

ELLORA'S CAVE *Moderne*



Research Required
AMBER SKYZE

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Amber Skyze

Ethan's on the run from the mob. He's in for a surprise when he knocks on the door of his sister's neighbor. The last thing he needs is a distraction like Bailey. She's sexy and sassy and dressed in skimpy shorts—and he wants to take her where she stands.

Sex with a stranger? Bailey would never think of it. Ethan's no stranger though, he's her friend Jenna's brother, so that makes *him* a friend too, right? Sex in the kitchen, sex in the bedroom, sex on the couch, it doesn't matter. Bailey can't get enough of this hot-blooded stranger.

Will Ethan's past catch up to him and ruin any hopes for their future?

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Research Required

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RESEARCH REQUIRED

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Dedication

To Connor, who came into my life in a rush and only stayed for a brief time. In a short time you impacted a lot of lives. You brought hope and renewed families who were at odds with each other. You made me realize how short life can be and to live like there's no tomorrow – for there may not be. I'll treasure the memories forever.

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The author acknowledges the trademarked status and trademark owners of the following wordmarks mentioned in this work of fiction:

Jell-O: Kraft Foods Holdings, Inc.

New York Times: The New York Times Company

Chapter One

"Shit!" Bailey screamed to her empty living room. "I'm never going to get this article in on time." She stared down at the opened email about her interviewee. His publicist explained that an emergency had come up and he wasn't going to be able to answer her questions after all. He was very sorry.

"Yeah, I bet he is," she grumbled.

Bailey removed the pencil from her unruly blonde hair, causing it to tumble around her shoulders. She tucked a strand behind her ear to keep it from falling in front of her face.

On the pad of paper sitting on the couch next to her she jotted down some excuses she could give her editor to convince her she needed an extension on the deadline.

Dog died.

In a horrible car accident.

Computer crashed.

None of the things were good enough reasons to give her editor.

"Fuck! I'm screwed." She stuck the pencil in her mouth and bit back the string of obscenities she knew were brewing.

Focusing on the computer, she logged into her favorite database website looking for a last-minute replacement for her interview. She had to have another guy's perspective for this article. After all it was a relationship article for women from the male's point of view. She had two resources, but her editor insisted on three minimum.

Just as she was updating what she was looking for the doorbell rang. As if on cue her stomach growled.

"Finally the pizza's here."

She placed her laptop on the coffee table, grabbed the twenty lying there and padded her bare feet over to the door.

"I'm starved," she said as she swung the front door open.

She came face-to-face with a complete stranger.

"You can have me!" the ultra-sexy guy standing on her doorstep said.

She stood there, her mouth hanging open.

"You're not Kyle." But damn he was hot. H-O-T hot. Her nipples hardened under her t-shirt. She wasn't wearing a bra, because she wasn't expecting company. Only Kyle and he didn't look at her in that I-want-to-tear-off-all-your-clothes-and-fuck-you way. She felt the juices from her pussy pooling at her opening. It'd been way too long since she'd had sex. That had to be the reason her body was reacting this way.

"No, but I sure wish I was. Who is this lucky guy Kyle and how do I get rid of him so I can replace him?"

Bailey laughed, trying to ease the nervousness she felt being so close to this gorgeous creature.

"Can I help you?" she asked.

"I'm looking for Jenna King. She was expecting me over an hour ago but she's still not home. Do you happen to know where she might be?"

"Sorry. Haven't heard from her." Lucky Jenna. She'd found herself a guy Bailey wouldn't mind having a one-night stand with. A booty call to end all booty calls. His arm muscles flexed as he rested his long, strong arm against the doorframe. Bailey yearned to know what it would feel like having his body hovering over hers, making her drip with sweat as he...

"Do you have a number where I could reach her? I tried her cell but she isn't answering."

Bailey tried to focus on what he was saying. She had to stop this daydreaming.

"Like I said before I don't know where she is. Maybe you should come back later." She attempted to close the door, but he stuck his foot in, blocking her.

"I wasn't finished."

Bailey wondered if she should be afraid of him, but that sparkle in his baby blue eyes told her she had nothing to fear.

"What's your name?" she demanded.

"Ethan." He smiled, revealing dimples.

Bailey melted under his intense smile.

"I'm sorry, Ethan. I don't know who you are or what your business with Jenna is, but I'm not going to give out any information about her to some stranger. For all I know you could be some rapist or something." In fact hadn't she just read somewhere there was a guy going around posing as a cable guy raping innocent woman. Fear knotted in the pit of her stomach. "I have to go."

She kicked his foot, hoping he'd move it, but it didn't budge.

"I'm Jenna's brother. I'm not going to rape anyone." He reached behind him and Bailey screamed.

"Whoa! What are you screaming for?" He pulled out his wallet.

"I thought you — I..." What could she say? She thought he might be reaching for a gun or a knife to hurt her with?

"Look," he said, removing his driver's license.

She read his name. Ethan King. Same last name as Jenna.

"Okay, so you aren't a murderer, but if Jenna was expecting you why didn't she leave you a key or something?"

"I don't know. I'm worried because it's not like her to be late."

"Ha! You don't know your sister too well."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Jenna will be late to her own funeral. She can't seem to arrive on time for anything."

"Are we still talking about the same Jenna? Because my sister has been punctual since the day she was born. Our mother jokes about how she even came on her due date and not a minute late."

Bailey couldn't help but laugh. He was funny and cute and oh-so-sexy.

Just then Kyle decided to make his arrival.

"Got your pizza, Bailey. Sausage and peppers on one side, pepperoni on the other."

She could see Ethan looking at her quizzically.

"What? I couldn't decide what I wanted, so I ordered both."

"Options. I love options."

That twinkle in his eye didn't go undetected. He was flirting with her.

"Thanks, Kyle." She handed him the twenty. "Keep the change."

"Enjoy the pizza." He bounced away, happy with his tip.

"I'm going to eat my pizza before it gets cold. So if you'll excuse me."

"Look, before you go. I've traveled twenty-three hours in my cramped little car to get here. I've been outside Jenna's door for another hour and I could use a soft chair to sit on." His stomach growled.

She was under a tight deadline. She didn't have time to make small talk with this stranger or share pizza. She had to dive back into her article while she ate. Then a thought hit her.

"I'll feed you if you'll answer a few questions for me. I'm working on an article for women. What men find appealing and what they don't like."

"I'm your go-to guy. I have a lot of experience in that field."

Bailey hesitated. "Are you a player?" Because the last thing she needed was a player's advice for her article.

His stomach growled again.

"Oh just come in," she relented. She couldn't leave Jenna's brother on the doorstep waiting for her to come home, but if he was a player then he wouldn't work for the article. She needed someone sincere. Someone honest.

She felt his eyes on her as she walked to the coffee table. Her skimpy shorts rode up her ass, revealing she wore no panties. He must love the view she was giving him, no matter how unintentional.

"Can I offer you a beer or soda or something?" She placed the pizza on the table and turned, practically bumping into his hard chest.

He was close. Dangerously close. If Bailey moved her head forward just a hair their lips would touch and she could find out what those sexy lips tasted like.

As if reading her mind he inched closer, reaching out to graze her lips.

Bailey licked the spot where his lips had met hers. She stood there mesmerized. She wanted more. She needed more. Her pussy lips swelled at the mere touch of his lips. She felt the electricity of his touch run through her down to the tip of her big toe.

"Soda," he whispered.

She shook away the thoughts of having Ethan's lips touching every inch of her body.

"Right," she said and walked to the kitchen to retrieve his soda.

She rested her hands on the counter and took a deep breath. She had to stop her heart from pounding so quickly. She wondered if he could hear the thumping when he stood a breath away.

"Okay," she muttered. "He's just a guy. Maybe a gorgeous guy, but a guy after all."

She'd been around many men before, but none evoked the reactions her body was displaying since she opened her door and found Ethan standing there. Never had a guy caused her pussy to drip with excitement without some sort of foreplay involved.

"Are you okay?"

Bailey jumped, startled. Her hand covered her chest as she tried to catch her breath.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to frighten you."

She turned on him.

"What were you thinking sneaking up on me like that?"

"I wasn't sneaking. I was talking. You obviously weren't paying attention. What had you in such deep concentration?" He stepped closer, closing the gap between them.

"Nothing," she stammered as her back pressed against the counter.

His finger reached out and twirled a strand of her hair.

"Were you thinking about how it felt when my lips touched yours?" He bent and placed a soft kiss on her shoulder. "Or how it would feel if I kissed you here?"

Again his lips touched her. He moved up her shoulder to her neck. Heat invaded her body. She bent her neck, allowing him access. He trailed farther up until he reached her ear.

"You are one sexy woman, Bailey. I could feast on this body all night long. Watch as you quivered under me."

A chill passed through her body. She was already quivering from his touch.

His hand slid under her shirt and found her nipple.

She moaned.

Lifting her shirt with his other hand, he bent, taking her hardened nipple in his mouth.

"Yes," she whispered.

His tongue swirled around.

She placed both hands on the counter, trying to steady her shaky legs. God it'd been too long since a guy made her feel so good. She wanted him inside her. She wanted to feel his cock pulsing inside her pussy.

Alarm bells went off in her head. How had he known her name?

"Fuck," she cursed. She pushed him away.

"What's wrong?" He looked stunned by her sudden rejection.

"How'd you know my name? I never told you it."

"The pizza guy called you Bailey. I assumed that's your name."

She paced around the kitchen table. It made sense. Kyle probably had called her by her name. Ethan was a distraction she couldn't afford right now, not if she wanted to get this article off in time.

"Seriously, he called you Bailey, when he said he had your pizza." He moved to where she stood and reached out to touch her arm.

"I know," she said, moving away.

"So then what's the issue?" He was behind her again.

"I'm on deadline and you're a distraction I don't need."

"That's cool. I'll just wait outside for Jenna." He turned to leave.

"Wait. I can't have you waiting outside. Especially since you've been driving all day long. You can stay. Have some pizza with me and answer a few questions."

"Sounds like a plan."

And with any luck Jenna will be home by then.

The last thing she needed was to sleep with her friend's brother.

Bailey had sworn off men after her last relationship, with diabolical Trevor. He was sleeping with her and half the apartment complex. Luckily for her Jenna wasn't one of the women. Their friendship had stayed intact through the breakup.

Jenna had warned her of her suspicions, but Bailey ignored her. She thought she was crazy. As it turned out Bailey was the crazy one. Crazy for believing Trevor could be faithful to one woman.

She should have suspected something was wrong the way the women always needed him to help them with something. Whether it was a leaking faucet or a clogged toilet. It wasn't like he was the building's paid maintenance man. Bailey considered herself one of the lucky ones not to have any plumbing issues. The joke was on her. The

only thing clogged was her brain for believing they were having trouble with their plumbing. There were no issues. What they were having was sex, with her boyfriend. Once she found out she kicked him to the curb. He didn't say in Bolton Landing long. She had the last laugh, though, because the women weren't ready to take him in on a full-time basis. Having been aware of his cheating ways, they didn't want him. He was only good for sex.

Bailey was sure he was now living with some unsuspecting fool who was being treated the same way. After that incident Bailey swore she wouldn't get involved. That was almost nine months ago and the very last time she'd had sex.

She found herself second-guessing her decision to wait any longer with Ethan standing in her kitchen looking hotter than her pepperoni pizza. She wanted to have a piece of him.

And another.

And another.

Ethan watched the way she looked at him, as if she could devour him at any second. She was one sexy woman and the feeling was mutual. He wanted her. His cock rose to the occasion with the mere thought of being nestled inside that hot cunt of hers.

