mark he made on her before he took off. Her shirt slipped down her shoulder and there it was. Kyle ran his fingers over the impression and groaned. Emily’s thighs would look good with his mark too. Kyle glided his fingers down her arm and rubbed her leg.

Emily didn’t move. It wasn’t as much fun without her squirming. He’d wait until they reached their destination to really play. Kyle started the car, not once looking back at the Colonel who lay bleeding on the doorstep. He knew he would have to be quick. Some nosy neighbor had to have heard the gunshots.

The engine sputtered and then flared to life. In a matter of hours, he would be free to explore and have fun with his new toy. He reined in his glee to focus on the street and obeying traffic laws. No need to get pick up by the cops. Kyle looked over at Emily and grinned, happy for the first time in weeks.

\* \* \* \*

Emily opened her eyes just a little to let some light in and then slammed them closed again. Her head felt as if little men were inside pounding away.

*What happened?*

She smiled as she remembered dinner with Joe, and then the fantastic sex that had followed. Emily frowned. The pounding couldn’t be a hangover. Neither of them drank a lot. She raised her hands to her head, but they were bound together. Then her eyes flew open and she plastered herself to the car door.

*Fuck me. Kyle!*

The car door was a cold comfort. They couldn’t stay in the car forever; at least they weren’t at their destination yet. She forced herself to stay calm. She looked at the drivers’ seat and Kyle wasn’t there. A rush of air left her.

*Where is he? I need to find a way out of this. Oh my God. Joe.*

It was then she remembered they'd left Joe bleeding on his doorstep. Was he dead?

Holding her sob back proved futile. She took a breath in and then out. She couldn't break down. First, she needed to figure out where they were. Then, she needed to figure out an exit strategy. When Gunny realized Joe wasn't at the base, he would go looking for him.

*Will he be too late?*

She couldn't think that way. If she was going to get through this, Emily needed to believe that Joe lived. It took a second, but Emily realized they'd stopped at a gas station.

*Where is Kyle?*

Using only her eyes she looked around her where she could. The door creaked and she knew it was him coming back in the car. She closed her eyes and relaxed her body. The longer he thought she was out, the better.

"I know you're awake. I was watching you through the window. You're beautiful when you're unconscious, but I like it more when you have that fire in your eyes. It will be even better when I beat that light out of them." he laughed.

She didn't take his bait and didn't want to risk talking again. Who knows how long she was out the last time and how much ground they'd covered. No one knew where she was and she wasn't due to check in with David anytime soon. Emily would have to wait for the perfect time to move. Kyle needed to believe she had no fight left to get away. She'd bide her time and make her move when they got to where ever he was taking them.

*Please be okay, Joe. Please. I can't lose you now. I just found you.*

Emily tried to calm herself with thoughts of the last couple days with Joe. He was so strong. Now she needed to be strong. Stronger then she'd ever been. She didn't have anything to leave a trail and she wasn't in a position right now to try. Her heart stopped.

*Where's my cell phone?*

She retraced her steps. She'd gotten ready for dinner, grabbed her bag and put her cell phone in her back pocket. It was still there when she got dressed to leave Joe's house. If she could find a way to turn it on and dial out to David they'd be able to find her quicker. Now she just had to figure out how she was going to do it with her hands tied and Kyle sitting right beside her. She needed to do it before he found out she had it. It was her only hope. David had put a special tracking device in it when she went on assignment, but he didn't know she was in trouble. By the time he found out, it could be too late.

She could try to tell him she had to use the restroom, but would he pat her down first? No matter what, the tracking would be active so they would have a general idea on where she was, but if she could get it turned on and a call in to David, maybe she could spare herself some of what she knew was to come.

"Ky—" she cleared her throat and tried again. "Kyle, I need to use the restroom."

He didn't say anything for a second, but he did look over at her. Once he focused back on the road he spoke.

"You'll have to make do with going outside. We aren't stopping anywhere with people. I don't want you to be tempted to do anything stupid."

Emily didn't say anything, just waited for him to pull over. Once the car stopped her heart beat sped up. She took a deep breath when he left the car and came over to her side.

"I'll need my hands free."

“You try anything and I’ll shoot you. You don’t need the use of your legs for what I have in mind.”

She tried not to shudder and he untied her wrist. Kyle yanked her out of the car and dragged her to a few bushes.

“Hurry up and do what you have to do. You rabbit on me and I’ll shoot you.”

She remained silent and walked into the foliage. Still standing, she unbuttoned her pants and wiggled them down as she squatted. One hand went to her back pocket and she sighed in relief when she felt her cell phone. Emily made all of her movements small. The last thing she needed was for Kyle to figure out what she was doing. Once the phone was in her hands she dialed David’s cell, thanking God he was on speed dial, and then she turned the sound down.

“What’s taking you so long? Hurry up or I’m coming in there to get you.”

She put the phone back in her pants and stood, pulling her pants back up. Now she had to hope the call went through and David figured out something was wrong.

Kyle jerked her from the bushes and pushed her toward the car. Once inside, he tied her hands again. All business, he got back behind the wheel and drove on.

Emily closed her eyes and wished the whole thing was some nightmare she would wake up from any minute.

*Please let them find me. Please, God, send someone to help Joe. Don’t let him be dead. Oh God...*

She had to stop thinking about the possibility before she started sobbing. Opening her eyes, she focused on her surroundings instead. All she could do now was pray and wait.

## Chapter Fourteen

*The Marines are not a branch—we are a Breed.*

It took Mag a minute to understand why he was laying on the steps in front of his house. When it hit him, Mag rushed up and had to hold onto the walls so he didn't fall again.

*Fuck.*

He had no idea how long he'd been out, but the street was empty and held no clues. He did the only thing he could. Mag went back inside and called out the troops. His first call was to Gunny.

"Gun, I need you to get Moore and meet me in the briefing room in five. I also need you to find me a number for Agent David McMichael with the NCIS."

"What's this about, Mag?"

"No questions right now. Just do it. I'll see you in five."

The second call he made was to an old buddy from his training days, Ben Davies.

"Ben, this is Mag. I need a favor and I can't have a lot of questions asked. How soon can you get to Camp Lejeune?"

"My team is already on base. Shouldn't take long to get them together, should I bring them? Should I bring the team?"

"Yes. We'll need them all."

"Done."

Mag grabbed his keys and headed for his truck. Not once giving a thought to the wound on his head, there were too many other things to worry about. That psycho had Emily and who knows what he'd do to her. Mag didn't plan on giving him enough time to do much of anything.

He made it to the base in record time. Moore and Gun were already in the situation room waiting for him.

"What the fuck happened to you?" Gun asked.

"That bastard Stewart shot me."

"Why aren't you at the hospital?"

"What are you, my mother now, Gun? It's just a graze and there are more important things to worry about right now. Did you get that number I asked you to find?"

"Right here."

Gun passed him the piece of paper and Mag turned to make his call.

"NCIS how may I direct your call?"

"Agent David McMichael."

"One moment, please."

The hold music grated on his last nerve, but the agent didn't take long to answer.

"McMichael."

"Good, you're there."

"Who is this?"

"Sorry, this is Colonel Joe Rivers and we have a situation."

"Why isn't Emily calling me? What happened?"

"At around twenty-three hundred, Agent Patterson was taken from my home at gunpoint by Private First Class Kyle Stewart. I was shot and down. As soon as I regained consciousness, I called in the rest of my team and another team. We're at your disposal."

"Do you have any idea of where he'd take her?"

"None. He was new to my squad. I'll do some digging on my end."

"Hold on a second. Damn. Hello? Hello? Shit. I just got a call from Emily's phone with dead air. I'll call you back. I want to get my people tracking this as soon as possible. If you find out anything, call my office. Can you trust the men you have with you?"

"Goddamn it! I hate feeling helpless. Yeah, I trust these guys. I won't go to the General because I don't trust him. Just so you know, I think it goes higher than him and I'm not sure if this has anything to do with the case you're working, but I have a feeling it's all connected."

Mag hung up the phone and turned to face Moore and Gun.

"I don't have time for questions. Emily Patterson is an agent with the NCIS. She was sent here to investigate a sex trafficking ring. Someone has been using us for their personal gain. Tonight she was taken from my home. We will get her back. Moore, go toss Stewart's room and then report back to me. Gun—"

"Mag, there's something you should know. Stewart was called up to the main office by the Red Cross. They said his father was ill and he was going on emergency leave. This goes up the chain if that was a false emergency."

"Shit. Go see what the Red Cross has on his father. Pull his records. If they fuck with you, have them call me."

"I'm on it." Gun squeezed his shoulder before heading out the door.

Once Mag was alone he put his head in his hands.

*Let her be safe. I'm not ready to give her up.*

"Fuck!" He slammed his hand down on the desk. Stewart had gotten the drop on them, plain and simple and there wasn't a fucking thing he could do about it.

He did the one thing he swore he'd never do. He picked the phone back up.

"Hello."

"Sir? This is Joe, your grandson."

"I know who you are, son. What's happened? I have to assume something is very wrong for you to be calling me."

"Yes, sir. I have a problem. Can you help me?"

"If I help you, you have to let me into your life, Joe. Give me a chance. You're all of my Maggie that I have left."

"Yes, sir. I understand."

"Then what do you need?"

"Tonight an NCIS agent was taken from my home at gunpoint. I think it has to do with an investigation she was working on involving my team. I suspect my General is involved and I think it goes up even higher than that. The man who took her is Private First Class Kyle Stewart. Can you dig into it?"

"This agent, is she important to you, son?"

"Yes, sir." He whispered.

"Give me ten minutes to make some calls."

The phone clicked in Mag's ear and he put the receiver back in the cradle. He hated being forced to call on his grandfather. They hadn't spoken in years. Of course, Mag had

a chip on his shoulder when it came to the man, but he was a retired Lieutenant General and he had strings he could pull that Mag would never be able to touch. Emily was worth it. Finding out if there was more to them than a couple fucks, was worth it too. She made him feel things he thought he'd never be able to feel.

Pulled out of his thoughts by Moore entering the room, Mag shook his head and stopped the groan of pain that wanted to worm its way out.

"What did you find, Moore?"

"You aren't going to like it, sir."

"I don't give a fuck. Tell me."

"He had surveillance type pictures of Patterson. He also had some sort of journal. I don't know why he left them here, but he goes on and on about Patterson being his and that..." Moore looked at him.

"Go on, Moore."

"Yes, sir. He called you a bastard and talked of cleaning Patterson to get you off her skin."

"Goddamn it!"

"His room looks like he'll be back any second. He didn't take anything with him when he took off, at least not anything I can see. He was clearly obsessed with Patterson, but I would have never guessed. He seemed normal to me."

"You did a great job. Why don't you hit the rack?"

"I'll stay up with you, sir. I want in when we find her. She can hold her own and I respect that. No way does she deserve this shit. Sorry, sir."

"No need to apologize to me. I've said worse."

"It doesn't matter that she wasn't trained as a Marine. She's ours now, a part of our unit and we take care of our own. Now, do you have a first aid kit here? I'll take a look at your wound."

"Yeah, in that drawer." He pointed in the general direction of his desk.

Mag let Moore bandage him up. It hurt like a son of a bitch, but he remained silent. He didn't even want to guess at what Emily was going through right now.

"She sure can hold her own when she's of a mind." Mag felt the need to talk about Emily.

"Yes, sir, she can."

"You know all those fuck ups of hers were on purpose? I don't know what she planned to do other than piss me off."

"Not surprising at all after seeing her on mission."

Gun chose that moment to walk back into the room.

"It's fake, sir."

"What's fake, Gun?"

"The Stewart identity."

"How the fuck did you figure that out? And why didn't we know?"

"A call came down from a Lieutenant General Joe Rodriguez while I was up at the Red Cross station. He was looking into Stewart and made a call. I was there so I spoke to him. He said to tell you he has more information and will be calling you soon."

"Well, fuck. Is no one who they say they are?"

"I am. So who is this General?" Gun asked

"My grandfather. We don't talk much, but he agreed to help. I have an old friend of



ours on his way up here too. Ben Davies. He should be here soon. His team is going to help us extract Patterson once we find her.”

“Great news. So, when are you going to tell us why Patterson was at your house?”  
pried Gun.

“I wasn’t planning on tell you at all,” grunted Mag.

“Have you known the whole time she’s an agent?” Moore inquired.

“That isn’t any of your business either, but no. I just recently found out.”

“How pissed were you?”

“Can’t you just drop it, Gun?”

“Just making small talk. It could be a long night.”

Mag sighed. “Yes, I was pissed. But I understood why she did it. I think General Potter is involved. I don’t know how yet, but I have this feeling.”

“I trust your feelings, Mag. They’ve gotten us out of a few messes over the years.”

Joe was holding on by a string. “What the fuck is taking so long? Who knows what Stewart, or whoever he is, is doing to her. Goddamn it.”

“You need to stay calm, Mag. If you don’t you’ll be no good to her.”

“She’s important, Paul.”

He felt a hand on his shoulder. “I get that. I do, but you’ll still be no good to her if you don’t calm down.”

Mag’s phone rang, breaking up the comforting moment.

“Rivers.”

“We’ve got a lock on the phone.”

“Shit. The rest of the team isn’t here yet.”

“They’re still on the move. Call me when you’re ready to leave and I’ll give you the update on her position.”

“Wait.” Mag looked up as four men came into the room. “They just arrived. I’ll brief them and we’ll head out. Call my cell if something changes or they stop. We’ll head to the coordinates you have now and hope we’re in time to prevent the worse of this. He’s obsessed with her, McMichael.”

“Just get our girl home, Rivers.”

“We’ve just been given a green light. Gear up. Davies, I’ll fill you in on the way.”

\* \* \* \*

The car pulled to a stop and Emily opened her eyes. She hoped someone was monitoring her phone by now so she started to ramble.

“Is this your cabin, Kyle?”

“It doesn’t matter. And stop calling me Kyle.”

“What am I supposed to call you?”

He slapped her. Her cheek burned and she knew a bruise would be there soon, if it wasn’t already.

“You only talk when I tell you to. A good woman knows her place.”

She tested him further. “But how will I know if I don’t ask? Don’t you want me to please you?”

He grabbed her by the shoulder he’d bitten earlier. “Shut up. That is all you need to know.”

Kyle got out of the car and walked around to her side. He threw open the door and

yanked her out. Without a word, he dragged her by the hands to the front door. She tried to look around, but there was nothing. He'd brought her to the middle of nowhere.

The lock seemed to be sticking, but Kyle pushed through it and opened the door. The cabin smelled musty and stale. Emily didn't have time to look at much as he rushed her through the house. She made herself fall, skinning her knee.

"Stop fucking around." He hauled her back up and continued.

A door loomed before them. Kyle pulled it open and tugged her down a set of stairs. They continued into the darkness and she stumbled into his back when he paused at what she assumed was the bottom of the staircase. A light came on and she got the first look of what he intended for her. She swallowed her scream because she knew he'd get off on it, but her eyes widened in horror.

Along one wall was a big wooden X and a set of chains attached to the wall. Another wall held whips and dildos. Yet another wall held a camera and video equipment.

"You're home now, Emily. This is where you belong, where I'll show you your proper place in this world."

She whimpered when he dragged her to the chains in the wall. Emily tried to stop herself. She didn't want to give him the satisfaction. He turned to face her and her survival instincts kicked in.

Emily head-butted Kyle and then brought her bound hands up to clock him in the head. He stumbled and she raced for the stairs. She was so close to the top when she felt a hand on her leg tug. She fell into the top stair, hitting her chin and biting her tongue.

*Goddamn it.*

She flipped over and kicked out, but he dragged her down the stairs. Her head hit each stair on the way back down. When she reached the bottom, Kyle yanked her up and punched her in the face. She sagged into his arms and before she blacked out she heard words that caused her heart to sink.

"So you like it rough? I'll show you rough."

\* \* \* \*

When Emily woke up she was disoriented. She looked down. Her clothes were still in place, but she had trouble using her arms or legs since they rattled when she tried. Her fears realized, she was chained to the wall. She tried to hold it in, but it was no use, she whimpered.

"Good, you're awake. I wouldn't want you to miss out on any of the fun."

There was glee in the Kyle's voice, pure pleasure at what was about to happen. Her eyes widened when she saw what he held in his hands. In one, he held a wooden club with barbs sticking out of it and the other held a knife. She wanted to ask what his intentions were, but she was afraid of the answer.

He stepped closer and closer. She closed her eyes, but they didn't stay that way for long. They popped back open when she felt the knife brush over her arm, the tip scraping her leaving a small trail of blood in its wake.

"Keep your eyes open. You're going to want to see this." He'd placed a stool beside her and put his club down on it, leaving one hand free to caress the knife. "Let's start with these clothes. You won't be needing them any longer."

Kyle moved in close and ripped the shirt, the tearing sounds echoing in the room. He used the knife to cut the sleeves off. The bra proved no match for the knife and it too fell

to the floor. It took seconds for him to remove her clothes. Her body flushed with embarrassment and she tried to close her eyes again when she felt the sting of the knife moving between her breasts.

“None of that, I said keep your eyes open.” He used the flat end of the knife to slap her face.

She got his point and opened her eyes to stare into madness. There was no other word she could use to describe Kyle.

“Kyle, you can let me go now and I won’t say anything.”

Again she felt the sting, this time from his palm.

“You are a slow learner, aren’t you? Since you want to talk, I have a few questions for you and I’d better like the answers you give. Who are you?”

“You know who I am, Kyle. I’m Emily Patterson.”

Slap.

“Again, who are you?”

“I’m Emily Patterson.”

Slap.

“Is that even your real name? You were involved in an investigation, so who are you?”

“I’m First Lieutenant Emily Patterson of the United States Marine Corps.”

Slap, slap.

“It seems you need more incentive.”

Kyle picked up the club and laid the knife on the stool. He slapped the club into her thigh hard enough for the barbs to stick into her leg. She gasped when he pulled it free. Not giving her time to breathe he tagged her other thigh. The blood dripped down her legs. She bit her lip not wanting to give him the satisfaction of her scream. Emily blocked the pain to focus on a happier time. It worked until his hand brushed against her clit, his fingers rubbing and pinching bringing the experience to the front of her mind.

He moved away and she looked at him as he surveyed his handy work. She held her chin up high and stared straight ahead. Emily wouldn’t give him the satisfaction. She refused.

“Let’s try this again. Who are you?”

“I’m First Lieutenant Emily Patterson of the United States Marine Corps.”

He grinned at her answer and licked his lips. He reached down and adjusted himself. It was then she realized he got off on causing her pain. It didn’t matter if she responded or not, he was loving every minute of it.

“I just knew you were going to be fun.”

He turned his back on her for a minute and she allowed herself to sag for just a moment to catch her breath. Kyle rattled around on the wall and when he stopped, she pulled herself back up.

“Let’s see if this helps loosen your lips.”

He held up a bullwhip and all she could do was gulp before he unwound it and let it rip into her flesh. One stroke turned into five as he whipped into her stomach.

By the time he was finished she couldn’t control her sobs. She’d tried so hard, but he’d broken through whatever barriers she’d erected.

Kyle panted in front of her and she could smell his excitement.

He walked up to her and brushed a tear from her cheek. Then he leaned down and

brushed his lips over hers.

“Beautiful. You are so lovely. Thank you.” He whispered over her mouth. “Now I want you to think about my next question very carefully and answer me truthfully. Who are you and why were you assigned to the base?”

She had to struggle with her words and it came out a whisper, “I’m First Li—lieutenant Em—Emily P—Patterson.”

Emily couldn’t dodge as his fist connected with her face. She gave a sigh of relief as darkness welcomed her.

## Chapter Fifteen

*You can take the Marine out of the Corps, but you can't take the Corps out of the Marine.*

He was pleased with her progress. He didn't want to break her too soon or he'd have no fun. And there was no question that he'd crack that tough exterior of hers. Emily took pain well. He backed away from her to enjoy his handy work. She looked so beautiful hanging there bleeding. He knew he needed to tend her wounds if he wanted to keep her around for a while, but first he needed to take care of a pressing issue.

Kyle unbuckled his pants and let them drop to his ankles. He stared at her as he jerked his cock in slow steady strokes. The need to feel her skin was strong. He paused for a moment and dragged his stool closer to her. He sat down, took his cock back in hand, and stroked her arm and his dick at the same time. Kyle grabbed her limp hand and cupped it around his cock and groaned. He sped up, her hand in his, and could feel his balls tighten.

*So good, so good.*

"Emily!" He screamed as he came, his seed landing on Emily's hand. She looked good coated with his essence.

He took a moment to calm his breathing before he reached down to take off his boots, he pulled off his socks and let his pants and boxers hit the floor before taking Emily off the wall. Kyle picked her up, loving the feel of her in his arms. On the other side of the wall there was a king-size bed. After putting her on the mattress, he went to the wall where he kept medical supplies. He would need disinfectant and bandages. No need for her to get sick. More work needed to be done. His uncle would want to know more about her and what she knew.

Once he finished with Emily's bandages, he'd call his uncle and give him an update. Not that he had much to tell right now. Emily wouldn't give away anything ... yet. Kyle would enjoy watching the light in her eyes dim as she realized what her place was. He couldn't wait to fuck her, but he needed to cleanse her of that bastard.