He had to clear his head. He couldn't take advantage of his sister's neighbor. Not if he was going to be staying across the way for any length of time. He didn't want this cutie getting any ideas of something permanent. Ethan didn't do permanent. Not even his living arrangements. He couldn't remember the last time he stayed put for longer than a few months. He had hoped Florida was his chance, but that never happened. He'd had to get out of there before something terrible happened to him. He thought about sticking around New York long enough to get what he needed and head west. His good buddy and former college roommate was living in LA and had offered him a couch to crash on if he needed one. He needed a couch all right and soon. Part of him wanted to stick around Bolton Landing. He wanted to build the relationship with his

sister. He wanted to have roots, but he wasn't sure his past wouldn't find him. Maybe he could make an exception for Bailey.

She was perfect, right down to her pink polished toenails. He wouldn't mind taking a nibble on those cute toes.

He groaned.

"Hungry?" she asked.

She batted those gorgeous brown eyes and he was a goner.

"Starved."

She reached into the cabinet and her cheek poked out of her shorts again, causing his shaft to press against his zipper. He had to keep his hands off her. Jenna would be pissed if she found out he'd slept with her neighbor. That was her one and only stipulation when she invited him to stay. No sleeping with the neighbors. Fuck it. Ethan wanted Bailey and he wanted her now!

Part of her hoped he'd take advantage of the view she knew she was displaying. He was a man after all, surely he couldn't resist taking advantage of her exposed ass.

As if reading her thoughts his finger eased her shorts aside and dipped into her juices.

He groaned.

"Oh so wet."

She stepped back on her heels, causing him to remove his finger. Although she felt empty she wanted to touch him. She wanted to feel his skin against hers.

She moved her hand to the front of his cargo shorts, rubbing her fingers over his bulge.

"Condom?" she cried, ready to explode as his finger inched its way back into her canal, deeper this time.

"Back pocket," he huffed, capturing her lips. Hungrily he devoured her mouth, his tongue seeking hers.

Bailey didn't wait for another invitation. She dug into his pocket in search of a condom. When she found what she was looking for she used both hands to open the foil package.

He yanked her shorts off with one swift tug. Gripping her hips, he lifted her onto the granite countertop.

She waited as he unbuttoned his shorts and watched as they fell into a heap at his feet. As his cock sprang free from his boxers she licked her lips and handed over the condom. Quickly, he sheathed his long, hard cock and with one swoop, slid it into her burning cunt.

She wrapped her legs around him. Her fingers threaded through his black, wavy hair.

"Is this what you wanted?"

"Yes," she cried. "Yes."

"Your pussy is so fucking wet. I want to feel it coming all over my cock."

She wanted that too. She wanted him deeper.

"Fuck me, Ethan. Fuck me hard."

His hands grabbed her ass and lifted her off the counter. He held her tight as he pumped into her over and over. She used the muscles in her legs to match his tempo. He felt so right inside her.

He lost his step but quickly recovered by leaning her against the refrigerator. Her back met with the cold stainless steel. The coolness mixed with the heat radiating off her body only made her desires stronger. She was going to climax. She felt the stirrings from the pit of her stomach.

"Ethan, I'm close."

He released one of her cheeks and reached for her nipple. Pebbling the nub between his fingers, he pinched it as he rocked inside her. It was exactly what she needed to push her over the edge. That last biting sensation to send her bursting into the most delightful orgasm.

"Yes!" she roared as her pussy clenched onto his cock, milking it for every last drop. Wildly, he pounded into her as he erupted into his own orgasm.

He continued pumping into her until he was spent. She loved the way his cock filled her as it pulsed its seed into the waiting condom.

She clung to him as they rode out the last of the climax. Her breasts heaved against his chest. He lifted her off his cock. She unraveled her legs and let them hit the floor.

Jell-O. Her legs felt like Jell-O. Luckily she had the refrigerator for support.

The small of her back hit the ice button, triggering cubes to come crashing out against her.

She yelped, and as she sprang away from the frozen cubes her foot landed on one, sending her slipping across the floor.

"Whoa," Ethan said as he grabbed her arms before she could fall flat on her back. He gathered her in his arms and she burst out into a fit of laughter.

"What's so funny?"

"I can see the headlines. *Killer cubes take out semi-naked writer.*"

"It does sound rather humorous, doesn't it?"

Bailey liked the way he chuckled at her attempt at humor. He had a nice smile and a cute little dimple in his left cheek.

"I should probably pick up the ice before it melts all over my floor." She pushed out of his strong arms and picked up the ice. One by one she threw the cubes into the sink.

Ethan bent over and gathered up the escaped cubes right alongside her. She threw the last of the cubes into the sink and picked up her shorts from the pile of clothes next to the counter.

"So do you still want a soda?" she asked, slipping a bare leg into her shorts.

"I'll take a beer if you have one."

"One beer coming up."

When she turned to hand him the beer he was dangerously close again. She could smell their sex on him. It made her want him again. This couldn't be happening. Her libido was already recharged. How could that be? Bailey Johnson didn't have sex more than once in a day. She was lucky if she climaxed. Orgasms sometimes eluded her, but not with Ethan. Ethan did it with no effort whatsoever. That scared her. She didn't need to know an orgasm could be a doorstep away.

"Hey listen. I was wondering. Could we keep what just happened between us?"

The beer she'd been handing him dropped down on the floor, causing a loud crashing noise. But it didn't break. It remained intact, saving her one more headache.

"Are you serious? And to think I was about to take out an ad in the fucking *New York Times*."

Shit! He'd pissed her off. He wasn't looking to get her upset. He just didn't want his sister to find out, because once she did he was history and right now he needed to be here.

"Look, I'm just saying, Jenna might not take too kindly to the idea of us sleeping together. I don't want to hide it, it's just for now I have to."

"No big deal. It was a onetime thing. It's not going to happen again, so no need in getting Jenna all worked up over nothing, right?" She brushed past him toward the living room.

"Pizza's getting cold," she called over her shoulder.

"And so is the temperature in here," he muttered. Great. Now what was he going to do? He didn't want her pissed off at him because he didn't want this to be a onetime thing. He wanted another round or two with her, but Jenna could *not* find out.

"Bailey... I don't want you to take what I said the wrong way. I enjoyed what happened and believe me I want it to happen again. I just kinda promised Jenna I'd behave. If she found out I did this already..."

"Wonderful!" she slapped her legs. "So you *are* a player."

"No, it's just..." He didn't know how to explain it. He didn't go sleeping around with every woman he came in contact with, but he had gone a few rounds with one of Jenna's former friends. He didn't want Bailey to become one of the statistics.

"Listen, it doesn't matter. I'm not going to tell Jenna anything. That's between you and her. What happened here, well...it isn't going to happen again. It can't."

"And why not?" he asked, offended. Didn't she find him attractive? Didn't she feel the sexual connection between them?

"Because I don't do *this*." She waved her arm around. "I don't normally sleep with some stranger who appears on my doorstep. But I did and I can't take it back. Nor do I want to. Let's just forget it ever happened and move on."

He didn't want to forget. He wanted to do it again. Her cavalier attitude was driving him crazy.

"Pepperoni or sausage and peppers?" she asked, opening the box.

The scent of peppers assaulted his nostrils, causing his stomach to growl. He was famished and not just for food, but for Bailey too.

"Both." He watched her slap two slices of pizza haphazardly on the plate.

"Here." She shoved the plate into his hands.

"I wasn't trying to offend you. Seriously. Jenna just has a strong opinion about me getting involved with her friends."

"And I feel the same way as your sister. I've been down this road before and the only thing that comes out of it is ruined friendships. I don't want that to happen to Jenna and me. I actually like your sister."

Just great. She was grating on his nerves with her goody-two-shoes attitude. They were consenting adults. They could have sex if they wanted. It was none of Jenna's business.

She bit into her pizza, leaving a string of cheese hanging from her chin. Ethan reached over and pulled it off her.

"All I'm saying is I like you. I'd like to...I don't know, do this again sometime."

She seemed to be considering his words as she chewed.

"You seem like a nice enough guy and what just happened was amazing, but..."

"But it can't happen again? That's bullshit and you know it. It's a cop-out." He tossed his plate on the table. She was irritating him. Why did she have to be so difficult? Ethan didn't like being told no.

"I don't need this shit from you. I've only known you for what, an hour? You don't own me and I certainly don't owe you any explanations. So if you don't like it, there's the door."

Ethan stared at her, stunned. She was a feisty thing. Her chocolate eyes blazed with anger. He smiled.

"Is something funny?" she demanded.

"No." He shook his head.

"I have a lot of work to do. Maybe I should call Jenna and see where she is."

Ethan kept his eyes on her while she searched for her phone. Damn she was one sexy lady. Thoughts of those long legs wrapped around his waist had his cock throbbing again. When she bent over to rifle through her purse, he wanted to walk behind her, grab her hips and take her from behind. He wanted to feel his hard cock sliding in and out of her drenched pussy. Then he wanted to taste her sweet nectar. Oh he would have Bailey again.

Yes, he was getting under her skin. The nerve of him to think she would be there to obey his every whim. She had a life and it didn't include waiting around for some guy. Though the sex was hot and so was he. Just thinking about being pinned under him brought renewed chills.

She felt the heat of his stare as she looked for her cell phone. The temptation to spill the contents of her purse out just so he couldn't look at her anymore was great. Caving in to him was not an option.

"Ha!" She produced the phone and dialed Jenna.

"Hello?"

"Hey, it's Bailey. Where are you?"

"Bailey, I'm having the worst day. I'm lost in the middle of nowhere. I drove around trying to find someone who can give me directions back to the highway. And my brother is supposed to be there by now, but I haven't heard a word from him. I'm worried he's lost too."

No such luck.

"He's fine. That's why I'm calling. He was concerned about you and stopped by my place."

"He's there? Thank God. I've been so worried. You'll keep him company until I return, right?"

"Of course."

"I have one more client, once I get back into town. I shouldn't be more than a few hours."

Bailey groaned. A few hours? Too much could happen in a few hours.

"I've got it under control, don't you worry."

Right about now Bailey wished Jenna had a spare key lying around so she could let Ethan in her apartment and be rid of him. Hanging out in her apartment was not a good idea.

"See ya soon."

"Yeah, see ya soon."

Bailey closed the phone and tossed it back into her purse.

Just fucking great. She was stuck with Mister-oh-so-sexy for a few hours and nothing to do. Well, she could get her article done.

"We're alone for a few hours?"

"Don't get any ideas. I have work to do." She pointed to her pile of paperwork and her laptop. "You promised to help me with the article, remember?"

"Of course. I'll be more than happy to assist with all your needs."

She wanted to scream. He was so fucking frustrating. He wasn't referring to her article. She wanted to wipe that grin off his smug face.

"Great. My only *need* is to get this article done—today." She picked up some of her notes and read. Ignoring him was the best solution. She wouldn't tell him she craved another orgasm or how she wanted to feel his stiff cock filling her.

She fanned her hot skin with her stack of papers.

"Want me to get some ice to cool you down?"

"No, I'll be just fine." She slumped farther into the couch, pissed at herself for being attracted to Ethan. Jenna would be angry too. They had a pact and Bailey had already broken it.

Ethan slid closer to her. He traced his finger down the length of her arm. Goose bumps pebbled her skin.

"You sure I can't get you some ice? I know a fun way to cool off with a few ice cubes."

I bet you do.

She cleared her throat.

"Thanks for the offer, but seriously. I'm under a tight deadline."

“Okay, but if you change your mind...” He moved his head closer. His lips touched down lightly on her shoulder. He kissed a trail up her neck.

His hot breath caused her pussy to stir. Her stomach muscles quivered in the wake of his touch. When he reached her ear, he licked the rim, driving her insane. She wanted him again. She couldn’t wait any longer. The way he worked his tongue over her ear had her ready to climax.

“Ethan, I...we...”

“Yes?”

Oh fuck it. What did she have to lose at this point? They’d already done the deed. What would it hurt if they did it once more?

“I want you,” she whispered.