Emily started to twitch a little on the bed. He hurried back because he wanted her to feel what he was about to do. He opened the bottle of alcohol and dumped it on her stomach and legs. She bolted upright in bed and screamed. Kyle laughed. Her screams sounded so sweet. Still naked from the waist down he crawled over and lay down on top of Emily so she could feel his cock harden. She tried to back away, but there was nowhere to go.

"You do this to me and you'll beg for my cock before we're through, but you can't have it yet. You still have the stench of the Colonel on your skin. I'll cleanse him out of you and all you'll be able to think about is me and what my cock can do for you."

She whimpered and closed her eyes. He couldn't have that. Kyle gently slapped her cheek and her eyes flew open. He leaned down and caressed her lips with his tongue.

"All in good time, Emily mine."

Kyle stood up and reached for the bandages. He made quick work of wrapping her up and then he used the manacles hanging from the bed post to chain her in place.

"I'll be back my sweet. I have a call to make. You should think about what you want

to tell me. I will find out who you are one way or another. As you can see, I don't mind beating it out of you. I rather like it." He gave her a quick peck on the cheek and turned to leave.

"I'll never tell you anything. I'll die first."

He turned to look back at her.

"Oh, hon when I'm done with you, you might wish you were dead, but I won't give you that satisfaction. You are mine. A new toy to play with and the only thing that matters here is my happiness. You would do well to remember that."

He walked up the stairs and locked her in the basement. Kyle didn't think she could get out of the restraints, but he didn't get as far as he did by taking chances.

The phone took three rings before someone picked up.

"General Clagg's office, how may I help you?"

"Hi Maria, it's Robbie. Is my uncle busy?"

"Just a moment and let me check, Robbie." A slight pause, "He is in his office, I'll patch you through."

"Thanks, Maria."

"Clagg."

"Hello, Uncle Hank! I just wanted to let you know I arrived safe and sound. My girl and I want to thank you for our getaway. We'll be here for a couple weeks and I know she wants to talk to you as well so when she is ready we'll give you a call back."

"You're welcome, son. That sounds great. I can't wait to talk to her. Have fun. I have to go talk to a couple of your cousins and I'll let you know how they are when you call back. I don't want you to worry."

"Thanks, Uncle Hank. Talk to you soon."

They both hung up. Kyle was sure his uncle understood the code. His cousins had to be the General and Colonel. He should have found a way to tell his uncle that Rivers wouldn't be causing any more problems, but he'd find out soon enough. Kyle yawned.

He headed to rest for the next round of play. If she didn't talk he would start the cleansing. She'd talk one way or another.

\* \* \* \*

"We need to leave, what's the fucking hold up now?"

"Sorry, Mag. You have a call."

"Tell them I'll fuckin' call them back. What about this doesn't scream urgent to you, Gun?"

"It's General Rodriguez, he said he has news."

Mag took a deep breath. He needed to tighten his reins. He had too much on the line to screw up now because of emotions.

"Get the men to the jeeps and I'll be out in a minute. Be ready to roll when I get there."

"Yes, sir."

Shit, he'd have to apologize to Gun. It wasn't his fault Mag felt like he would crack into tiny pieces at any second.

"Rivers."

"I've got news, son."

"What kind of news, General?"

"I've done a little digging and I have a name for you. Lieutenant General Hank Clagg. I don't think he's your top man, but he has pull and he is the one working the strings on this one."

"Do I even want to know how you found this out?"

"I couldn't tell you if I wanted to, son. One more thing, you have a loose cannon on your hands in the way of Clagg's nephew. Robbie Clagg. You might know him as Kyle Stewart. He's been using that alias for a few years and until now it remained clean. He's been in and out of mental hospitals his whole life."

"How the fuck did he get into the Marines?"

"He isn't a Marine, son. He tried to enlist straight out of high school but he was rejected."

"This makes no sense whatsoever. We've found where Stewart, Clagg or whatever name he's using, is. He's in a cabin out north. We have the coordinates and are on our way now."

Mag heard his grandfather shuffle some papers.

"That cabin belongs to Clagg. If you can catch that son of a bitch there you'll be able to wrap this case up with a nice little bow for the NCIS. Godspeed, son."

"Thank you, sir."

Before leaving, Mag made a quick call to McMichael. He hated going through the receptionist, they didn't have time. Finally the man answered.

"McMichael."

"I have a name for you. Lieutenant General Hank Clagg. The guy who took Emily is his nephew. Start tugging on strings and get him. Once I have his nephew in custody, you'll have your case."

"How did you find this out?"

"I have a few connections. I think you'll find that General Potter and General Clagg are tied together somehow."

"Thanks, we owe you one. Any word on Emily?"

"We're leaving now. I stopped to get this information to you. As soon as I hang up we'll be en route."

"Let me know when she's safe."

"Will do."

Mag hung up and raced outside to the waiting jeeps. He hopped into the first one with Gun behind the wheel.

"Do you have the coordinates locked in?"

"First thing I did."

"Then let's hit it. Stop about a mile out."

"This isn't my first mission, Mag."

"I know and I—I'm sorry."

"What's this I hear? Who are you and what have you done with Magnus?"

Mag gave a dry chuckle. "I'm ready to crack. If I lose it, I need you to take charge and get her out of there, Paul. I don't know what he's done to her already. He's had his hands on her for hours already and he's an obsessed man. I just found out that he's a mental case too. In and out of the loony bins his whole life."

"Your grandfather told you that?"

"Yep. It doesn't matter, the crazy is going down and I'm taking him there."

“Don’t kill him Joe. Just don’t do it. It could ruin your career and anything you might want to have happen between you and Patterson.”

“Shit man, I can’t even think about that right now.”

“I see you didn’t deny there was something between you two.”

“I might deny it to others, but I’ve known you too long to even try.”

“You love her?”

“I don’t know, man. It’s too new, but there is something about her.”

“Yes there is. Okay, let’s focus on getting her out of there and we’ll worry about the rest later. If it comes down to it, you might have to let her take him out, you know that, right?”

“We’ll cross that bridge when we come to it.”

The two settled into a comfortable silence born of many missions together. Mag took the time to check his weapons, making sure all his magazines were full. A couple hours later they parked the jeeps on the side of the road.

“Ben, take a man and head to the back of the cabin. Gun, you and I are going in the front. Moore, go find some high ground. If you get a shot, shoot to wound. I want this bastard alive. The other two men stay by the jeeps and have them ready. We don’t know what shape Agent Patterson is in and I’m not taking any chances.”

The men separated. Mag and Gun took the straight route to the cabin, breaking into a run until it came into view. There wasn’t much cover up to the front door. They would be exposed, but they would have to take the risk. The two dropped to the ground and belly crawled their way to the front door. The cabin had a window on each side of the door. Mag and Gun each took a side and hugged the door.

With a hand gesture, Mag told Gun to go in low and indicated he’d take the high ground. Gun nodded and cocked his gun while Mag reached for the door knob, hoping Stewart was stupid enough to leave it unlocked.

Luck favored them as the door swung open. The two crept in. Mag looked around and noticed an upstairs. He motioned for Gun to go up. He’d take this floor. Gun acknowledged him with a nod and made his way up. Mag cleared the front room and headed back. It was clear.

*Fuck.*

He stood in the kitchen and looked around. He noticed a door. At first he thought it might be a pantry, but something in his gut told him to open it. He was rewarded with stairs. It was paneled in so he didn’t have to worry about being seen until he reached the end. Mag eased his way around the corner with his gun in front of him. He paused to listen for any sounds. When he heard nothing, he moved forward again. What he saw stopped him in his tracks.

*It’s a fuckin’ torture chamber. Sick fuck!*

He didn’t want to think of Emily in this room. He couldn’t. After he finished the mission he could deal. Right now he had to find Emily. The room was small enough that he knew she wasn’t in there so he turned and headed for the other side of the room. It was then that he saw her. He wanted to sob at the sight of her battered and bruised. He looked around the room and didn’t see Stewart so he rushed to the bed.

“Oh shit, Em, what did he do to you?” He stroked her face with a gentle touch. The whole left side of her face purple and blue.

She was chained to the bed, naked. He pushed that thought to the back of his head.



Her eyelids fluttered. She opened them and pulled back.

“Hush, baby. It’s me, Joe.”

“J—Joe?”

“Yes, sweetheart. I’m here and I’m going to get you out of here.”

“I—he—oh God, Joe.”

She sobbed and the feeling of helplessness welled inside him. He kissed her cheek and moved away.

“I’m going to look for a key.”

Her eyes got wide and the color drained from her face. He dropped to the floor as instinct kicked in and it saved his life. He rolled over and kicked out at the monster above him.

“Get away from her, she’s mine!” Stewart shouted.

“She isn’t yours, you delusional fuck.”

Mag levered himself up to his hands and knees and got to his feet. He took quick stock of the room but he didn’t see anything he could use as a weapon. Stewart had a knife and Mag counted his blessings that it wasn’t a gun.

“Once you’re dead, she will be. I’ll wash her in your blood if I have to.”

“What does that even mean? You really are crazy. What loony bin did you escape from this time or did your good old uncle spring you?”

“Leave my uncle out of this.”

Stewart leapt forward and slashed out with his knife. Mag sidestepped and it barely missed his arm.

“Why did you do it, Clagg?”

That pulled the man up short and he looked confused.

“What did you call me?”

“What’s wrong, Robbie boy? Don’t you like that name? Yes, I know. I know all about you. You’re a sick twisted coward who hides behind his big bad uncle. You won’t be able to hide any longer. He’s going down.”

The taunting seemed to be working. Stewart kept slashing at him and he dodged.

“You can’t touch us.”

Getting tired of being on the defensive, Mag charged the man. He led with his shoulder and rammed into Stewart’s stomach. He pushed him back against the wall with a thud and felt the air leave Stewart’s body. The knife grazed his arm and he hissed at the pain, but the vision of Emily kept him going.

Stewart reached for his bad shoulder and dug his fingers into the wound that wasn’t fully healed.

“Fuck.” He groaned.

“That’s just what’s going to happen. I don’t think I’ll kill you right away. I think I’ll let you bleed out while I fuck *my* woman.”

Mag saw red and swung his fist into Stewart’s face. The man just laughed.

“You’re so weak. I can’t believe they let you in the Marines, much less lead a team. I was under your nose the whole time and so was Jackson. You’re too trusting, you sorry son of a bitch.”

The time for talking had ended. Mag wanted this guy taken out so bad he could taste it. Stewart moved his hand to slice into Mag with his knife. The two struggled to get the upper hand. Mag’s training won out over the crazed drive of Stewart and he managed to

get the knife out of play. He threw it to the side and wrapped his hands around Stewart's throat. The man pulled and pinched at the hands around his neck, but Mag held tight.

"This ends now." Mag slammed Stewart's head into the wall. Once, twice, three times and the man went limp in his arms. Not taking any chances that Stewart would wake up; Mag dragged him into the other room and looked for something to tie him up with. He didn't have to search for long. He found some rope and bound Stewart's hands behind him and then tied his ankles together as well. Mag dropped him on the floor and went to get Emily off the bed.

## Chapter Sixteen

*When it absolutely, positively, must be destroyed overnight—call the United States Marine Corps.*

Did she really see Joe or was it a dream? Would she wake up to more beatings? When the fighting began Emily battled her way out of the fog she'd been in. She had to struggle through the pain. Her whole body ached, but there he was. Joe. It wasn't a dream.

Stewart's knife slashed at Joe and she had to close her eyes. If something happened to him she didn't know what she would do. She'd never tell Stewart what he wanted to hear. He would have to kill her first. Of course, by the time he was through with her she was sure she would wish for death.

Em didn't open her eyes until she felt a soft touch on her arm. She was afraid of what she would see, but she forced them open and sighed in relief.

"Joe, thank God. Are you okay?"

He caressed her face and she leaned into his palm.

"I should be asking you that question, babe."

"You're here. That's all that matters. I knew you'd come for me."

"No way would I leave you with this monster. Let me find a key and then we need to check on Gun. He went upstairs, where I assume Stewart was. I'm hoping some of the other men are in the house."

"Other men?"

"Yeah. I had a buddy bring his team in to help out. We need to call McMichael as well so he knows you're safe, but first things first. You need to go to a hospital."

"I just want to go home, Joe."

"I don't even know where that is, honey."

"With you. I want to go with you. You make me feel safe. Please, take me home."

"Let's go find Gun and then we'll talk."

As Joe searched the room for a key, Em's gaze followed him around the room and she watched as he found it by the medical supplies along the wall. He unchained her from the bed and helped her sit up. She winced when her legs brushed the bed, but she noticed he looked around the room again with a frown on his face.

"What are you looking for?"

"Something for you to wear. There isn't anything around here. You'll have to put my shirt on. It should cover enough of you."

He shrugged out of his shirt and helped her put it on. She held in a cry when it brushed her battered face.

"Can you walk or do you want me to carry you?"

"Let me try walking first."

Joe didn't say anything, just held out his arm to help her up. She nodded her thanks and slowly eased off the bed. When she tried to stand her legs buckled beneath her. Joe didn't wait; he scooped her up and held her close. She breathed in his scent, all woodsy and musky. It smelled like home.

She closed her eyes and let him take over. She could be strong later; right now, she just needed him. He made quick work of the stairs and she opened her eyes when she heard a strange voice.

"I see you've got her. Where's Stewart?"

"He's tied up downstairs. I'm going to take care of Emily. Could you get him settled into the jeep?"

"Sure thing." The man slapped Joe on the back.

"Who was that?" Em asked when the man left.

"That was Ben Davies. We went through training together. He's from my hometown. I'll introduce you before he takes off."

"I'd like that."

Moore walked in the door.

"Moore, I haven't heard from Gun. Has he checked in?"

"No, sir. Patterson." He gave her a nod.

"Go upstairs and make sure he's okay. I'm going to get Patterson to the jeep."

"Yes, sir."

Em loved it when he took charge. She also loved how he protected their budding relationship. She hoped Gun was okay. Her legs started to throb and she closed her eyes against the pain. Biting her lip, she could feel the blood start to drip down her legs. The bandages needed to be changed.

"Joe." She whispered. "My wounds, they're bleeding. They'll need wrapped again before we leave."

"I'll raid his medical supplies once I get you in the jeep. Or I'll send one of the guys back. We'll check the jeep for some sort of pain reliever. I'm not going to trust anything he might have in the cabin. Are you sure we can't take you to a hospital? They'd be able to give you the good stuff to stop the pain."

"I don't want to go, but I think you're right. I need something to dull this ache."

They reached the jeep in record time, Joe ran with her half the way. It hurt, but she was happy to be away from the cabin. Joe settled her inside. Another soldier she didn't recognize leaned against another jeep.

"Soldier."

"Yes, sir?"

"I need you to go into the cabin and get me something to bandage her legs. There's a medicine cabinet in the basement."

The soldier saluted and hot-footed it to the cabin.

"You should get that checked out too, Joe."

She pointed to his arm where Stewart connected with his knife.

"It's just a scratch. At least the knife wound is. My shoulder hurts like a son of a bitch. The bastard dug his fingers into it."

She crumbled. "Why did he do it, Joe? Why me?"

He took her hands in his and squeezed them before kissing each one, causing her eyes to tear up.

*Don't break down now. Don't break down now.*

Over and over she chanted the words in her head while listening to Joe. There would be time to break down later. Right now there was too much to do.

"He was obsessed. We found pictures of you in his bunk."

“It was more than that, Joe. He was asking me who I really was. I kept cover, but he still suspected something.”

*There, that sounded calm.*

“You’re right. He was in on the sex ring. His uncle is tangled up in it and so is my General. I gave McMichael all the information he would need to close the investigation.”

“How... I don’t understand where this information came from. We’ve been working this case for months.”

Before Joe could answer the other men appeared. Moore had Gun thrown over his shoulder in a fireman’s carry. Em tried to get out of the jeep, but Joe put a comforting arm on her. When she saw the next man headed for the vehicles, she stiffened and tried to scramble as far into the jeep as she could.

“It’s okay, babe. He’s out and he’ll be in the other jeep. They’ll head straight to base and throw him in the brig.”

“He’s crazy, Joe. The Marines should have caught that.”

“Well, that is one of the things I need to tell you. He isn’t a Marine.”

“How is that possible and if he isn’t, then you can’t hold him in the brig.”

“How is it possible that you’re on my team and not a Marine?”

“That’s different.”

“Not really. He had someone pull some strings as well.”

“Fair enough. Get me out of here, Joe.”

As soon as Moore settled himself and Gun into the back of the jeep, Joe sped off to the hospital, leaving Emily with thoughts she didn’t want.

\* \* \* \*

Emily withdrew into herself on the drive to the base hospital. Mag felt helpless and kept looking at her to make sure she was all right.

*Who am I kidding, she isn’t all right.*

He still had so much to tell her, but it could wait. He wanted to talk about what happened to her. Mag didn’t know what to do or even if he should do something. He’d never felt this way about a woman before and it frustrated him to be so close, but still so closed off.

He hated feeling so out of control.

*Fuck.*

Mag was not good at this touchy feely crap. If she were a man, they’d go out have a few beers get into a bar fight and get it out of their system. Now he worried he’d say the wrong thing.

What did he know of relationships? His usual MO was wham, bam, thank ya, ma’am. If he had an itch, he’d scratch it. Emily was different. He wanted more with her, but he didn’t know what exactly it was he needed.

*Shit, I should let her go now.*

Mag didn’t know why that thought caused his heart to skip a beat. He brought a hand to his chest.

“You okay, Joe?”

She finally broke the silence. He looked over at her. She looked so small and broken against the door. He wanted to pull her into his arms and never let her go, to protect her against the world.

*Fuck, I'm turning into such a girl. Pull yourself together, Mag.*

"I'm good." He cleared his throat. "We'll be at the hospital soon."

She didn't say anything to that, just settled back into her seat and closed her eyes. She must have fallen asleep because as they pulled into the hospital she woke up screaming. Mag jerked the car to a stop, his heart in his throat this time.

He ran his hands through his hair. Should he touch her? He'd heard that could be a bad idea. Fuck this shit. Mag took off his seat belt and moved in closer.

"Emily? Babe? It's me. It's Joe. You're having a bad dream. You're safe."

He reached out to touch her arm and she jerked away, her eyes glassy and unfocused. Joe slammed his hand on the steering wheel. He wished that maggot Stewart was here. He'd rip that bastard apart for what he did to Emily.

"Joe? Wh—what? Oh no, I'm sorry. I was dreaming."

"Don't apologize to me. Don't ever say you're sorry, not for this."

"Colonel?"

Shit, how could he have forgotten the men in the back?

"Yes, Moore?"

"Could you get us to the ER doors? Gun is starting to shake and he hasn't woken up once. I think we should get him inside ASAP."

"Fuck."

Mag put the car in gear and stopped at the entrance.

"Can you handle getting him inside?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'll grab Patterson."

The two men walked to the triage area and Mag spoke to the nurse.

"I have two soldiers I need to sign in."

He tried not to think of the fact that Emily wore his shirt and nothing else. Of course standing in the waiting area with a bare chest was no fun either.

"What is the nature of their illness?"

"Wounded on mission, ma'am. Gunnery Sergeant Roberts has been unconscious for about a half hour to forty-five minutes and he just started shaking."

The nurse motioned behind her to a row of gurneys. "Put him on that and I'll get him back to a room."

"Thank you, ma'am. I also have Lieutenant Patterson who was wounded. She'll need to be seen soon too."

"The nature of her wounds?"

"She—"

"She can speak for herself, Colonel Rivers, but thank you. I have some deep wounds on my thigh and a few on my stomach as well."

"Your pain level, one out of ten."

"I'd say I'm at nine and a half. It's edging its way to a ten."

"Let's get her back there too. It's a slow night so we have beds ready. You'll need to put her in a wheelchair, sir."

Mag walked to the nearest chair and gently placed Emily in it, causing her to wince. He followed the nurse to the available bed.

"Are you family, sir?"

He looked at Emily. He didn't want to leave her side.

"I'll be okay, Joe."

"If you need me, make them come get me."

"Yes, sir." She gave him a small salute.

Mag gave her a halfhearted smile and turned to leave. Hospital rules sucked. He went to the waiting room and found Moore sitting there thumbing through a magazine. An empty chair next to Moore called his name.

"How's she doing?"

"I really don't know, to tell you the truth. I know she's in pain, but she's tough, she'll pull through. How about Gun? Has he woken up yet?"

"When I left he was opening his eyes, but he was groggy. I think the team will pull through."

"Fuck, Moore, when did things get so complicated." He ran a hand through his already rumpled hair.

"Probably about the time Patterson was assigned to our team. Is that her real name?"

"That's what she says."

Moore nodded and went back to his magazine leaving Mag to think about all that had happened. It was fucked up for sure. He kept going back to the memory of Emily lying in that bed, naked and hurt. They'd better keep Stewart from his path because he didn't know what he'd do. He wanted to kill the man with his bare hands. He had the chance and let it slip through his fingers.

Twenty minutes later, they were still sitting in the waiting room. Mag had made a quick call to McMichael to let him know Emily was safe. He'd called his grandfather to thank him. He wanted to wait to call the General.

"Moore, you can head out. I'll stick around."

"You stay, I stay. Our people are in there."

Mag nodded, not really expecting a different answer. A doctor stepped out and looked at his chart.

"Is there a Colonel Rivers here?"

He stood up and walked toward the doctor.

"Yes, sir?"