Chapter Two

He knew he was wearing her down when his tongue licked her ear. It worked every time. She was crumbling under his touch. He'd help her with her article, but first he wanted her. He wanted to feel her writhing under him, calling out his name. Ethan hadn't let a woman affect him in this manner in a long time and he didn't like the way she'd crawled under his skin. He'd have her again and get her out of his head.

When she whispered the words, "I want you" he was a goner. He couldn't shed his clothes fast enough, but refrained.

"Should we move this party to the bedroom?" He'd already had her in the kitchen. He didn't mind having her in the living room, but having her underneath him on a soft bed was more appealing.

"We could."

When she batted her brown eyes, he just about melted. Did she realize how beautiful she was?

Standing, he reached down and offered her a hand. "Lead the way."

He started to follow when his cell phone buzzed to life. "Shit."

"You better get that. It could be Jenna."

Yes, he thought about that. But something told him it wasn't his sister.

He dug deep into his pocket and pulled out the phone. *Restricted.*

It couldn't be Jenna.

"Hello?"

"You can run but you can't hide." A creepy voice on the other end.

Ethan slammed the cover shut.

"Who was that?"

He could see the concern in Bailey's eyes.

"No one. Wrong number." He plastered a fake smile on his face and slung an arm around her neck. "Where did we leave off?"

"I was showing you to my bedroom." She giggled.

So they knew he'd left Florida. How long before they tracked him down to his sister's? Probably not long. Maybe it was a bad idea coming here in the first place. His sister didn't need his trouble. She didn't need his headaches. But he needed her. He needed a safe place to hide out until he could think of a way to resolve this issue. He'd never told anyone in Florida that he had a sister, so maybe...just maybe they wouldn't figure it out. First thing he had to do was ditch his car and get something less noticeable. Like a motorcycle. It could be easily hidden and...

"Ethan?"

"Huh?"

"You sure that call was nothing?"

"What? Yes. Why?"

"I was talking to you and you were a million miles away."

"I'm sorry. What did you say?"

"How about I just show you?"

She licked her tongue across her top lip, causing Ethan to groan.

"Oh woman. You drive me mad." He pulled her into his arms and captured her mouth. His tongue slipped past her lips. Exploring.

The taste of pizza still lingered on her tongue. Ethan didn't mind. His hands reached under her tank top, looking for her perky breasts. He took a handful and pebbled the hardened nipple between his fingers.

She moaned.

His mouth left hers, searching for a taste of her skin. He lifted her tank over her head. "I don't think we need this." He tossed it across the room.

"And these aren't needed either." He slid her shorts over her hips, dragging them down and over her feet.

"Your body is amazing."

"Clothes off," she demanded.

"Yes ma'am." He saluted her before shedding his clothes in record time.

"You're not so bad yourself." Her hand covered his hard cock. Rubbing gently, she teased the tip of his head with her finger.

"Climb on that bed. I want to taste all of you."

Ethan watched her crawl across the bed, exposing her pink puckered hole. He'd like to sink deep into there, but first he wanted to taste her sweet nectar.

She looked back over her shoulder. "Where would you like me?"

He climbed on the bed and flipped her onto her back. "Right here, Bailey."

He nudged her legs apart with his knee. She smiled up at him.

"What?"

"Nothing. I like a man who knows what he wants and isn't afraid to take it."

"Then I'm the man for you." He lowered his head and placed kisses along the crest of her breasts. He worked his way down her stomach, lingering over her navel. When his tongue delved into the tiny hole, she wiggled.

Her fingers raked through his hair as he descended closer to his destination. Her sweet pussy.

He liked that she was perfectly trimmed. The smell of her arousal grew stronger the closer he got to her swollen lips.

"Heavenly," he whispered.

He blew against her clit.

She shivered.

He dipped his finger into her opening. She was soaked. He dragged her juices up her folds, covering her.

He couldn't wait any longer. He had to taste her. He eased his tongue into her hot channel. She tasted like honey. Just like he thought. His tongue swiped across the tiny nub, causing her to quiver. He took her clit in his mouth, sucking.

Her moans grew louder with every suck on her swollen bud. He slid his finger deeper into her.

"Yes," she cried.

Another digit entered her pussy. She bucked against his fingers. He filled her with a third finger.

"Ethan, I'm..."

He tugged on her clit, while pumping his fingers into her. The walls of her pussy contracted against his fingers, as her orgasm consumed her. She moved her hips in steady rhythm with his mouth and fingers.

"Fuck," she screamed as her body shuddered into a series of orgasms.

He continued playing with her clit until her shudders settled.

"That was amazing."

He removed his fingers and licked the juice from each one.

"Hmmm, now *that's* amazing. Your juices are delicious."

"Your tongue should be considered a lethal weapon."

Ethan smiled as he watched her cover her heart with her hand. She tried to catch her breath. Yes, he knew how to use his tongue to please a woman. He wasn't done. Not by a long shot. He had a few other secret weapons up his sleeve. Bailey hadn't seen anything yet.

"It's been outlawed in a few states," he joked.

"I'll bet it has."

They shared a laugh. Ethan found being with her easy. Too easy. Again he had to wonder why she was affecting him this way. He'd only known her for a few hours and she was in his blood. He wanted to spend every moment bringing her pleasure.

He climbed up and lay down beside her. He gathered her in his arms and held on tight. That sparkle in her brown eyes melted his heart. She was an incredible woman. She was sexy and funny. Yes, pleasing Bailey suddenly became very important to him.

He wanted to stick around and get to know her better. She made him think about long-term. Then the lingering truth slapped him in the face. If they caught up to him, her life, along with Jenna's, could be in danger. Ethan couldn't stand the thought of putting either one of them at risk.

No, he made up his mind. He had to leave in a few days. It was best for everyone concerned. He'd stay around long enough to collect some money, swap the car for a bike and then hit the road again. He had to make sure Bailey and Jenna never got mixed up in his mess. He had to keep them safe, even if it meant sacrificing his happiness.

"Why don't we answer some of those questions you had."

Confused. Bailey was thoroughly confused. They were having a good time. No, a great time and suddenly he shut down on her. What happened? It was like someone flipped a light switch. One minute they were laughing, enjoying each other, the next he was talking about working on her article. She didn't want to think about her article right now. She wanted to feel his cock inside her. Filling her. Fuck the article. Fuck her deadline. That could wait. Sex couldn't.

"I thought we could see if this is outlawed in a few states too," she said, rubbing her hand along his hard penis.

"We'd better not," he said, releasing her from his grip. He jumped off the bed as if the touch of her skin burned him.

"Ethan?" Bile rose in her throat. What had she done?

He threw his clothes on haphazardly.

Following his lead, she eased off the bed and gathered her clothes. She held them against her chest, fighting back the urge to cry. His rejection pained her.

"What the fuck is going on here?" she demanded. She wasn't going to stand for him ignoring her any longer. She deserved an explanation for his sudden cold shoulder.

He turned and looked at her. The haunted look in his blue eyes caused her to suck in her breath. There was a deep pain. He was hiding something from her.

"Is there another woman you're cheating on?" Bailey knew some men tended to feel guilty after cheating. Maybe that was what was wrong with him.

"No, Bailey. There's no other woman." He tried to embrace her.

"Back off. I want an explanation."

"It's not you, Bailey, I swear."

God, if she had a nickel for every time she heard a guy use that line. Shit, she'd used it a few times herself.

"You have to believe me, Bailey."

"I don't have to believe shit. Get out of my apartment."

"What?"

He looked completely shocked. What, did he think he could use her and get away with it? Fuck that. If he didn't have the balls to tell her the truth, well fuck him.

"You heard me. Get the fuck out of my apartment and don't come back."

"But I thought you needed help with your article."

"I don't need your help. I'll find someone else to answer my questions. Thanks for the good time, now get out." *And don't let the door hit you in the ass on the way out*, she wanted to add. She turned her back on him. She couldn't stand to look at him any longer.

"Bailey."

"Go," she said through clenched teeth.

When she heard the door close she let out the sob that she'd swallowed. She threw herself on the bed and cried. She had no clue why, but she cried.

She spent the next hour lying on her bed naked and alone, trying to figure out what the hell just happened. It was like a nightmare. She'd let a complete stranger into her place. She'd had the most incredible sex she'd ever experienced and thrown him out. All in the matter of a few hours. What the hell was she going to say to Jenna? Surely Jenna was going to want to know why her brother wasn't there waiting for her to return. She could tell her the truth, that her brother was a dog just like all the other guys out there, but then she'd have to admit that she'd had sex with Ethan and that would cause some serious issues with their friendship.

Oh shit. Men sucked.

Chapter Three

Bailey didn't have to wait long to find out what Jenna thought. Jenna came knocking at the door shortly after Bailey pulled herself out of bed, showered, dressed and cleaned her tear-stained face.

"Bailey. I know you're in there. Answer your door. I just want to know where my brother is."

"Coming." Great, what was she going to tell her? Ethan wouldn't tell her the truth, would he? Bailey wasn't sure, but she didn't have the heart to be honest with Jenna.

"What's up?" She pretended the butterflies in her stomach weren't real. She pushed the feeling of nausea away.

"Isn't Ethan here?"

Bailey could tell her friend was confused. She wasn't half as confused as Bailey, but that didn't matter. What's done was done and although they had great sex, that's all it was. Sex. They wouldn't be having any more.

"No. He went out for a drive. Said he wanted to acclimate himself with the area."

Jenna chuckled.

"That's Ethan. Can't hold him down for long."

Ain't that the truth?

"Sorry I couldn't keep him here longer. He seemed to be getting restless waiting." Not that Bailey minded keeping him busy for some of the time.

"So how are you doing?" Jenna asked.

Bailey groaned. This wasn't the time for small talk. What could she say? Great, now that your brother gave me the most amazing orgasms. Oh, but wait, then he fucked with my head.

"Busy. I'm under a tight deadline and my interviewee canceled last minute. I'm in crisis mode."

"Oh shit. What's this article about?"

"Relationships. From a man's perspective."

"You should ask Ethan. He's got great advice. Believe me he'll shoot straight from the hip. He's the person I call whenever I want to know how a guy's brain works."

"I just assumed they didn't have any." And Ethan proved her correct after their encounter.

"Hey, I understand you're still smarting over Trevor's betrayal, but not all guys are like that. I know Ethan isn't."

"You have to say that. You're his sister and besides, I'm not looking to date anyone. I'm not looking for anything from a man."

"Nothing?" Ethan asked, appearing out of nowhere. He wore a grin as if he was challenging her to state otherwise.

"Well there you go, Jenna. The case of the missing brother is solved. Now if you'll excuse me I have an article to write."

"Wait." Jenna stopped the door with the palm of her hand.

When did she become as pushy as her brother?

"You still need a man's point of view and Ethan's here. I'm sure you wouldn't mind helping out my friend, would you? It's the least he could do for crashing here for a few hours."

Bailey watched the exchange between brother and sister. She didn't need this shit right now. She didn't want to be within ten feet of Ethan and his sexy body. She didn't want to think about the orgasms he gave her. The only thing she wanted to concentrate on was getting this article in before her deadline so her editor didn't have a conniption fit.

"Don't you two want to catch up or something? It's been a long time since you've seen each other."

"We have all night. I know how important your job is. So please. Let him help you. Maybe we could all get a bite to eat later."

"Thanks, but I've already eaten pizza."

"So, that was earlier. I'm talking about in a few hours. The three of us can have a few drinks and relax. We'll celebrate Ethan's arrival and you making your deadline."

What could Bailey say? If she refused Jenna would be suspicious, but she didn't want to hang out with Ethan more than she had to. In fact she didn't want to use him as a reference either. Although in all honesty she didn't have much of a choice. She didn't have anyone else lined up. Her mistake. One she wasn't likely to repeat. Next time she'd line up a handful of resources.