"I wanted to give you an update. The Gunnery Sergeant will have to stay overnight for observation. He did wake up, but he was unconscious for a long time. We want to monitor him. The Lieutenant will be discharged soon. We just have to do her outtake paperwork. Her wounds are deep, but as long as she keeps them clean, infection shouldn't be an issue."

"Thank you, doctor."

The man nodded, "You're welcome. An orderly will bring the Lieutenant out when the paperwork is done." The doctor left the waiting room.

Mag went to Moore to give him the news. Moore agreed to stay at the hospital with Gun and Mag would take Emily home with him.

Mag peered around the curtain, "You ready to go?"

Emily looked his way; her eyes looked a little glassy and glazed over as if she couldn't focus.

"Joe babe, I'd follow you anywhere, come give me a kiss."

"Emily?"

A nurse patted his shoulder, "We gave her something for the pain and it's kicking in."

I'm sure she'll be asleep here soon."

"Thank you, ma'am."

"You're welcome, sir. We'll have a wheelchair here in a moment and we can meet you at the front entrance if you want to get your car."

Mag left the room before he did something stupid like take her in his arms. He rushed to get the car. He needed to hold her and know that she was okay.

*What have you done to me, Emily?*

With a sigh he continued on. It wasn't like they were breaking any rules, but she hadn't officially broken cover. Anybody could be watching and they still hadn't caught Stewart's uncle. Once he got Emily settled he'd make some calls and see where they stood on the investigation.

As Mag reached the car, he thought of how proud he was with how Emily handled herself. She might not be a Marine, but she had the heart of one.



## Chapter Seventeen

*Save water, shower with a Marine.*

Emily put up a small fuss when Joe carried her into his home. Her head felt strange, a loopy sensation she wasn't used to. Her eyes wanted to close, but she couldn't sleep. Not yet. She was afraid she might dream.

"I can walk, you know, but this caveman routine *is* kind of nice." She struggled a little before settling into his arms.

"Humor me. You've been given painkillers and you're hurt. Let me take care of you."

"For now, because I think I need it. I need you."

The two remained silent as Joe took Emily to his bed. He started to set her down, but she stopped him.

"Could we take a shower first? I just, I feel dirty and I need to wash up."

"We can do that, but we're going to have to be careful of your wounds. I don't want to hurt you."

"I don't care; I just want to be clean."

Joe changed direction and headed to the shower. She sighed and snuggled into him. She could get used to this.

"I'm going to set you down and get the water started."

He put her on the counter by the sink and turned on the water. She could stare at him all day.

He bent over and Emily bit her lip, controlling her whimper. She had a flashback of hanging in that basement and shook her head. That man would not force her to become afraid. She was stronger.

"Emily. Emily!"

"What? Oh sorry. I didn't hear you."

"You zoned out for a minute. Everything okay?"

She placed her hand on his arm. "I'm okay. Really. I'm fine. I-I just..."

"Don't worry, babe. You don't have to talk about it, at least not yet. Let's get you cleaned up." He had a soothing tone.

"Will you come in with me?" she asked, afraid he wouldn't want to see her with her wounds.

"I wouldn't want to be anywhere else." Joe assured her.

He leaned in and placed a kiss on her forehead, then helped her stand up. Em winced when her feet landed on the ground, but ignored the pain and put it in the back of her mind. The pain medicine kept most of the edge off.

It didn't take much to relieve her of his shirt, they left her bandages on. She wanted to hide herself from him as she stood naked before him, but he wouldn't let her.

"You're beautiful no matter what, don't hide from me."

Joe was so gentle with her. He left her for just a moment to take off his clothes. He picked her up and walked into the shower with her. The first sob came out of nowhere. She wasn't expecting it and she could tell by the look on Joe's face that he wasn't either.

“I’m s—s—sorry.”

He just pulled her close and slid down the shower wall so they sat down. He cradled her in his lap and made a shushing sound while rubbing her back with slow circles and rocking back and forth. She couldn’t stop even if she wanted to.

“Don’t be sorry. You’re breaking my heart here. Please stop crying. I don’t know what to do with a sobbing woman.”

She wrapped her arms around him. “Thank you, Joe. For being there, for saving me. Just hold me. Please.”

She felt safe in his strong arms and didn’t ever want him to let go.

“I’m here for ya, babe. I’m right here. He can’t hurt you.” He kissed her cheek, her forehead and her lips, over and over again.

Em reached up and stopped him. She needed more, needed to feel alive and clean. She needed Joe, inside her. Now. She looked into his eyes for a moment before she pulled him closer and sealed their lips together. When she pulled back, she could see the glimmer of desire in his eyes and his hard cock wedged between her thighs.

“I need you, Joe. Please. I need to feel alive”

“I don’t want to hurt you.”

“The only way you could hurt me is if you say no. I need this. Don’t make me beg.”

“Never.” He kissed her. “Tell me if you need me to stop.”

She scrambled up a little and took his cock in her hands, positioning him at her entrance and wiggled until she had all of him inside her.

“Fuck.” He moaned and threw his head back against the shower.

“Yes, Joe, God yes ... fuck me. Make me forget. Just for a minute. Make me feel alive.”

Em settled into a hard, fast pace.

“Emily, God Em, I’m gonna come. Slow—slow down.”

She didn’t listen, she couldn’t. Em could only feel and she savored his quaking body under her.

“Come for me, Joe.”

Joe hugged her tight and stopped her frantic pace.

“Not yet, Emily, I have to make this good for you.”

“Bu—”

He placed a finger against her lips.

“He won’t ruin this for us. I want to make it beautiful for you.”

Joe pulled her off him and stood to shut the shower off. He picked her up and carried her into the bedroom, gently laying her on the bed.

She started to cry again. Not the racking sobs from earlier, but tears rolled down her face. She almost came undone when he wiped her tears away.

“I need you, Joe.”

“You’ve got me, babe. I’m not going anywhere.”

He knelt by her feet and kissed her toes, working his way up her calves. She sighed when he moved up her legs. He avoided her cuts.

“We got your bandages wet.” He said as he continued up her body.

Joe moved to the juncture of her thighs, but skipped his way up until he kissed her stomach. She let out a groan of disappointment, but didn’t say anything. Tears still streamed down her face, but it was because she felt treasured. He licked her nipples and

made his way to her neck. Joe nibbled for a minute before he kissed her tears away.

She opened her legs so he could settle between them. His weight felt wonderful. He paused to sheath himself before slipping into her wet folds.

The slow pace he set was driving her crazy and she was shocked when her climax rolled over her.

“Joe!”

“That’s it, baby. That’s it.”

He sped up just a little.

“Emily!”

Joe collapsed on top of her and the pain from her legs and stomach seeped into her consciousness. She winced and he rolled off her.

“I’m sorry.” He rained kisses over her face.

“That was beautiful, Joe. Thank you.”

Her eyelids felt heavy and she let them drift shut.

*I think I’m falling in love*, was her last thought before sleep washed over her.

\* \* \* \*

Mag bolted upright, unsure what jerked him from his sleep when he heard it again.

“No, please. No!”

Emily thrashed back and forth on the bed. He wasn’t sure if he should try to wake her up or not. Mag tried to calm her.

“Shh, it’s okay. I’m here, Emily. It’s just a dream, only a dream. Wake up for me, baby.”

He leaned close to stroke her hair when he saw stars. She’d punched him in the face.

“Fuck!” Mag jumped off the bed, holding his nose.

Emily bolted up right on the bed with a bloodcurdling scream before her eyes popped open. She looked dazed. Her unfocused gaze darted around the room until it settled on him.

“Joe?”

She sounded so confused. He walked back to the bed still holding his nose.

“It’s okay. You had a nightmare, but you’re safe now.”

She shook her head, like she was clearing it.

“Did—did I hit you?”

“You took a swing at me, but I’ll be okay. Let me just go to the bathroom. You gonna be all right here?”

“Yeah.” She took a deep breath. “I’ll be fine.”

He rushed to the bathroom and grabbed a towel. Mag looked in the mirror, but it didn’t look too bad. He wiped at his nose and threw the towel in the sink. When he got back into the room, Emily held her head in her hands.

Mag got into the bed and pulled Emily back so she lay on his chest. He wrapped his arms around her.

“You want to talk about it?”

She shook her head. “Not yet. I can’t.”

He gave her a small squeeze, “It’s okay. I’m here if you need me.”

“Could you just hold me for a bit?”

“You got it.”

They sat in silence and all Mag could hear was the two of them breathing in unison. He could get used to being like this, a scary thought for a man who didn't understand the word commitment. Mag's hand went to his chest as an unfamiliar ache settled there.

"Is something wrong, Joe?"

He shook his head only to realize she couldn't see him. "No sweetheart, nothing's wrong."

"I—I"

"What is it, Emily? You can tell me." He stroked her arm with a light touch.

"I need to call David. Fill him in on what's been going on, see what's happening with the case and then," she took a deep breath. "I have to see Stewart. I need to know he's behind bars. And ... a report, I need to fill out an assault report. I need to make everything official. What about Gun? I want to see him too."

"We'll do all of that in the morning. The hospital gave you some sleeping pills. Would you like a couple?"

"I don't want to sleep, Joe. I can't. The dreams are too much. It's like I'm there again. Why don't we call David and get that out of the way."

"I hate to break it to you, Emily, but it's," Mag looked over at the clock, "only four in the morning. He might be asleep."

"Not if you gave him something to close this case. Did someone interview Stewart tonight?"

"I don't think so. We just threw him in the brig."

"David might know. Or he could be here."

Mag reached for the phone. He knew she wouldn't settle until she did something. He settled back into the bed with her cuddled into his arms and he felt like he'd finally found home.

*Christ, I'm a fucking sap.*

He shook his head and listened to Emily.

\* \* \* \*

Emily snuggled into Joe. It felt right to let him take care of her, but she needed some control. Stewart took some of that away from her and she needed it back.

"McMichael."

"Hey, David, it's Emily."

"Are you okay?"

"As okay as I can be. I'll be better once you give me an update."

"Did your Marine tell you about the break in the case he gave us?"

*My Marine, I like that.* She smiled.

"He gave me some info. Is it tied up with a pretty bow for me?"

"We still have a couple loose ends. We have General Potter in custody and an APB out on General Clagg. Thanks to Colonel Rivers we were able to pull the strings we needed. I'm going to interview Stewart or Clagg, whatever he's going by. We'll break him."

"I want in."

"I can't do that, Em, and you shouldn't even ask it of me. You can watch from the viewing room, but you can't actively participate."

She gave a little sigh, "What time is the interview scheduled for? Has he asked for a

lawyer yet?”

“It’s scheduled for eight in the morning. I’m not sure if he has a lawyer. Not that it’ll matter. With you pressing charges and the other Marines as witnesses, there is no way he’ll wiggle out of the assault, attempted murder or kidnapping charges. Now we need to get him to crack on the sex ring.”

“I don’t know if he will go against his family.”