"Fine," she relented. "I'll let Ethan help me and I'll think about dinner and drinks later. But I'm not making any promises."

Jenna smiled victoriously. The same smile Ethan wore on his face.

Yes, she was fucked.

"Don't think you've wormed your way back into my bed," Bailey said once Jenna entered her own apartment and closed the door. She stepped out of his way, allowing him entrance once again to her apartment.

"Me? I'm just here to help with your article. Out of the goodness of my heart. I'm not expecting any sexual favors in return."

Bailey didn't know if she wanted to laugh or slap that look of innocence off his face. She refrained from both. She would get him to answer her questions and send him on his way. She'd find some excuse to get out of dinner and drinks. The thought of hanging out with Ethan and his sister just didn't appeal to her right now. Jenna alone, maybe. Ethan no.

"So what are these questions you have for me?"

Bailey took a seat on the couch and lifted her laptop onto her legs. She scanned the list of questions she had, trying to find which one to start off with.

"Umm, let's see. Say you meet a girl in a bar and you hang out for a few hours getting to know each other. She offers to exchange phone numbers, but she just doesn't do it for you. Do you accept her number and promise to call or do you not exchange numbers?"

"I'll accept her number and probably give her a bogus number in return."

"Jerk!" Bailey threw a pillow at him.

"What? I don't want to hurt her feelings."

"You don't think she's going to be waiting for your phone call? And how's she going to feel if she calls the number and finds out it's not yours?"

"I don't know and I don't care. At least I didn't tell her to her face she's a loser."

"Ugh! What a creep. You *are* just like all the guys out there."

"I'm just being honest."

"How about being honest with the woman you led on all night long." Bailey wondered if she was talking hypothetically or about herself.

"Listen, you asked me a question and I answered it honestly. You don't have to like my answers. But if it makes you happy, I'll consider being honest with the woman next time."

No, she didn't have to like his answers. She could hope that there was one decent man out there, couldn't she?

"Fine. You're right. Next question. If you do like a girl do you leave her hanging for a few days or call her right away?"

"I'll most likely call her the next day. If I like her that much I'm not going to torture myself just to follow some man code."

"Ah, so you admit there is some man code out there?"

He shrugged and Bailey could see him struggle with his words.

"It's not written in stone, but yes. Some guys think there are some things we should and shouldn't do. But I've never been one to follow the rules."

Now that she believed.

"So if you like her you'll call the next day. If you don't you'll give her a fake phone number." Bailey typed as she spoke.

"I'm not a bad person. I just don't know how to tell a girl to her face that I'm not interested, and to be honest I've been on the receiving end of the fake phone number deal. It sucks, but it was better than having the chick tell me I'm a loser to my face."

Bailey studied his face. She found it hard to believe any woman would turn him away or call him a loser.

"You don't believe me?"

"I'm having a hard time believing you've been given fake phone numbers."

"It's true. It's only happened once, but it's happened."

Bailey laughed. Poor Ethan. Rejected once! She was sure it was traumatic for him.

His phone rang, interrupting Bailey's thoughts.

"Sorry I have to take this. It'll only be a minute." He dug the phone out of his pocket and walked away.

"Okay."

He stepped into her kitchen to take the call. Bailey strained her ears to hear the call. Yes, she was eavesdropping, but she wanted to know who he was.

She heard faint whispers but couldn't make out what he was saying. The call ended quickly and he returned to the living room.

"Sorry about that."

"No problem. Anything important?"

"Nope. Just an old buddy wanting to catch up. I told him I was busy and I'd catch up with him later."

Bailey had a hard time believing him. He seemed agitated by the call.

Ethan purposely sat close to her when he returned to the sofa. He felt the heat radiating off her as their skin touched. She was hot for him. There wasn't a doubt in his mind and he was hot for her. He wanted to rip off her scant clothing. He wanted to taste her pussy juices on his tongue and his lips again.

When he went out for a drive earlier she was still on his lips. His fingers were covered in her scent. He drove around aimlessly, trying to get rid of the thoughts of fucking her over and over again. He tried to get a grip on his raging hard-on, but couldn't. All he could think about was sinking his cock deep inside her wet cunt. So he returned. Just his luck Jenna was back. Any thoughts of having another round were out the window with Jenna home. He thought for sure she'd want to drag him to her apartment and grill him for a few hours on why he needed to come to New York so badly. He wasn't ready for her inquisition. When she pushed him onto Bailey he was relieved. He wouldn't have to face the firing squad for a little longer and if he was really lucky, Bailey would want to go another round or two.

If only they hadn't been interrupted earlier with that damn phone call. He knew his time was going to be limited, but he'd hoped it would be longer than it was turning out to be. He'd only been in New York a few hours. Only gone from Florida less than two days. He'd made sure he wasn't being followed when he snuck out of his place at three in the morning.

For a few days prior to leaving he started loading the trunk of his car with his belongings. He hadn't taken everything, but he needed his clothes. The rest were non-essential. Once he got his hands on a bike, he'd have to limit his clothing. Unless he came up with enough cash to put this behind him. Getting out of debt and settling somewhere permanent was something he could only dream about doing. He was tired of running from mobsters. He was fed up with always being broke. He was sick of fearing for his life. Bruno and his thugs were more than happy to tie him to a cement block and toss him into the river. Ethan shuddered at the thought.

"Ethan?" Bailey's hand on his brought him back to here and now.

"Hmm."

"You okay? You looked kinda distant there for a second."

"I'm fine. I was just thinking about our time together earlier." He traced his finger down her bare arm. Tiny hairs stood on end.

He bent and kissed her shoulder.

"Ethan!" She tried pushing him away, unsuccessfully.

"What? I can't help it if you have the most amazing body I've ever seen." He planted another kiss, this time closer to her neck. "And shoot me, 'cause I can't get the taste of your pussy off my lips."

He edged closer to her ear. His tongue swiped across the shell. "Sue me for wanting to have your wet pussy soaking my cock." His words were barely a whisper.

She moaned and let her body fall against the back of the couch.

"Ethan, we can't."

"Why?" As he whispered, his hand brushed against her nipple. It reacted by hardening.

He searched her face for disapproval, but found none. Instead he found a look of desire—need. She felt it too. He covered her nipple with his mouth. Even through the thin fabric her skin was burning. His hand roamed over her stomach, around her laptop, to her shorts. It moved between her legs and slid past the barrier to her waiting pussy.

"Are you sure we can't?"

She shook her head.

"Good." He removed his hand, picked up the laptop and rested it on the coffee table.

He didn't waste time. His lips found hers. His tongue invaded her mouth, hungry for her taste.

Bailey wrapped her arms around his neck, pulling him closer. His cock stiffened with every kiss. He had to have her.

She reached for the button on his shorts and unbuttoned it. As the zipper descended and she freed his cock a temporary relief washed over him. When her hand covered him, stroking him through his boxers, he pulled out of her embrace.

He moaned.

"Time to get you out of these clothes."

"I thought you'd never ask." Ethan stood and removed his clothes at lightning speed. Bailey didn't waste any time peeling her clothes off either.

"I like a woman who isn't afraid to tear her clothes off."

"I'm not shy. Like you, if I want something I'll go after it."

Ethan pulled out a condom from his shorts and waved it in front of her. "So do you want this?"

She grabbed the condom from his hand and ripped it open with her teeth. "Come here, big boy. Let me do the honors."

Ethan thought for certain he'd explode when her fingers touched his cock. She was delicate as she rolled the condom over him. He fought the urge to erupt. He wanted to see the look on her face when he brought her to a screaming climax. If he exploded prematurely that would be lost to him.

He sat on the couch, his cock saluting.

"What are you doing?" She looked concerned.

"You seem to like taking charge. Climb up and take what you want, Bailey."

She smiled.

"My pleasure."

When she straddled him, Ethan sucked in a breath. He held it as she slid her wet juices down his pole. She felt so right. The walls of her pussy wrapped around his cock. Clenching.

Her hands on his shoulders, she eased up and down his shaft, rolling her hips. Ethan pinched both nipples between his fingers. She ran her fingers through his hair, bringing her mouth down on his lips. She sucked on his bottom lip, biting him gently.

He tugged on her nipples.

She bit his lip again before pushing down on his cock, swallowing him. She released his lip and threw back her head.

He placed his hands her hips, holding her as he pushed his cock deeper into her channel. Overpowered by the need to fill her to the brink, he pumped furiously.

She didn't argue. Digging her nails into his shoulders, she clung to him, riding along with his steady tempo. The features on her face tensed. Her lips pursed together, her eyes squeezed shut. *She was close.* This excited Ethan more.

"Ethan," she cried out as the stirrings of an orgasm took over her body.

He dragged his teeth across her nipple, pinching the other one.

"Yes!" She rolled her hips, grinding against his cock.

Ethan watched her facial expressions change as she rode out the orgasm riddling her body. He admired her creamy skin. Shit, who was he kidding? He admired everything about her, right down to her painted pink toenails. But this could only be for here and now. His life was too fucked up to get involved with anyone.

Her tempo slowed and the orgasm subsided. Bailey fell against him, out of breath. He nuzzled his face in her hair, breathing in the fruity scent. He wanted to get to know her better. If only his circumstances were different and he had more time. He wanted to find out what this attraction to her was all about. He knew deep down Bailey wasn't the type of woman he normally found himself attracted to. This intrigued him more, but if he didn't get the money soon, he might not have time for anything. He might be dead.

Distracting himself from thoughts of death, he whispered in Bailey's ear. "Ready?"

She leaned back and smiled. "I'm just getting started."

To prove her point, she slid up his shaft and back down. She repeated her slow seduction three more times before Ethan couldn't take any more.

"Woman, you are driving me wild." He pounded into her, reaching as far as her channel would allow. The sound of her juices slicking his cock filled the air. The scent of their arousal hung heavily between them.

He couldn't hold out any longer. He was going to erupt. Holding her hips tightly, he slammed into her, exploding instantly. Bailey cried out his name and he felt the walls of her pussy contracting, milking his cock for every ounce of cum.

They collapsed against each other. Sweat mingled together.

"Now that was delish." She struggled with her breath.

"Magically delicious." She was scrumptious in every way. He couldn't believe no one had snatched her up and claimed her as his own. Why was this beauty single? The sex alone was unbelievable.

When they finally regained their normal breathing, Bailey sat up. She wiped away drops of sweat beading on his forehead.

"Who are you, Ethan King, and where have you been hiding all my life?"

He laughed at her question. He knew from everything she said, she wasn't looking for more than sex from him.

"I've been in Florida waiting for you to find me."

"It's about time you dragged your ass up here and found me."

"And what a perfect ass this is." He cupped both cheeks in his hands and squeezed. She giggled.

"Do you want me to answer some more questions for you?" It was the least he could do. He did promise after all.

"Do you mind?"

"Not at all. Let me get dressed and I promise to be a good boy for the rest of the time you're working on your article."

"Okay, but you don't have to be good the *whole* time." She winked before she climbed off his lap.

He was in trouble. Deep, deep trouble.

Bailey had a bounce in her step as she entered the bathroom to clean up. It felt good having sex again. Not just once, but two times. Suddenly she was insatiable. It helped that Ethan had an incredible body and a cock that any woman would kill for, but there was something buried deep in his eyes. He was hiding something. Bailey didn't know what, but the reporter in her wanted to find out. If he was hiding another woman she didn't want to go near him with a ten-foot pole.

Then there was the issue of Jenna. She didn't want her best friend knowing she'd fucked her brother. Christ, she'd have a heart attack. And what could she say? Oh yeah, by the way, fifteen minutes after I met your brother I fucked him up against the refrigerator in my apartment. Hope you don't mind.

Bailey heard his cell phone ringing again.

Someone really wants to get a hold of him.

She tiptoed out of the bathroom and hid behind the wall leading to the living room. Yes, she knew it was wrong, but she needed to know who it was trying to get in touch with him. She had to know what he was hiding.

"I know."

She heard the frustration in his voice.

"I'm working on getting it now. It won't be long. I promise." His whisper became more frantic.

"No, you don't need to send your thugs. I'll get you your money soon."

"Money?" she mouthed.

Thugs. Money. What kind of trouble was Ethan in? Reality hit Bailey in the face. Drugs. He had to be involved with drugs. She'd been down this road with Carla, her

sister. Carla would lie, cheat and steal to get her next fix. Bailey did everything she possibly could to help her sister, but in the end the drugs won and took her life. It was a horrible experience. One she didn't want to repeat. If Ethan was involved with drugs and drug dealers he couldn't bring his mess to her doorstep.

He walked around the corner, frightening her.

"Were you listening in on my private conversation?" he asked.

"I...uh...kinda." She felt low in that moment. Why was she spying on him? His life didn't concern her. It wasn't like she wanted a relationship with him.

"Why?" He put both hands against the wall, trapping her between him and the wall.

"Just trying to find out who you are." Her eyes gazed at the floor.

"You know who I am. I'm Jenna's brother."

"Yes, but you seem to be in some kind of trouble."

"Nothing I can't fix and nothing I want my sister worrying about." He looked pointedly at her.

She nodded.

"It's not my place to tell your sister." She pushed his chest. He was too damn close and she was feeling claustrophobic.

He didn't budge. Instead he moved closer, pressing his body against hers. She felt his hard penis against her stomach. His hot breath grazed her neck.

"I want to fuck you again," he whispered.

"Ethan, I don't..." He captured her mouth. His tongue slipped past her lips, exploring her mouth.

She couldn't help herself. She wrapped her arms around his neck. Giving in to the passion of his kiss, she tilted her head and allowed him better access to her mouth.

Abruptly he stopped and pulled away. "We'd better get back to those questions or I might never answer them."

“Are you serious?” He couldn’t be. Could he? She felt his engorged penis rubbing against her. He wanted her.

“Jenna will be looking for us soon and you have an article to get done. I won’t stand in the way of your work any longer.”

She nodded, both stunned and disappointed. Her body was ready for another round of sexual bliss with Ethan, but he was right. Jenna would come calling soon and her deadline loomed overhead. She had to finish the questions or risk getting in trouble with her editor. The last thing she wanted to do was piss her off and lose the assignment. Bailey knew there were plenty of other writers waiting in the wings.

Chapter Four

"Thanks so much for helping me." Bailey truly appreciated his frank answers. She was surprised by a few and had to wonder if he truly was a player or just pretended to be all macho. Either way she was grateful he'd saved her from a potentially sticky situation with her editor.

"Anytime. Look, I'm going to head over to my sister's. When should I tell her you'll be ready?"

"Give me about an hour to clean this up and throw on something decent."

"You got it."

A knock at the door startled both of them.

"Who is it?" Bailey called.

"Pizza man."

Ethan and Bailey looked at each other questioningly.

"You didn't order another pizza, did you?"

Bailey could hear the fear in his voice.

"Nope, I think you would've known if I had."

He nodded.

The knock came again.

"Coming," she said, jumping off the sofa.

"Wait!"

Bailey froze and turned to Ethan.

"Why?"

He was rummaging through his backpack sitting on the floor next to the couch. He pulled out a gun and Bailey screamed.

"Shhh. I'm not going to hurt you."

"Put that thing away," she demanded, through clenched teeth.

He put his finger to his lips and motioned for her to be quiet and get behind him.

A knot formed in her stomach. *What the fuck is Ethan doing with a gun?*

The knocking became fiercer as Ethan tiptoed to the door.

"Lady, are you going to pay for your pizza or what?"

She looked to Ethan for help.

He shook his head no.

"Wrong place. I didn't order any pizza."

"Are you sure?"

"I think I'd remember if I ordered a pizza."

Ethan got closer to the door and peeked through the little peephole.

He blew out a breath.

"Go ahead and open the door," he whispered.

Unsure what had just taken place, Bailey stepped forward and opened the door.

"Are you certain I'm not at the right place?"

"Like I said, I didn't order a pizza."

"Hey, over here," Bailey heard some teenager calling.

"Wrong place," she said, before closing the door on him. Once she did she turned to Ethan, demanding answers.

"What. The. Fuck. Are. You. Hiding?"

He returned to his backpack and buried the gun deep in its confines.

"Don't turn your back on me, Ethan. I want answers and I want them now. If you're hiding something dangerous, do you think it's fair to subject Jenna or me to it?"

Wearily he hung his head. "No."

Bailey stood frozen. Her heart still pounded from the realization Ethan was a stranger—with a gun. She needed to know what kind of trouble he'd dragged to her door.

With her hand on her chest, she took three long strides to the couch. She gulped down half a glass of water.

Shit, I need something stronger.

"You gonna explain to me or should we head over to Jenna's and you can explain this all to her?" Bailey preferred the alternative. She didn't want to be mixed up in any crap. She'd seen enough of the other side to last her a lifetime. She'd seen what the horror of drugs could do to a person. If Ethan was involved with drugs she wanted no part of him or his trouble.

"It's complicated, Bailey."

"I don't give a rat's ass what it is. You whip out a gun when you don't believe there's a pizza delivery guy at the door and all you can say is it's complicated? I'll bet it is. I still want answers." She stood with both hands on her hips, tapping her foot.

"I'm in big with some loan sharks. I was afraid they found me."

"Is that what all the phone calls are about?"

"Yes. They know I left Florida. They're not happy."

"I'll bet. So you just show up here on our doorstep and expect us to give you a place to hide?"

He shrugged.

"I don't know about Jenna, but I sure as hell don't want trouble at my door. I think you should leave and forget you ever met me."

"Bailey, please. I'm not trying to bring trouble to you or Jenna. Just the opposite. They have no clue I have a sister. I don't talk about her much."

"Nice."

"It's better that way. The less people know about my personal life the better."

If he was mixed up in crazy stuff he had a point.

"You obviously aren't one hundred percent certain they don't know. Otherwise, you wouldn't have gotten freaked out by the pizza guy."

"No, I can't be totally certain. But I really don't think they have a clue."

Bailey could tell he was uncertain. He had no idea whether or not they knew. She didn't doubt he prayed they didn't know, but he couldn't be absolutely positive.

"So exactly why did you show up at Jenna's door and how do you plan on keeping her safe? Please don't tell me with that gun." If Ethan was carrying a handgun what were the guys looking for him packing? She didn't want to find out firsthand.

"Honestly?"

"That would be a novel idea."

"I was hoping I could start fresh, a life free of gambling and running. I needed to score some cash so I could wire it to the thugs looking for me. If things heated up here, I was going to head out west to California. I'd be far away from the loan sharks and far away from Jenna."

"What makes you think Jenna has money to give you?"

He shrugged again. "I was hoping to *earn* the money."

Bailey saw right through his lies. He was hoping she had some stuff he could hock. He was going to steal from his sister to get himself out of danger. Desperation. It made people do crazy things.

"How much do you need?"

"What?"

She'd shocked him with her question.

"I want to know how much you need to make these guys disappear from your life."

"Why do you want to know?"

"Humor me."

"Ten grand."

She let out a low whistle. Ten thousand was a lot of loot. She didn't have that much to give away, but she could part with a couple thousand if it got him out of town and away from Jenna.

"Is it just gambling or is it drug related too?"

"No," he said vehemently.

"What kind of gambling?"

"I was in a few too many card games."

Okay, now they were getting somewhere. So he got in over his head playing cards. Ten thousand seemed a bit low for the loan sharks to be pursuing him so adamantly.

"These guys would chase you thousands of miles for ten thousand?"

"You don't understand. They're highly connected—to the mob. In fact I probably shouldn't tell you any of this."

She held up her hand. "Maybe you shouldn't. I don't want to know any more." Just knowing he had the mob following him was enough information for her.

"I'm not a terrible person. I just got into something over my head."

Oh where had she heard that before? Her baby sister. And where was she? Lying in the ground from a drug overdose.

"I'm not about to judge you, Ethan. I'm sure you're a nice person and all, but..."

"But you want me out of your life and at lightning speed."

"Pretty much. I could help you with some of the money. If I give you say three grand will you promise to leave? Jenna doesn't need this in her life and I certainly don't."

"I can't take your money!"

"No? But you can steal from your sister?" She reached for her purse and retrieved her checkbook. "Who do you want the check made out to?"

Ethan looked at her, stunned. She was serious. She was going to give him three thousand dollars if he hit the road right this minute. She was fucking crazy. What made her think he was going anywhere at this point? Now that he'd had a taste of Bailey he wasn't ready to leave. Yes, he wanted to get out of trouble with the thugs Bruno would eventually send looking for him, but he didn't want to run off on Bailey.

The revelation that he felt something for her was mind-boggling. Ethan didn't let women in. They were full of drama and headaches. He liked his freedom. He enjoyed coming and going as he pleased and the way his life had been going recently, ditching things at a moment's notice and taking off was a necessity. But wasn't this the life he wanted to get out of? Wasn't this the opportunity he'd been looking for? A chance to change and make a fresh start.

The reality of his situation was, he couldn't stick around. It was too dangerous for both Jenna and Bailey. He didn't want to do anything to hurt either of them. But what if he could stick around? What if he made good on his debt?

"Well, are you going to take my offer?"

He smiled at her. She was hot with anger at him for bringing his troubles to their doorstep and he didn't blame her, but he wanted her. God, he wanted to whisk her off to the bedroom one last time before leaving.

"Ethan!"

"No, I won't take your fucking money." He stormed toward the door. There was no way he could take money from her. He liked her too much. He had to get out of here before he did something he regretted.

"Don't you go running off on me." She grabbed his arm, attempting to stop him.

"What do you want from me?" He didn't hide his frustration—frustration that came from his desire to fuck her, hard.

"I want you to take my offer and beat it before Jenna finds out."

"No." It wouldn't be fair to her to take the money. If he could find a way to stick around and pay her back it would be one thing, but the reality of his life was he might not be able to.

A knock at the door startled them once again.

"Who is it?"

"Jenna. What the hell is going on in there? I can hear you two arguing across the way."

"Fuck," Ethan cursed under his breath. The last thing he needed was his sister finding out any of this. Now he had no choice but to make up something. He didn't want to hurt his sister. He couldn't stand the thought of her thinking him a loser.

Bailey whipped the door open.

"Hey, Jenna. What's up?"

"That's what I want to know," she said, storming through the door. "I can hear you guys in my apartment. Granted, I had the windows open, but seriously. You two hardly know each other and you're arguing like an old married couple?"

Ha. Not a chance in hell they'd ever be an old married couple. Ethan didn't do married. He barely did couple. He wasn't going to heed the feelings tugging at him. He couldn't allow Bailey any closer. Oh Christ, who the fuck was he trying to fool? She was already too close and he actually liked it.

"We were disagreeing on my article," Bailey said.

Relief washed over Ethan. He wouldn't have to make up an excuse or tell the truth.

"Thank you," he mouthed.

She rolled her eyes.

"It seems your brother here is a player after all."

"Ethan?" Jenna looked between the two. "I know I haven't seen you in quite some time, but I'm positive you are *not* a player."

He shrugged indifferently. He couldn't admit he was in deep shit to some mob guys, but he could let her believe he was a player. Anything was better than telling her he was in danger. He didn't want his sister worrying about him.

"Maybe we should go get dinner," he suggested. "I think Bailey's seen enough of me for one day."

"Is that true, Bailey? Have you seen enough of Ethan?"

Ethan watched her features soften from totally pissed to he didn't know what.

"Actually I'd love to join you guys for dinner. Just let me freshen up."

Now he didn't know what to think. This vixen was too unpredictable. What if she told Jenna while they were having dinner? It was a definite possibility with the way things were going.