“I guess we’ll have to find a way to make him. Maybe we’ll do some dealing.”

“Not too much I hope.”

“Don’t worry about it, Em, he’ll be behind bars for a long time. Now, what are you doing talking to me? Go to bed. I’m sure I’ll see you in the morning.”

“You will. I won’t miss it. Plus I have to make my official report. I’m sure Joe should be there too to make his, and the other team members.”

“See you tomorrow, Em.”

Emily hung up the phone and turned a little so she could see Joe’s face.

“Do you think we could go see Gun before we head over to the base for Stewart’s interview?”

“I’ll find a way to make it happen. You ready for that pill now?”

“I’ll take a painkiller, but not the sleeping pill. I’ll be too groggy in the morning if I take it now.”

He got out of bed and headed for the stairs.

“Joe.”

He turned, “Yes, Emily.”

“We left everything in the car. Um ... do you really want to go out like that? Not that I mind. I could look at you all day.” Her tone held a note of humor and she laughed when he looked down at himself.

“Well, fuck.”

“Now there’s the Joe I know and lov—” She froze when she realized what she’d nearly said.

*Love? Do I really love him? Yes, I do.* She amazed herself with her thoughts and glanced up at Joe’s face, unsure how he’d take the words. He just winked at her and grabbed some shorts off the floor that she hadn’t noticed before.

“You just like it when I talk dirty to you.”

She didn’t say anything more and shook her head at herself, hoping she hadn’t run him off. Emily settled back into bed and tried not to concentrate on the pain racking her body. Instead her thoughts drifted to Joe and his fine ass as he walked out of the bedroom. She closed her eyes with a smile on her face.

## Chapter Eighteen

*Marines always welcome, relatives—by appointment.*

Emily didn't get much sleep, but she really didn't expect to. She dragged a little today, but they were on the way to the hospital. Joe had called before they left and pulled some strings to get them in. Emily was grateful. She really needed to make sure Gun was okay. After all, he'd been hurt trying to save her.

They made their way to the row of elevators and headed up in silence. It didn't take long to get to Gun's room.

"Do you think he's awake?"

"We'll have to see."

Joe guided her into the room and they both stopped at the edge of the bed. Gun didn't look too bad.

"Hey, Mag, Patterson. What are you two doing here so early?"

"We wanted to check on you. I told Emily your head was too hard for there to be too much damage."

Emily just shook her head.

"Are you really okay, Gun?" she asked cautiously.

"My head hurts, but they say I'll be fine. I should be out by tonight."

"I'm relieved."

"Me too."

"So what happened?" Joe asked.

"I went upstairs and looked around and the bastard jumped out and hit me with something. Next thing I know, I'm waking up here."

"At least he didn't shoot you." Mag winked at Emily.

"Always the happy thought with you isn't it, Mag?"

"I'm just glad you're okay. Emily was worried. Now we need to go to the base and make sure that fucker rots in hell."

"Oh, Joe, you have such a way with words." It was Emily's turn to laugh.

A sense of normal flowed over and around her even if just for a moment. She was almost afraid to go to the base and see Stewart. She'd been on tough cases before, but this was the first time her injuries were so personal. Her job came with a certain amount of danger. When she signed up, she knew that, but no one had prepared her for a psycho to take things about her.

"—right, Emily?"

She shook her head, "I'm sorry. I drifted off. What were you saying?"

"I just said we should be going. Catch ya later, Gun."

"Wait. Question for you."

Em and Joe turned back toward the bed and waited for Gun to speak.

"I'm just wondering if I'll be invited to the wedding." Gun asked with an innocent expression on his face. He winked at Emily.

Em's blinked back at the question. She had no idea what to say, and then Gun laughed.

“You should see the look on both your faces. It was worth it just for that!”

“You’re lucky we’re in a hospital and there’s a lady present,” sputtered Joe.

“Don’t stop what you want to do on my account.” Em said with an evil grin.

“Hey now, I’m a wounded man. You wouldn’t kick a man when he’s down, would you?”

Joe shook his head. “I’ll see you later.” He turned to her and whispered loudly, “You know, some people will do anything to get out of a little PT.”

A surprise laugh left Em’s mouth. She liked this teasing, easygoing Joe and wondered what she needed to do to keep him this way, not that she didn’t like it when he was all growly. He gave her tingles when he started his domineering attitude.

She followed Joe down the hall, but had to slow down because the cuts in her thighs throbbed. Her pain pills must be wearing off. She didn’t want to take another one for fear of being groggy while listening to David grill Stewart.

“You doing okay?” Joe slowed down. “I’m sorry; I didn’t mean to take off so fast.”

“Stop! Just stop.” Em blew a strand of hair out of her face and looked at Joe.

*Shit.*

Joe stood in front of her with his hands in the pockets of his jeans.

“What’s wrong, Em?”

“I’m sorry.” She bowed her head. “I don’t know what’s wrong with me.”

Joe’s fingers rested under her chin and brought her gaze to his. “It’s okay to be frustrated and angry.”

“I know, but I don’t want you to baby me. Treat me as if none of this happened. That is what I want. No, what I need.”

“Well if I do what I really want to right now, we might end up in jail.”

He leered at her and wiggled his eyebrows. Em laughed.

“We can’t have that.”

Joe held out his hand, Em took it and laced their fingers together. He slowed his pace so they stayed side by side. When they finally reached his car, she sighed in relief. The rest of the day loomed before her. She wanted it to be over so she could go back to Joe’s and relax. Em knew she should go home, but for now, Joe made her feel safe.

\* \* \* \*

Mag looked over at Emily. He tried not to, but he worried about her. It wouldn’t be easy to see Stewart again. Closure was a good idea, in theory. Beating the shit out of him would be more therapeutic, but he didn’t think her partner would let her do that. Plus, it could ruin the case they had against the man.

*When did I get so fucking sensible?*

His hand went to his chest and he rubbed it in small circles. He felt tight and the unfamiliar ache was back. He looked back at Emily and it eased a little.

*Is this love? What the fuck do I know about love?*

Emily caught him looking at her and he saw the questions in her eyes. She reached for his hand and entangled their fingers.

It didn’t take long for them to pull up to the base. He parked by the brig and walked around to help Emily out of the car.

He sighed when she reached for his hand again.

*Man, she has you whipped.*

Who would have thought that a girl could bring down the great Magnus? She'd wormed her way right into his heart. It was easy to fight when he thought she was a Marine under his command and a total fuck-up. Now he knew the truth and he liked what he saw. Mag thought about pulling away, but she looked at him with a small smile and he couldn't bring himself to do it.

*Yep, I'm whipped.*

They entered the building and it didn't take long before they were greeted by a preppie looking man in khaki's and a polo shirt. Emily pulled away from him and hugged the stranger. He had to control the growl he wanted to release at seeing the man touch his woman.

Emily glanced back over at him and frowned. He tried to put a smile on his face. She tugged the man forward.

"Joe, this is my partner. David McMichael. David this is Colonel Joe "Magnus" Rivers."

Mag put his hand out, "McMichael," He said with a nod in the man's direction. "You can call me Mag or Colonel. Not too many people call me Joe."

He caught Emily's look and winked at her. She blushed and looked away. Mag pulled her away from her partner and tucked her under his arm. McMichael grinned at him and turned around.

"If you two will follow me I'll take you to the interrogation rooms. We have General Potter in one room and Robert Clagg aka Kyle Stewart in another. You two made it just in time. We're going to start with Clagg. I think he'll be easier to flip than Potter. Potter has more to lose."

"I hate that I can't be in there. This is my case, damnit!"

"You're the most important part of this case. Thanks to you, Clagg is going down. Now we have to make sure he doesn't go alone." McMichael went to comfort Emily and Mag frowned.

He needed to get his ass under control. This was about Emily, not him.

"Em, why don't we go in now so they can get started? You ready?"

She dragged air into her lungs and he admired the way she got control of herself. She nodded at him and he guided her into the room that contained a couple chairs and some recording equipment.

Emily walked up to the glass and Mag followed. Stewart wasn't in there yet. He took her hand in his to show his support. She looked over at him and tried to smile.

"Joe, could you do something for me?"

He nodded.

"Please hold me. Just for a second. I—I'm a little scared."

"Oh, babe."

He pulled her into his arms. She nuzzled into his neck and he closed his eyes. Emily's arms went around his waist and she laid her head on his chest. Mag's hands were loosely wrapped around her. He moved them up to cup her face so he could look into her eyes. He leaned in and brushed his lips against hers, then put his forehead on hers.

"Fuck, babe. The things you do to me. I'm here. We can leave whenever you want. They really only need your statement today."

"I have to see this through, Joe. I would never forgive myself if he got off on something because of me."



The door to the interrogation room opened and both he and Emily turned to see Stewart walk in. Emily shuddered in his arms causing him to pull her tighter against him. He whispered into her ear, "He can't get you here. You're safe and if he comes near you again, I'll kill him with my bare hands. Do you believe me?" She nodded, "I hate being this scared, but I do believe you. Thank you." Mag smiled at the soft kiss Emily placed on his chest. *Fuck me. I do love her. Now what?*

\* \* \* \*

Emily wanted to crawl up the walls. She concentrated on Joe's arms wrapped around her that kept her grounded. She would have been a mess without him here. They listened as David interviewed Stewart.

Stewart—she had a hard time thinking of him as Clagg or Robert—didn't say much. David did most of the talking.

"Listen, Clagg, I've got General Potter in the next room. If you don't want him to roll on you, I suggest you deal. You're going away for a long time for what you did to Agent Patterson. We're willing to work with you a little on that if you give up your uncle and General Potter. If not, we'll throw away the key and get the General to roll on your uncle. Then you can be one big happy family."

David looked like he was getting fed up with the silent treatment. The minute he mentioned Emily, Clagg perked up. She noticed the change in his posture right away and braced herself for what he might say.

"Emily?" Stewart looked around. "Is she here? I want her back." He growled and pushed himself over the table toward David.

Emily stumbled away from the window. She could hear Joe's soothing voice wash over her, but she gasped for breath in her panic.

"Sit the fuck down before I forget the deal and throw your ass back in your cell." David held out a hand as a couple MP's rushed into the room, "He's under control now. Aren't you, Clagg?"

She turned away from the viewing area and missed what they said next. Emily needed to get her control back. This ass hat wasn't going to bring her down. She was stronger than him.

Joe's hand brushed her arm and she sighed. "I'll be okay now. He just startled me."

"He's lucky I'm not in there. That fucker is going down, Em."

"He can't hurt me anymore. I'm ready to leave. I'll call David later and let him fill me in. I'll give my report to him then too."

Joe gave her a nod and escorted her out of the room. They stopped at outside the door and got the attention of the MP's.

"Will you tell Agent McMichael I'll call him later?"

"Yes, ma'am."

They walked out of the brig and headed for Joe's car.

"Where to now?" Joe asked.

Emily really wanted to go back to Joe's house, but she didn't want to assume anything.

"I should probably have you take me home. I haven't been back in a while."

"Anything pressing you need? I'd like, that is ... well, fuck."

She gave a little laugh. She'd never seen Joe at loss for words before.

"What did you have in mind?" She asked, curious as to what had him flustered.

"Fuck. This is hard for me, but I don't want you to leave yet, okay?"

"I'm safe now and my assignment is over. You don't have to protect me."

"Goddamn it! This isn't about protecting you."

"It isn't?"

They were still in the car, Joe hadn't even started it. He turned to face her and she could see the struggle taking place in his eyes.

"I want more. With you that is. Fuck. I'm not saying this right."

Emily placed a hand on his thigh.

"Just say it."

"I don't want you to leave. I want you to stay with me."

"For how long?"

He gave her a puzzled look. "What do you mean?"

"Well, I don't know. I ask to go home and you want me to stay with you. I'm just wondering, how long?"

"I—"

She laughed, "Stop worrying. I know you aren't asking me to move in with you. It's too soon and we have a lot more to learn about each other. I just need to know if I should have you take me home to get a few things or if stuff from the base will work."

He released a breath that Emily didn't realize he'd been holding. She slid closer to him and rested her head on his shoulder.

"I want that too."

She raised her head, "Want what?"

"You to move in. Wait," He held up a hand before she could talk. "I'm not saying right now but I want you to know I'm serious. About us."

Emily bit her lip. He reached up and soothed her mouth with his thumb. She closed her eyes and licked the pad of his thumb.

"Thank God." She whispered.

"What was that?" They still sat there in the parking lot.

She looked down at her hands before she answered, "I want more too. I just didn't want to assume anything. But maybe we should slow down, just a little. We've only been on one date and that didn't end so well."

Her eyes clouded for a moment as she flashed back to Joe being shot. Was that just the other day? They were a mess. She looked over to see Joe had his head rested on the steering wheel.

"We're a pair, aren't we? Shit, Emily, all I can think about is you. It's seriously fucking with my head. I don't want to fuck this up, but it's all new for me. I've never been in a relationship that lasted more than a month. And listen to me rambling now. I sound like a goddamn pussy."

"Joe, I—"

They both jumped at the knock on the window. Emily looked up to see David standing there, grinning like a loon. Joe rolled down his window.

"What's up, David?" Emily was the first to speak.

"I broke him. Clagg is singing like a bird. We sent a couple men to pick up his uncle. We're going to give Potter a deal and General Clagg is going down. From what we've

been told, he is the mastermind behind the sex ring. His idea, his men. We don't have him for Jackson's murder yet, but it's only a matter of time. Em, I'll need your statement to make everything official and we'll have this wrapped up. The boss man said to take a couple weeks. So let's go get this over with so you can start your vacation."

Emily looked at Joe and swallowed. "Let's do this."

She just wanted to be done with Stewart and this assignment. Joe reached for her hand and gave it a squeeze. Emily was also ready to go home with Joe. It had been a long day already and his bed was starting to look more and more inviting.

\* \* \* \*

Three hours later, Mag and Emily made it back to his house. He didn't think McMichael would ever let them leave. The one bright light in the day happened when the MP's hauled in General Clagg. The case was full speed ahead and he wanted to get Emily's mind off all the bad shit. He had a plan.

They'd stopped at the grocery store on the way home and he snuck a couple goodies into the bag. He couldn't wait to share.

"Em, why don't you go upstairs and relax in a nice bath. I'll put this stuff away and be up soon."

"Will you join me?"

"Maybe after."

She looked puzzled, "After what?"

"It's a surprise, now get your ass upstairs and relax."

She gave him a salute. "Yes, sir!" he turned and rushed up the stairs.

Rummaging around in the kitchen, he put the groceries away, but left out the chocolate ice cream. He pulled out two spoons and grabbed the ice cream on the way up to his bedroom. Mag found himself whistling a tune on the way up. He stopped and tried to remember a time when he'd been this happy and he couldn't think of one. What was it about this woman that made things seem not so bad? He really couldn't figure it out and right now he had more important things to worry about.

"Joe?"

"Be right there."

He continued up the stairs and put the ice cream on the nightstand. He'd have to hurry her along so it didn't melt too much.

Mag paused in the doorway. Steam rose from the bath. Emily had her head resting on the back of the tub with her eyes closed, her skin all rosy from the heat. He groaned when she opened her eye and looked his way. His cock stood at attention.

"Wash my back?" She held out a wash rag and leaned forward, her breasts bobbing in the water.

He gulped and made his way to the tub.

"Oh, your hands are cold," she said when he touched her shoulder

"Sorry." He put the washrag he held in the water to help warm them up.

She sighed when he rubbed the cloth in small circles around her back. She raised her legs and hugged her knees while he continued to bath her. His dick throbbed behind his zipper and wanted out. Mag didn't know how much longer he could touch her and not stroke himself.

While he washed her back he thought about the days and nights to come. He could

get used to this—her, here ever night—in his home, being able to touch her when he wanted.

Mag stood up and grabbed a towel from the rack behind the shower.

“You ready for a treat?”

She looked up at him and nodded. Mag reached down and helped her stand up, putting the towel around her. He lifted her out of the tub and carried her to the bed. After drying her off, he threw the towel to the floor and undressed. His cock sprang from his pants, hard and wanting. Mag felt her gaze on him so he took his time sliding his jeans down his legs. Once he kicked them aside he stroked his dick. She moaned and he couldn’t wait to feel her any longer. He rushed out of his shirt and joined her on the bed. He kissed her feet, her calves, her thighs and skipped to her stomach, working his way up to her lips. He needed a small taste before he started his fun.

“You said something about a treat?” She whispered against his lips.

He pulled back to lean over and get the ice cream. He only took one of the spoons and left the container on the nightstand. Mag took a spoonful and rubbed it against her lips until she opened. He slid the bite into her mouth; she closed her eyes and moaned around the spoon. He slowly pulled the spoon from her mouth allowing the cold substance to drip down her neck. He wanted a taste and took it, drinking from her lips, and then licking his way down her body to catch the ice cream.

“Cold.” She whispered, but didn’t ask him to stop; instead she grasped his hair and held him to her.

“I guess this is more my treat than yours.” He took another spoonful of ice cream. This time he trailed the spoon down her chest. Letting it flow down to her belly button.

“It feels like a treat to me.” She whispered as he smoothed his tongue down her body, lapping up every drop.

Emily started to wriggle on the bed, her hips bucking against his. Mag put the spoon aside and used his finger to scoop up a little more ice cream. He held it to Emily’s lips. She opened her mouth and ran her tongue up and down his finger before sucking it into her mouth. Her cheeks hollowed out as she cleaned his fingers. When she let his finger pop from the warm haven of her mouth, he took her lips in a kiss.

“I don’t know what’s sweeter, you or the ice cream.” He nibbled on her mouth.

She giggled and he delighted in the sound. He even grinned at her next words.

“My turn.”

Her voice husky, like sex personified. Emily dipped her finger in the ice cream and held it so Mag could take a bite only to pull it away at the last minute. She ran her cold finger around his nipple. He shuddered, both from her touch and the cold. Mag gasped as she bit his nipple and sighed when she soothed it with her mouth.

“Fuck, Em, that feels good.”

A moan slipped from his lips as she kissed her way down his body. She reached his cock and paused. Emily looked at him with a twinkle in her gaze. He started to question her when she reached over for the ice cream.

“Shit, that’s cold,” he hissed as she coated his cock.

“Here, let me warm you up.”

Emily guided his dick to her mouth and licked the ice cream off. She took her time and swirled her tongue up and down his cock before she took all of him in her mouth. His hips bucked off the bed. She soothed them with her hands.

Mag growled and pulled her off him, dragging her up his body. He flipped her over and watched her wince as he settled between her thighs.

“Fuck, I’m sorry, Em.”

“Just give me a second. It’s fine.” She took a few shallow breaths and spread her legs farther apart. “Kiss me, Joe.”

He didn’t keep her waiting. Mag brushed his lips over hers, holding himself up so he didn’t hurt her stomach. She pulled him down and deepened the kiss. He needed to be inside her. He didn’t think he could wait.

“Make love to me, Joe,” she panted once the kiss broke.

Emily reached down and guided him to her entrance. He sighed as he filled her.

“Home,” he whispered.

This moment nothing mattered. Emily was his whole world. He moved, slow and easy. Mag wanted this to last. He needed to remember these moments in time when he felt whole for the first time in his life. This is what had been missing and he didn’t even know it.

Mag rested his forehead against Emily’s and stared into her eyes. She gazed back and he loved the look of awe on her face. He couldn’t look away.

“Come for me, baby.” He whispered.

Emily closed her eyes and he shook his head against hers.

“No Em, keep them open. Look at me; let me see your eyes. Please.” He whispered the last word.

She moaned and opened them.

He continued his slow assault until he couldn’t any longer. Mag’s pace sped up and Emily’s legs wrapped around his waist and squeezed tight.

“Joe, yes ... please ... yes.”

She moved with him, but never closed her eyes. Emily bit her lip and he knew she was close. She started whimpering.

“Emily ... Emily.” He chanted her name, over and over.

“Joe!” she sighed, her face flush with her orgasm.

He continued to thrust, riding out her orgasm until his roared through him. He rolled over so Emily was beside him.

A warmth Mag had never experienced before raced over his body.

“Move in with me,” slipped out before he could stop it.

“What—”

“I know this is sudden. Fuck, I don’t know what I’m doing, but I do know I can’t lose you.”

“It’s too—”

“I know it’s too soon. I know I’ll fuck up. I also know we still need to get to know each other, but we can do that here. I sound like a sissy man, but I want to come home to you at night, damn it. I want you here, in my life, for good.”

“Joe—”

“Shit, I ... damn it—”

Emily put her hands over his mouth.

“My turn.” She said.

Mag nodded so she would continue.

“It is too soon,” she started.

Mag shook his head and tried to talk.

“Let me finish!” she sounded exasperated

He nodded again.

“I know we’ll both mess up a time or two, but I don’t want to leave you either. I don’t want to lose you ever.”

He grinned against her hands and she dropped them. Mag pulled her close for a kiss.

“Thank God.” He whispered and hugged her to him.

“You might be saying that now, but wait until you meet my dad.”

“Let’s not think about that right now.” He shuddered.

She laughed and he smiled.

“I love you,” he whispered.

Right before sleep claimed him, Mag thought he heard a whisper back.

“I love you too.”

A smile graced his face as visions of the two of them filled his dreams.