"Shouldn't you get that article finished? Don't you have to like write it or something?" He was grasping at straws here, but Bailey coming along for dinner was no longer a good idea.

"Nope, I have time. If I get it to her by midnight I'll be fine."

Ohh, she was looking smug. He wanted to kiss that smugness off her face.

"We'd understand if you couldn't go."

Come on, Jenna. Don't just stand there watching us like a tennis game. Say something. Anything. Just be on my side.

"Ethan, why are you being like that? Don't you want Bailey to come with us?" Jenna asked.

"I don't care if she comes along. I just thought this article was very important to her and she's on a deadline."

"Bailey's a big girl. She knows what she can and can't do."

"Thanks, Jenna," Bailey said, looping her arm through Jenna's. "I couldn't agree more. Give me a few minutes to change my clothes and do something with this hair."

Ethan clapped his hands together. "Damned if I'm going to argue with two women."

They both laughed.

Ethan wasn't laughing. He cringed inside wondering what Bailey was up to. She had an ulterior motive for tagging along. He felt it in his bones. She was up to no good. Most likely she was going to expose him to his sister.

They arrived at the local bar-restaurant. The atmosphere was charged, just like Bailey. She couldn't believe he wouldn't take her money and run. He was being pig-headed and she wasn't about to let him stay around. She didn't care that her libido was off the charts. Ethan's ability to supercharge her body wasn't going to win him points. He needed to take her money and get the hell out of here, quick.

She twirled the tiny umbrella from her mai tai between her fingers. Jenna and Ethan were talking about childhood things while she just listened. She was waiting for her chance to interrupt and bring the subject to the present.

She was sipping her fruity concoction when Jenna finally spoke to her.

"I'm sorry, Bailey. We must be boring you to tears with our reminiscing."

"Quite the opposite, but wouldn't you love to know what Ethan's been up to now?"

His nose flared and his eyes pierced her. If they were daggers, she'd be dead.

"I'm boring to say the least," he countered.

"I highly doubt that. What is it you do for work?" she challenged.

"I'm currently unemployed." His voice dripped with venom.

Score one for Bailey.

"Unemployed? Wow, that sucks. What do you do for money?"

"Yes, Ethan. What have you been doing to stay afloat?"

Bailey saw the worried look Jenna gave her brother and immediately regretted baiting him, but Jenna's life could be in danger if he stuck around. That wasn't something she wanted her best friend exposed to.

"I've been taking odd jobs here and there. Picking up a little work whenever and wherever possible."

She watched him swallow back his ice-cold beer. He slammed it on the table a little too hard.

"Now, I'm starved. Let's order some food."

Bailey decided to let the conversation drop. Jenna didn't push either. It wasn't until they were halfway done with their meal and Ethan's phone rang that Bailey had second thoughts.

"If you'll excuse me, I have to take this call."

Once he was out of earshot, she turned to Jenna.

"He's been getting all kinds of crazy calls today."

"Crazy? What do you mean?"

How did she explain without actually telling her what she knew?

"I don't know. It's like he's fighting with an ex or something. He keeps getting angry and hanging up on the person."

"I must say I'm very surprised by the things you've been saying about Ethan. He's not the person you're describing. In fact it sounds like you dislike and distrust him."

"Whoa! Where is this coming from?" Bailey couldn't believe how upset Jenna was.

"Just be honest with me, Bailey. You don't like Ethan so you're trying to get me mad at him."

"I am not. I'm only suggesting there might be more to him showing up on your doorstep than you realize." She threw her napkin over her plate. There wasn't any way she'd be eating any more food.

"For your information I knew Ethan was coming a few days ago. This wasn't a surprise visit and by the way, he's *not* a player." Bailey watched her dig in her pants pocket and pull out a bunch of bills. She threw them on the table. "This should cover dinner and a cab home."

She stormed off, leaving Bailey sitting there both stunned and hurt by Jenna's reaction. She was trying to help her friend and it turned into a full-blown nightmare.

Not having the strength to fight with Jenna, she waited until they were long gone before paying the waiter. She used her own cash. She'd return Jenna's to her when things cooled down. She hailed a taxi and wearily jumped in the back. All the way home she replayed the night over and over in her mind, trying to figure out where she went wrong. She was dumbfounded. She couldn't fathom why Jenna got so upset.

It didn't matter anymore. Maybe Ethan would hit the road now that he knew she wasn't afraid to expose him.

The cab pulled up in front of the apartment complex. Bailey noticed Ethan's car immediately. A strange guy was lurking in between Ethan's car and the one parked next to it. Bailey had never seen the guy. Immediately she wondered if she should call the police. She took her cell phone out of her bag and kept her finger on the number pad just in case she had to call 9-1-1.

"Lady, you getting out?" the cab driver asked.

She could hear his frustration, but she was worried about the guy hanging around Ethan's car.

"Sorry," she mumbled as she opened the back door and stumbled out of the cab. She kept her eyes on the guy, trying to figure out what he was doing. Was he trying to break in? Would he hurt her for catching him snooping around?

He looked her way. She nodded and called, "Hello," having heard if you speak to a possible attacker they will think twice because you can identify them.

He grumbled something incoherent and moved away from the car. Luckily he headed in the opposite direction from her.

Bailey quickly ran up the stairs to her second-floor apartment. She let herself in and slammed her body against the closed door. Letting out a heavy breath, she tried to relax.

Once her breathing resumed to normal, she bolted and chained the door.

Paranoid? Maybe, but she wasn't taking any chances. The guys Ethan had after him meant business. She'd seen it all before with her sister.

"Fuck!" How did she get herself in this mess? She led a simple life. She wrote her articles, worked out and occasionally went out on dates. In a few hours she'd managed to get herself mixed up with a guy who had the mob after him. Never mind that she was fucked senseless, which she rather enjoyed.

She threw herself onto the couch. She had to stay away from Ethan, but she had to warn Jenna. She didn't want to see her friend mixed up with all this craziness. She didn't deserve it.

Staring at the laptop, she realized her article hadn't been sent yet. It was just the distraction she needed. She quickly finished it and sent it off.

"There. At least my editor won't be pissed at me," she said, pressing the send button.

The article hadn't helped keep her mind off Ethan. Not when he was her resource. It only made her think of him more.

Oh shit it. She was going to bed. Tomorrow was another day. She'd worry about Ethan and how to protect Jenna in the morning.

Halfway to her bedroom there was a knock at the door.

"Omigod," she whispered. Had the guy watched her go to her apartment? Was he aware that Ethan was there earlier? Maybe she could pretend she was sleeping and he'd go away.

Another knock.

No such luck. She looked toward the kitchen and contemplated grabbing a knife. What if he turned it on her and stabbed her? Damn, she didn't like the situation she was in. It was times like this when living alone really sucked.

The knocking grew louder.

"I know you're in there, Bailey. Your lights are on. Open the door."

It was Ethan. The rotten bastard had come back again. For what?

"Go away, Ethan. I'm done with you and your problems."

"I need my backpack, Bailey."

Her eyes darted to the side of the couch where Ethan had placed his backpack earlier. Sure enough it was still sitting there.

She stomped over to the door, unlocked it and swung it open.

"Grab your bag and get the hell out of my life."

He stepped over the threshold and went directly for his bag.

"I'm sorry my sister left you high and dry at the restaurant. If it's any consolation I feel horrible I involved you in this mess."

She shrugged. "No big deal. I'm a big girl. As you can see I managed to get home safely."

"Still, it wasn't right. You were only trying to protect her."

"Yeah, well I didn't see you sticking up for me at the restaurant. Why didn't you just tell her the truth instead of making me look like an ass?"

Someone walked by the apartment and Bailey slammed the door shut. The last thing she needed was for her neighbors to hear her personal life. She'd gone down that road once before. She wasn't ready to repeat that any time soon.

Ethan threw his bag over his shoulder.

"Look, I told you I'm trying to protect Jenna. To do that I need to keep her out of my mess. It's for her own good. You know too much as it is. I regret showing up at your door."

"Does that mean you'll take my offer and hit the road?"

Before Ethan could answer a knock came at the door. Not a knock, more like pounding. Someone wanted their attention.

Ethan lunged for Bailey and pulled her close.

"I think we have trouble," he whispered in her ear.

She attempted to pull free, but Ethan's grip was binding.

"I know you're in there, Ethan. I've been watching you. I've seen your car too."

Bailey swallowed. Her heart pounded in her chest. She thought for sure the guy at the door could hear it.

"Is there a way out of here other than the front door?"

"There's a fire escape outside my bedroom window." *Dear God, please don't tell me I'm going to have to climb down it.* Her fear of heights had her wondering if there ever were a fire if she'd make it out alive. She didn't believe she could climb down the fire escape.

The pounding at the door became kicking.

Ethan pulled Bailey.

"There's no time to stand here waiting for him to break down the door. He's not going to ask for tea if he does. He'll likely shoot first and ask questions after."

Just fucking great. She was really in deep shit with this situation. Reluctantly she followed Ethan. He climbed out the window first and shimmied down the ladder. Bailey closed her eyes tight and inched her way down.

"Move it, Bailey. There's no time for being slow. This guy means business," he hissed.

As she neared the bottom he wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her to the ground.

"Where's your car?"

"Out front, but my pocketbook is in my apartment."

"What's that got to do with your car?"

"My keys are in my purse."

"Oh I'm not worried about that. Lead the way."

She should have known someone like Ethan wouldn't need the keys. Bailey wondered how many times he'd hotwired a car before.

She led him to her car, where thankfully no one was waiting for them. Bailey wondered if the guy had broken down her door or if he'd given up. Guess it didn't matter at this point. She was at Ethan's mercy and would have to find a safe place for them to stay.

Her foot tapped nervously against the floor of the passenger's seat. Great, so Ethan could open a locked car door with no problem. A talent he'd probably picked up when on the run. This wasn't what she called fun. It took Ethan a few minutes, but he finally got her car started and off they went peeling out of the apartment complex parking lot.

"Do you have somewhere we can go?"

"As a matter of fact I do." She was reluctant to offer up the house on the lake, but what other choice did she have? Her life was now in danger too.

"What about Jenna? Do you think she'll be okay?"

He shrugged.

"I don't even have my phone to call her."

"Let's worry about that once we get out of town. Which way?"

Bailey directed him onto the highway headed north toward the small town where her family still had a house. It hadn't been used in some time. She wasn't even sure the electricity would be on, but they had nowhere else to go.

Once they were far enough away from her apartment and pretty certain they weren't being followed Bailey settled into the seat.

"I take it that was one of the thugs looking for you?"

"What gave you that idea?"

She didn't like his arrogant attitude. She didn't need his crass bullshit. He put her life in danger.

"I'm getting tired of your smartass remarks. I could make you turn this car around and go back to face that asshole looking for you."

"You could, but you won't."

"And why's that?"

"Because you're worried about me and you won't put that kind of risk on Jenna."

"If she's not already in danger," she added.

Ethan punched the steering wheel. He didn't want to think about the possibility of Jenna being in danger—all because of him. He should have listened to Bailey from the beginning. He should have taken her offer and hit the high road immediately, but he thought he was safe. He thought they'd never find him up north. How fucking wrong he'd been. Now he'd put Bailey's life in danger and he didn't like the way it tore at his heart. He felt the need to protect her.

Shit! Shit! Shit! He hoped they made it out of this mess alive. They could run and hide out at this house, but for how long? It was only a matter of time before they'd have to return to town and he knew Vinnie would be waiting for him.

He pulled in front of the house. It was dark and he hadn't seen another house for at least a few miles. That could work to their advantage. Maybe they were safe after all.

Bailey let them in. She flipped the switch, but nothing happened.

"No power."

She'd warned him this might be the case.

What little light the moon provided wasn't going to be much help. They needed something brighter.