## Epilogue

*“The Marines I have seen around the world have the cleanest bodies, the filthiest minds, the highest morale, and the lowest morals of any group of animals I have ever seen. Thank God for the United States Marine Corps!”*  
—Eleanor Roosevelt

### Nine Months later

“It’s time to push. One, two, three ... PUSH!” Mag shouted.

“I can’t, I—” Emily panted.

“I know you can do it, babe. Just try.”

“Who gets stuck in the bathroom on her wedding day?” She said with a cry as she tried to push the door yet again.

Mag held in his laughter knowing it wouldn’t be appreciated.

A hand gripped his shoulder and he turned to see Ben Davies and Fin O’Malley standing behind him.

“What going on up here? Your guests are starting to worry.” Ben asked.

“The damn door is stuck and it won’t fuckin’ budge.”

“Have you tried the handle?” Fin asked.

“Yes, smartass, we tried the handle. I think the heat made it swell.”

Fin held his hands up, “Don’t bite my head off, man.” He laughed.

“Just help me with it.”

“Hon, Ben and Fin are out here. We’re going to pull, you push. We should have it open in no time.”

Each man grasped a part of the handle.

“On three. One, two—”

“Wait!” Ben said. “Do we pull on three or after three?”

Mag shook his head. “I say three and then we pull. Got it? Dumbass.” He muttered the last words.

“I heard that, Mag. I should just go back—”

“Just pull the damn door. Ready? One, two, three, pull.”

The door opened and out tumbled the most beautiful sight Mag had ever seen. She was a vision in white and headed straight for them.

The four of them landed in a heap on the floor.

“What the fuck is going on up here!” a gruff voice echoed in the hallway.

“Sir!” Mag tried to scramble up, only causing him to fall on his ass. He liked Em’s dad, but the man scared the shit out of him.

“It’s nothing, Daddy. The bathroom door got stuck with me on the wrong side of it.”

“Well your guests are getting antsy waiting for some dance you two are supposed to do and the cake to be cut. Get a move on it, missy.”

“Yes, Daddy.” Emily sighed.

The group managed to get on their feet.

“Thanks, you two. I can always count on the Marines.” Emily winked at his friends.

“Hey, what about me!” Mag grumbled.

“You’re my Marine and I can always count on you.” She whispered.

Mag leaned over and captured her lips with his. The kiss started out as a thank you, but he couldn’t get enough. He never could.

“Ah Mag?” A voice said.

He sighed and pulled back.

“What.”

“Didn’t Emily’s old man say something about cake? Do you really want to have him come back up here?” Ben said with a chuckle.

“Goddamn it! You two make yourselves useful and tell them we’ll be right down.”

Mag closed his eyes and pulled Emily back into his arms with a sigh. The other two men laughed as they left the hallway.

“When can we leave, Mrs. Rivers?”

“We still have a few things to do before we leave.” She raised a hand and caressed his face. “What’s the hurry, big guy? You’re stuck with me now, I’m not going anywhere.”

“I knew you were trouble the first day I met you.”

“You did not. You wanted to jump my bones. Admit it!”

“I will not. You were a Marine under my command, even if you do have a nice ass in BDUs. Of course, I really wanted to throttle you for being such a fuck-up.”

“I saved your ass, didn’t I?”

“Right back at you, babe.”

They shared a grin remembering their first months together.

“Emily Marie Patterson, get your ass out here!”

“My dad is summoning us. I guess we’d better get out there.”

He gave her a kiss and took her hand, leading her to the ballroom where their family and friends waited for them.

It hadn’t been all smooth sailing the past nine months. The trial had been rough on both of them, but Emily stood strong. He was proud of his wife. Stewart would be away for a long time and he would keep her safe when the madman came up for parole. Mag knew Emily could take care of herself and her job was just as dangerous as his, but coming home to her meant everything.

*Wife.*

Mag liked the way it sounded. He gave her hand a squeeze as they joined the others.

The DJ made an announcement as they walked in.

“Here’s the happy couple. Join me in welcoming Colonel and Mrs. Rivers.”

There was clapping and the DJ continued.

“We’ll start the night off with their first dance as a married couple.”

The song Emily picked, *Bless the Broken Road* by Rascal Flatts, drifted over the ballroom. He held her tight and they swayed to the music.

“Have I told you how handsome you look in your dress uniform?” she nuzzled his neck.

“Not in the last few minutes. You look like a princess. I love you, Mrs. Rivers.”

“I love you, Colonel Rivers.”

He kissed her. He couldn’t get enough of her taste. A couple catcalls and whistles had him moving back again.



“Are you sure we can’t leave yet?”

“Where’s my big bad Marine?”

“He’s right here and ready to take his wife home and fuck her brains out.”

He loved watching her face flush when he talked dirty to her.

She shook her head right before she laid it on his chest.

Before he knew it, the song was over and he had to let her go. He escorted her back to their table so the waiters would start serving the guests. Ben and Fin sat at the head table grinning at him. He knew dinner wouldn’t be dull with those two around.

“So old man, how does it feel to be whipped?”

“Oh Benny boy, you have no idea. Just you wait.”

He noticed Ben look over into the crowd. He followed his gaze to a pretty little redhead in a green dress. He did a double-take when he saw it was Fin’s sister, Maribeth.

“Well then, maybe you do know.”

Ben whipped his head around and looked between him and Fin before looking back at his plate. Mag just slapped Ben’s back and chuckled. He wanted to be there when Ben told Fin he was hot for Maribeth. He looked over at Fin. Then again, maybe not.

“What’s so funny, Joe?” Emily asked.

“I’m just very happy today.” He brushed his lips over hers. “I don’t know about you, but I’m hungry.”

\* \* \* \*

Emily looked over at Joe and couldn’t believe how lucky she was. She’d wanted a fairytale wedding and he’d given it to her, horse-drawn carriage and all.

The cake looked so good, but it was time to cut it. Then they could do the bouquet and garter toss and get out of here. She wanted to be naked and in Joe’s arms as soon as possible. She knew he liked to tease her with his blunt talk, but she loved every minute she had with her Marine.

It was nice to see Gun and Moore here. She still had a hard time using their first names. The men had just gotten back from a training mission last week; they said they were breaking in a new man. Hopefully, he did a better job than she did. Emily laughed at herself. Of course, she’d gone right back to work after her incident. They’d put her on desk duty and she’d just been cleared to go back into the field. She still needed to tell Joe, but she thought she’d wait until after the honeymoon, or maybe during.

She’d never been happier and she couldn’t stop grinning. She knew she looked like a fool, but she didn’t care.

Joe handed her the knife for the cake and the two of them sliced a tiny piece to feed to each other. She placed her piece up to Joe’s lips. The crowd chanted for them to smash it, but she didn’t want to. Emily slipped the cake past Joe’s lips and nibbled on the slice he held for her before sucking his fingers into her mouth, her cheeks hallowed out as she sucked and licked his fingers clean.

He leaned down to whisper in her ear, “You’ll pay for that.”

Emily shivered and it was her turn to ask, “Can we leave now?”

“Didn’t you tell me we had a couple other things to do?”

“Let’s finish them now. I want to start our honeymoon and if we don’t leave soon, I’m taking you back to the bathroom and sealing us in.”

“No way am I getting caught up there with your father still here. Not gonna happen,

sweet cheeks.”

“Spoilsport.”

“Have you met your father?”

She raised her eyebrow at him, “You’re scared of my dad?”

“You know it. He’s one touch Marine. No way am I crossing him. Why did you have to be a daddy’s girl?”

“Let’s get this over with so you can take me home.”

“Done.” He said.

Joe left her for a minute and she watched him walk over to the DJ. God she loved that man. If someone had told her nine months ago that she would be married she would’ve laughed. She figured Joe felt the same way.

“All right, if I could get the single ladies to the floor please. It’s time for the bouquet toss.”

Emily turned her back on the audience and the DJ started a countdown. She tossed it over her shoulder and turned to see who caught it. It was a pretty woman with red hair and a green dress. Even though Joe had introduced them earlier, she wasn’t sure who the woman was. She looked over to Joe and he was laughing. He came her way and she tilted her head, trying to figure out what had him laughing.

“What’s so funny?”

“The woman who caught the flowers? She’s Fin’s twin sister. Take a look at Ben over there.”

She looked and saw the man gazing at the woman with a longing she hadn’t seen in a while.

“Well, what do you know?”

“Fin is going to kill him when he finds out Ben has the hots for his sister.”

“They’re both your friends. Should you really be laughing?”

“Hell yes! What else are friends for?”

The DJ made his next announcement, “All right, single men, it’s your turn.”

Joe turned and found a chair for her to sit down on. Emily placed her foot on his thigh and he reached up under her dress and caressed her thigh, letting his fingers wonder.

“Is this you getting me back?” She whispered to him.

“Not yet.” He winked at her.

Joe tossed the garter and it was her turn to laugh as the men tried *not* to catch it. She started laughing harder when it ended up in Ben’s pocket.

“What?”

“Um ... Ben caught the garter.”

“Holy shit!” Joe laughed. “They have to dance now, don’t they?”

“Yes they do, but do you really want to wait around for it?”

“Fuck no. Let’s go home, Mrs. Rivers.”

“There is no other place I’d rather be, Colonel Rivers.”

They walked hand and hand toward the door. Her dad stopped them on the way out and whispered something in Joe’s ear. His faced paled and she looked over at her dad. Her father pulled her in a tight hug.

“I love you, baby girl. Make sure that Marine treats you right. Are you happy?”

“Over the moon, Daddy.”

“Good to hear.”

She kissed his cheek and left the building.

“What did my dad say to you, Joe?”

“He told me if I fucked up he’d have my balls in a jar so fast, my dick wouldn’t have a chance to miss them. Whatever the fuck that means, but you’d better believe I’m not crossing that man.”

“Guess that means you’d better keep me happy.” She pinched his butt and ran for the car. He chased after her and bumped into her back when she stopped at the car.

Attached to the bumper were cans, condoms and something she couldn’t name with ‘Just Married’ spelled out using more condoms.

“Well then.” She said before getting into the passenger side. “I guess married life with you will never be dull.”

“You’d better believe it, babe, and you’re stuck with me now. You signed on the dotted line.”

“Don’t worry; you’re stuck with me too. Now take me home and ... what did you say earlier ... oh ... fuck my brains out, Colonel Rivers.”

“Anything to make you happy, Mrs. Rivers.”

## **The End**

### **About the Author:**

Jambrea wanted to be the youngest romance author published, but life got in the way. She put aside writing and went to college briefly, then enlisted in the Air Force. After serving she returned home to Indiana and started a family. A few years later she discovered yahoo groups and book reviews. She hasn’t turned back since. Reviewing books invoked her muse and called her back to writing.

Jambrea lives in Indiana where she reads and plays with her son when not writing. She is addicted to the internet and you can often find her lurking there. She loves reader feedback so email her any time. [Jambrea@jambrea.com](mailto:Jambrea@jambrea.com)

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