"Maybe we could get some firewood and start a fire."

"I have a flashlight in the safety kit in my trunk."

A woman who's prepared! He liked that.

"I'll grab it."

She touched his arm. "We'll go together."

Was she frightened? He couldn't blame her. This night wasn't your typical "stay at home and watch a movie" night. His heart went out to her. She deserved much better than he was giving her right about now.

Taking her hand, he led her out to the car, where they retrieved the flashlight together. Once he had it firmly in his right hand, she reached for his left. He felt the warmth of her touch radiate through him. It stirred his cock to life. He wanted to groan. This wasn't the time to be thinking about sex, but he couldn't help it. Bailey was so damn hot.

Inside he flashed the light over the room.

"Great. The dust is at least an inch thick."

He had to agree. This place looked like someone had deserted it a long time ago. There were sheets covering all the furniture. Dust covered the sheets. Cobwebs hung from the ceiling and corners. Ethan wouldn't be surprised if a few bugs and creatures were taking up residence. As long as any bats stayed away he was fine.

"It's just for the night, right?" He tried making light of the situation.

"Yeah, just for the night," she mumbled.

"Let's grab the firewood and get the fire started. This way we'll have more light."

"Okay."

Luckily there were still some logs left over from the last time anyone was there. Ethan handed Bailey the flashlight and lifted a few logs into his arms.

"Do you have matches or a lighter in that safety kit?" he asked as they headed back inside. The wood would do them no good without something to start a fire with.

"I'm not sure. There's probably something in the kitchen."

Yeah, but will it be in working condition? He didn't speak out loud. He didn't want to frighten her more than she already was.

"I'll throw these into the fireplace. You go check the kitchen."

"Alone?" She grabbed the back of his shirt.

"You have the light."

He looked up and the fear was written all over her face. She wasn't moving without him.

"We'll go together. Just let me finish stacking this wood."

Her leg trembled against his side. *Fuck! I'm an idiot.* Once this was over and done with he wasn't gambling anymore. He couldn't continue to live life like this and he certainly didn't want to involve anyone like Bailey or Jenna in his messes.

They managed to get the fire going, which was no small effort. Once it was going strong they searched the cabin.

"The bed looks okay. We can shake the dust off the comforter."

"Let's check out the rest of the place." His voice was rough, but he couldn't help it. He was fighting a raging hard-on.

Surprisingly there were a few towels in the bathroom closet. Some soap and shampoo were there too. Overall they were going to be okay for the night. Tomorrow when the daylight came they'd have to go to town and get some food and call Jenna. She was probably worried about her brother's sudden disappearance. Then they'd have to figure out his next move.

Ethan prayed Jenna was okay.

They cleaned up the bedroom as best they could. Then they shook the dust from the sheet on the couch, removed it and settled in close to the fire. It wasn't cold outside, but the fire felt good.

Bailey nestled into his body. He wasn't sure if it was for safety or body heat, because she was shaking.

"Do you think that guy will find us?"

"I doubt it. We weren't followed so that's a good sign." Ethan wished he believed the lies he was feeding her. He didn't feel completely safe. How could he? Vinnie had tracked him down to Jenna's without any problems, so what was stopping him from finding them in the woods? Nothing.

He wrapped his arm around her and pulled her closer. He used the blanket from the car and covered her.

"Any warmer?"

"Yes, thanks."

She buried her head under the blanket and settled on his lap. He prayed his cock cooperated right about now. The last thing he needed was to be hitting her in the head with a hard-on.

Her warm breath on his leg didn't make things any easier. He ran his fingers through her hair, trying to distract the urge to take her right there on the couch. They needed to keep their wits about them. They couldn't get distracted by sex.

Who the fuck was he fooling? *He* couldn't get distracted by sex. Bailey was thinking about her safety, not fucking him. *He* was the idiot here.

"Do you agree with me now?" she asked in her soft voice.

"With what?" He kept his tone lower. He continued rubbing her silky hair.

"You need to take the money I'm offering and pay those guys. You need to get them off your back for my sake and for Jenna's. Everyone's safety is at stake here."

He didn't want to admit it, but she was right. He had no choice but to accept her offer. Once all this was said and done he'd leave for California, far away from Bailey and Jenna.

The thought of leaving her left a hole in his heart. There was something about her — something he wasn't used to. He thought he might be falling in love with her.

Nah. He couldn't be in love with her. He just loved the great sex they had. That wasn't love. He was thinking with his penis and not with his head. There was a huge difference there.

"I'll give Bruno a call in the morning and let him know I have some of his money. Maybe he can call off the dogs – temporarily."

"Good. Then we can resume our lives once again."

God he hoped that was possible. He hoped it wasn't too late.

Chapter Five

"You awake, Ethan?" Bailey gently nudged him. She'd been lying awake for quite a while, listening to rustling noises. Darkness filled the room. The moon seemed to be hidden behind the clouds. It was an eerie feeling lying there in the dark.

"Hmmm."

"I think I heard something," she whispered.

"What do you mean you heard something?"

She detected fear in his voice. Not the reaction she was hoping for, but he was awake.

"It sounded like someone was walking around outside."

"It's probably just an animal looking for food. If they smell our scent they'll associate it with food."

She nestled closer to him. "Are you sure?"

"Positive."

He wrapped his arm around her, making her feel safe.

"Sorry for waking you."

"No problem." He kissed her hair.

Something stirred inside Bailey. She wasn't sure if it was the fear or the need to get rid of the tension, but she wanted Ethan to make love to her. She wanted him to hold her tight and kiss away all her fears.

Bailey bent her head so that she was close enough to kiss him. She felt his hot breath on her lips. When he didn't move to kiss her, she decided to take things into her own hands. She stretched, closing the last inches separating them. Her lips grazed his. At first he didn't respond. She did it again. This time he responded. He wrapped his other

arm around her and pulled her tighter. That's when she realized he was completely naked.

Their mouths opened and he slipped his tongue over her threshold.

Bailey readily accepted his tongue as it explored. Their tongues danced a tango, hands roaming the other's body. His cock pressed against her stomach. It was hard and rigid. He wanted her too.

She covered his penis with her hand and gently stroked him. She felt her pussy juices pooling at her opening. The need to be fucked grew stronger and stronger with every passing second.

As if reading her mind, Ethan reached down between her legs and eased them apart.

"Are you sure?" he whispered, rubbing her through her clothes.

She nodded in the darkness. This was one time she was never so certain in her life. She needed Ethan.

Ethan turned his back and reached down for his pants as she quickly removed her clothes. When he found what he was looking for, he quickly sheathed himself and nestled against her.

His mouth returned to her skin as his finger gently eased into her opening. He kissed her neck and trailed up to her ear.

"I'm going to make love to you all night long."

"Please," she moaned. When had she become so needy? She never needed a man for satisfaction. She was more than capable of pleasuring herself with her hands or any of the vibrators she kept in the nightstand. Yet she couldn't get enough of Ethan. She wanted more and more.

She slipped a leg over his hip and nudged her opening against his finger.

Ethan continued sliding his finger in and out of her channel. Bailey couldn't take it any longer. She wanted him inside her. Not his finger. She wanted to feel his cock pulsing against the walls of her pussy.

Frustrated, she pushed him on his back and climbed on top of him.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

She knew he was stunned by her suddenly taking control, but she felt she had no other choice. She thought she wanted it nice and slow, but she was wrong. She needed it fast and hard.

"Taking what I want." As she finished her sentence she slid her pussy down his hot penis until it filled her completely. She rolled her hips, enjoying the feel of him stretching her walls.

Ethan pulled her down into a kiss. Bailey accepted his lips and tongue as he explored her mouth. She continued rolling her hips and grinding her pussy against him. She felt the stirrings of an orgasm building in her stomach. Tingling sensations rippled down to her cunt.

She rode him faster, charging head first into the orgasm. Ethan released her mouth and held onto her hips. He pumped into her, giving her every inch of his cock.

As the climax showered her body Ethan slapped her ass with his bare hand.

The heat from her ass cheeks mixed with the heat of his penis intensified the orgasm. Just when she thought her orgasm was going to subside, a new one began. Ethan took full advantage, pinching one nipple and bucking against her. His other hand cracked against her ass.

"I'm going to come," he declared. He released her nipple and grabbed onto her hips again.

Bailey cried out in ecstasy as her pussy clenched around his cock, sucking him dry.

She fell into a crumpled heap against his sweaty body.

"That was..." Was what? She couldn't find the right word to describe the feelings and sensations he filled her with.

"I know," he replied, out of breath.

She rolled off him and rested her head on the pillow.

He scooted out of bed and disposed of the condom in the bathroom. As he walked past the window on his way back to the bed, Bailey noticed something out of the corner of her eye. A slight movement.

"Ethan," she whispered. "I think someone's outside."

"What?" He froze.

Bailey fumbled around in the dark for her clothes.

"I swear when you walked past the window something moved behind you."

He looked out the window.

"I don't see anything."

"That doesn't mean someone isn't out there. What if that thug found us?"

"What's the likelihood of that? We didn't have anyone tailing us."

"That you know of," she spat. Fear crawled under her skin into the pit of her stomach. Her heart pounded in her chest. *Dear God, please don't let anything happen to us.*

"I'll keep you safe, no matter what." He crossed the room and threw on his clothes.

Bailey sat fully dressed on the edge of the bed, listening for any sound of movement outside or, more importantly, inside.

Once Ethan was dressed he gathered her in his arms. "We're okay. I haven't heard anything. Have you?"

"No," she confessed. It was quiet. Maybe too quiet. Maybe that was her problem. There was no noise.

A creak in a floorboard startled them both.

She gasped.

"Shhh," Ethan covered her mouth with his hand.

"I'm going to let go but please remain as quiet as possible," he whispered.

She nodded.

He removed his hand and as much as she wanted to scream for dear life, she remained silent. Ethan got down on his hands and knees, looking for something.

"What are you doing?" she asked in a hushed tone.

"Looking for my bag."

That's when Bailey remembered his gun. If there was an intruder at least they had an advantage. Not that they could call anyone from up in the mountains.

"Freeze!" a male voice in the dark demanded.

Bailey screamed.

"And shut up," he said.

"Hands up where I can see them." He flashed a light on his gun before flashing it on Ethan.

Ethan obeyed and put his hands over his head.

"You too, Blondie."

Bailey did as she was told. Her body shivered in fear. She wanted to burst into tears.

"Move out here," the man said, pointing the gun toward the other room. "And don't try to be heroic, Ethan, or I'll kill your girlfriend."

"She's not my girlfriend, Vinnie. She's just someone I met tonight. She's kinda my hostage."

"Even better, so she's very disposable."

Bailey didn't like the way the conversation was going. She wasn't disposable by any means. And what the fuck did Ethan mean his hostage? She came of her own free will.

"Do I get to speak here?"

"No," they both said.

She quietly walked to the other room where two chairs awaited them.

"Take a seat so I can tie you up."

"That's not necessary, Vinnie. Besides, she's my bankroll. I think you should let her drive into town and get the money I owe you."

"The boss is tired of waiting on you. He said to just get rid of you once and for all."

Bailey swallowed. She was going to die, be killed, right here in her family's house. It didn't seem fair. Why should she have to pay for Ethan's mistakes?

"He's right, Vinnie. I have a ton of money in the bank. I'll give you whatever you want as long as you don't hurt me. I don't care what you do to him."

"Thanks a lot," he mumbled.

Hadn't he just said the same thing about her? Fuck him. She was going to save her own ass before his. He was going to throw her under the bus? Well, she could do the same thing.

"Both of you shut up before I start shooting." He waved the gun closer to their faces.

Bailey didn't say a word. She thought she'd pee her pants with the gun that close to her. She had to think. She had to get out of this situation alive. She wasn't going to be defeated by some mobster. She hadn't let the drug dealers take her down when she went looking for her sister, this guy was no better.

There was a little light left from the fireplace. He must have thrown a log on the fire. Outside traces of dawn were beginning to make an appearance. Soon it would be bright and sunny. They'd have plenty of light.

He wasn't scary-looking by any means. He was overweight and looked like he could be someone's uncle. He honestly didn't look like the type to hurt anyone. Why would the mob send someone like Vinnie to make an impression on Ethan?

"What kind of money does this loser owe your boss?" she dared to ask.

"Let's just say enough to piss off the boss."

"Yeah, but how much? I have money in the bank. I'll give you whatever you want if you just let me go," she pleaded. She didn't want to be part of this mess. She had her whole life ahead of her.

"So if I let you go get the money you promise to come back without the pigs?"

"I wouldn't call the cops. In fact you can come with me to the bank. Leave Ethan here."

"No," Ethan demanded. "You are not to go anywhere with Vinnie alone. I'll go."

"I think it's better if I go. It is my bank account after all."

Where was this coming from? This bravado? If she was smart she'd just let them go and take all the money they wanted and be gone. If wiping out her life savings meant saving her life, then it was well worth it.

Sadly, she didn't want Ethan to just run off with her money. She didn't care about Vinnie taking off, but she didn't want Ethan to leave. In that very moment she realized she didn't want to be without Ethan. She was trying to save him. She was in love with him. She feared for their lives and she didn't want either one of them to die. If she could lure Vinnie away from here, maybe he wouldn't shoot Ethan and he could escape.

"I'll decide who gets to stay and who gets to go," Vinnie said.

He still hadn't tied them up. That was a good sign. His hesitance could mean that he was thinking about her idea.

He threw the rope at Ethan. "Tie her up and if she doesn't shut up I'll gag her."

Bailey swallowed. She didn't want her mouth gagged. She didn't want to be tied up either.

"And no funny business, Ethan. I want her secure."

"No shit, Vinnie," Ethan spat. "I'm not dumb."

"Coulda fooled me. If you was bright you'da paid the boss by now." He laughed at his attempt at a joke.

"Shit happens. I got in over my head. I've got the money for you, so why won't you just let us go?" He began tying her hands behind her back.

"Ouch, that hurts." It didn't really hurt at all. Ethan had barely tied her hands together, but she pretended he was doing it the way Vinnie wanted.

"Shut up, bitch. Stop the whining."

Bailey kept her mouth shut. Ethan was giving her a chance to escape if one presented itself. She wasn't about to screw that up.

Once he finished he sat in his chair.

"Now what, Vinnie?"

"No more questions. I'm the one holding the gun. I'm the one in charge."

"Yes sir."

Why was Ethan provoking him? Did he want to get himself shot? Bailey silently prayed he'd shut his mouth like Vinnie asked.

"It's time to tie you up. If you try anything funny at all I'm gonna shoot your girlfriend."

"I told you already, go ahead. She's not my girlfriend. I'm only with her for the money."

Bailey should be hurt by his confession, but deep down she didn't believe him. He didn't want her money. She'd tried pushing it on him so he would leave town and leave Jenna and her alone. He'd refused. This was his stall tactic. Okay, she could run with that.

Vinnie bent over to tie Ethan's hands to the chair when Ethan popped up and shouldered him. He managed to knock Vinnie back a few feet. The gun fell to the floor. Both dived for it. Each had their hand on it. They were wrestling with it. Bailey loosened the rope around her hands and broke free. She ran for the door. If she could just run to the nearest house maybe she could get help for Ethan.

As she swung the door open a shot rang out behind her. Fear made her stop. She knew she should keep running. Run until she was safely away from this mobster. Run until she found the help they needed, but she couldn't. She slowly turned around. She was afraid of what she was going to see. *Please dear God, don't let Ethan be shot.*

Ethan lay flat on the floor. She didn't see any blood. Vinnie was kneeling over him.

"Don't try anything like that again, Ethan. I'm trying to be nice here, but you're making it difficult. I promise I'll shoot her."

He was pointing the gun at her.

"Okay, I give." He held his hands up in the air. "You win, Vinnie. I'm at your mercy."

"Get back here, Blondie," Vinnie demanded.

Bailey did as she was told. She couldn't understand why she hadn't just run straight out the door. What was the likelihood he would have shot her? Probably slim to none, but there was a definite possibility that he would have shot Ethan. She didn't want his blood on her hands.

He said he was trying to be nice. Did that mean he was going to let them go eventually? He said he'd been sent to kill Ethan no matter what. Him being nice didn't make sense.

Bailey slumped into the chair and waited for Vinnie's next move. Ethan rolled off the floor. His eyes pierced her and she wanted to wrap her arms around him and kiss him. He was safe—for now.

"What now, Vinnie?"

"I'm going to tie you up properly. If you try any funny business I swear I'll shoot the girl in the forehead. I'll make you watch while she begs for her life."

"I told you already I'm not going to do anything foolish."

Ohmigod! She couldn't believe they were talking about her as if she weren't here. Talking about killing her like it was no big deal. She couldn't understand the life

mobsters lived. Killing people with no remorse. She couldn't kill a spider, let alone a person.

Vinnie tied her hands behind her back so tightly the ropes burned against her wrists.

She didn't say a word. It was for her own good to keep her mouth shut. She just wished she knew what his plans were and if they'd make it out of this mess alive.

"Hands behind your back, Ethan." His voice was suddenly raspy. Creepy.

She wanted to turn around and see if Ethan was complying with Vinnie's request, but she didn't dare. The last thing she wanted was to piss him off any more than he already was.

"Good boy," Vinnie said.

Yes, that meant he was behaving himself. Maybe they could get out of this alive with a little common sense.

"Look, Vinnie. I really need to know what we're going to do here. Are you going to kill me like the boss said or are you just fucking with me?"

"Shut your mouth, Ethan."

"Yeah, Ethan. Listen to your girlfriend and shut your fucking mouth."

"I think it's the least you could do. I mean I have a right to know if I'm going to live or die today."

"And what gives you the right to know? I don't think you deserve to know anything. Just know that I'm going to make your life a living hell."

So he wasn't going to kill them.

"Great. At least I know you aren't going to listen to the boss."

"What makes ya think I'm not going to listen?"

"You just said you were going to make my life a living hell. If you were going to kill me you wouldn't tell me something like that."

"I think you really need to shut your mouth now. I'm getting sick of hearing your bullshit."

Bailey had to agree. She really wished he'd shut his mouth.

Vinnie paced the room after successfully tying them both snug to their chairs. Dawn was upon them and Bailey was exhausted. Her body ached. All she wanted to do was crawl into a nice comfy bed and sleep. Sleep and forget about this night or the past twenty-four hours. How had her life taken such a turn? Yesterday she was sitting on her couch writing an article about men and today she was tangled up in some mobster mess. It just didn't make any sense.

She needed to get out of this safely. She needed to know she was going to live. No matter what Vinnie said, he could always turn on them in a heartbeat.

If he came for the money, he might kill them afterward.

Ethan remained quiet. Eerily quiet. Bailey couldn't understand why he suddenly decided to shut his mouth. Was he awake? She wanted to lean back and rest her head against him. She wanted to close her eyes and sleep.

Suddenly she caught a glimpse of a movement outside. Fear coiled in the pit of her stomach once again. Could this be someone the mob sent to make sure Vinnie did his job? Would this person finish it for him before they got the money?

Oh dear God, I don't want to die.

She was about to cry out when she noticed another person and then another. She turned to see where Vinnie was and if he saw them too. He was sitting at the table with his back to the window. He seemed pretty distracted with his thoughts.

Was it help outside? It had to be, right? Who else would be out there, in a group? They were going to be rescued. They were going to be saved. But by whom? Who knew she was here and had sent help? Did it matter? The only thing that mattered at this point was someone was here to save them. They were going to make it out of this mess alive and in one piece.

As if on cue men dressed from head to toe in black burst through the front and back doors. They came charging at Vinnie guns blazing, screaming for him to put his hands in the air.

Stunned was the only word she could use to describe the look on Vinnie's face. This wasn't in the plan. He hadn't expected to be caught.

Bailey noticed some of the men had "FBI" written on their shirts and some "Police". Holy shit, she couldn't believe the FBI were in her family's lake house and they were rescuing her from a dangerous mobster.

One of the men quickly untied them as they dragged Vinnie out the front door.

"Are you two all right?" he asked.

"We are now," she said, rubbing her sore wrists. "I'm not sure how long we had before he decided to kill us."

"We've been tailing him for a long time and then when we got a few calls from concerned residents we knew where to find you."

Bailey wondered who the concerned residents were.

It didn't take long to find out. Mr. Dooley, her father's oldest and dearest friend, came walking through the door.

"I told you there were trespassers up here. I knew no one was supposed to be here."

Bailey laughed. Leave it to Mr. Dooley to call the police. She never would have guessed he heard them pass by his place.

"Thank you, Mr. Dooley. I'm grateful for you calling the police. You saved our lives."

"I knew when I saw two cars coming up the road they weren't supposed to be here."

"I'm so thankful you saw us. Who knows what would've happened if you hadn't."

"Yes, thank you, sir." Ethan extended a hand.

"Just doing my part to keep our woods safe."

"Well, you did a great job."

"I second that," Ethan said. He turned to Bailey. "I'm so glad you weren't hurt."

"I'm glad you're safe too."

He pulled her into an embrace. She held him tightly and for the first time realized just how scared she was. She started to tremble in his arms. Tears racked her body and she let them flow.

"I thought we were going to die."

"I didn't think Vinnie had it in him to kill us. He's not that kind of guy. Yes, he would've taken the money and run, but he couldn't kill me."

"Oh thank God you guys are okay," Jenna said, rushing through the door.

Bailey removed herself from Ethan. "Jenna?"

"I was so scared," she said, embracing them both. "I saw that creepy guy banging on your door and then he burst through. Once he was in your apartment I knew something was wrong. I pretended I didn't know you and he just brushed by me, mumbling something about having to find them."

"How did you know we were here?"

"There was only one place you could hide where no one else would know. So what is this all about anyway? I can't believe the FBI is involved."

"It's a long story," Ethan said.

"That's an understatement." Bailey chuckled, afraid she'd cry again.

"I'm just thankful they got to you in time."

"Us too."

Jenna removed herself from them and Ethan pulled Bailey into the safety of his arms. "I'm not letting you go."

"What? What's going on here?" Jenna asked.

"That's another long story," Ethan said. "We'll tell you everything once we get back to the city."

"Excuse me, we have a few questions for you," an FBI agent said.

Bailey and Ethan nodded and told them they'd be willing to answer any questions they had.

Bailey felt Jenna's eyes on them the whole time they were answering questions. She had a ton of them herself, Bailey was sure. Bailey knew Jenna wasn't going to like the idea of her dating Ethan, but she wasn't about to give him up. She'd just found him and if she were honest with herself she was in love with him. The fear of being at death's door had given her the push she needed to see that she had true feelings for him. Feelings she intended to explore.

When the agents finished with the questioning, Bailey turned to Ethan and said, "Let's go home."

"That's the best offer I've heard in a long time."

Jenna followed behind them, asking a ton of questions. Both Ethan and Bailey laughed. They had a lot of explaining to do, but first they needed sleep and then maybe a quickie. Nah, they needed more than a quickie. They needed the whole day in bed.

About the Author

From a very young age, Amber Skyze began making up stories—the only child syndrome. Had anyone asked her back then if she would write when she grew up, she'd have laughed. It wasn't until raising children and reading all those romances that she decided, hey, I can write these. Then she discovered erotica and found her calling.

This New York transplant now resides in Rhode Island with her husband (the inspiration behind her stories), three children—who force her to work a day job—and three dogs. She's thrilled to join the authors of Ellora's Cave.

Amber welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at www.ellorascave.com.

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