

Siren Publishing

*PolyAmour*

# ENGAGING EVELYN

Jennifer Salaiz

 *Blissful Bets*



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*Blissful Bets Series*

**Jennifer Salaiz**

POLYAMOUR



Siren Publishing, Inc.  
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## **Letter from Jennifer Salaiz**

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With deep gratitude,

Jennifer Salaiz

# DEDICATION

To my mother, who's always supported me, no matter what. I love you, Mom.

And to all of the women who have been strong enough to take control of their lives and go after what they want. I admire you.

*"I believe that everything happens for a reason. People change so that you can learn to let go, things go wrong so that you appreciate them when they're right. You believe lies so you eventually learn to trust no one but yourself. And sometimes, good things fall apart so better things can fall together."*

— Marilyn Monroe

# ENGAGING EVELYN

*Blissful Bets Series*

**JENNIFER SALAIZ**

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## Chapter 1

When one is single and lives in a small town along the gulf coast of Texas, there's only one thing to look forward to: spring break. Most would think that just the high school or college crowd partakes in the monthlong, party-packed celebration. But truthfully, Evelyn and her friends had enjoyed it for years, and their ages ranged from the mid-twenties to early thirties.

Of course, they weren't an average group of women. One could say they were a bit eccentric in a way. Evelyn hadn't personally ever met another group of women who made bets the way they did. But the pain they had all experienced in their pasts allowed them to enjoy the game they played, without regret. As she looked at her new recruit, she tried to explain.

"I know, I know, you say bets like you're not sure what I mean." Evelyn looked at Natalie's confused face, trying her best to cheer up her upset friend.

"Please don't tell me that you bet on men," Natalie whispered from across the small table for two. The restaurant was one of the smaller, family-owned businesses on the island. It was one Evelyn frequented, often.

“Well, of course not!” Evelyn made her face look appalled at the question, but she couldn’t hold out for long before a smile appeared. “All right, that’s a lie. That’s exactly what we do.” A laugh burst from her lips at her friend’s parted mouth. She couldn’t help it. Natalie was downright shocked, and Evelyn loved it.

“Let me explain,” Evelyn said, leaning forward and lowering her voice. “We look for the most gorgeous men we can find, and then the bets are on. One point of the index finger toward a man, and that’s all it takes for us to get our point across to each other. With a wink, the one appointed with the task happily—and trust me, they’re very happy—stalks toward her target to see if she can get him to leave with her. And if by some chance she might not be feeling that particular man, no problems. There’s always another girl ready to take on the challenge.” Evelyn smiled.

Poor Natalie. Evelyn couldn’t help but think that she had lost her as a possible recruit. The dear girl, not a day over twenty-four and she just didn’t have what it took to put feelings aside. That was all right, though. They really didn’t need anyone else. The idea of adding someone had seemed fun when she had thought of it.

There were four of them altogether. Their looks ranged from the tall, fair-haired Sarah; to Melissa, whose hair was the darkest red Evelyn had ever seen; to Julie, with hair that was a dark brown with blond highlights; and Evelyn, whose hair was a natural midnight black, which looked exotic against her pale skin.

They had gone to school in the small tourist town of Port Aransas, Texas, and although each one of them had had a chance to escape at one point or another, they had refused to leave. This place held more to offer than any big city that Evelyn had ever been to. There was the beach, and during tourist season, there was a wide variety of men from all over. One couldn’t ask for more than that.

The blame for the betting game could only be pointed in one direction: Evelyn’s. With the growing uneasiness in their lives, something needed to change. The restlessness each of them was



feeling wasn't hard to detect. They knew they needed something to kill the time during the winter, until spring break arrived, starting the months of fun that would last during the summer. That's when everyone would come to vacation on the beach.

They had been sitting at their favorite little Cajun restaurant eating dinner when a group of men walked in and were seated two tables over. That's when it had hit Evelyn. They needed to have fun, a new game that was sure to please the entire group, kill time, and one that would sidetrack her from the deep depression she was quickly sinking into.

Natalie standing brought Evelyn's focus back to what she had come here for. She grabbed her friend's hand and looked up into her angelic face.

"Evelyn, let me think about it. Bradly and I have only been broken up for a month. I need time to process everything, but don't get me wrong. It sounds like a fun thing to do. Something I would have relished a few months ago. Just let me think it over."

Standing, Evelyn hugged Natalie and looked into her gray eyes. "Take all the time you need, but remember you promised not to tell anyone."

"I won't tell a soul. I'll see you next time you're in the office." Watching her walk away, Evelyn sat back down and drifted into her thoughts of the first time this game went into effect.

"Sarah, I bet you can't get that man over there to leave with you," Evelyn had whispered.

Everyone at the table had turned to view the group of men. The women's eyes lit up at the wickedness Evelyn's words carried. Sarah turned to her with her usual competitive face, and not the least bit intimidated, she smiled.

"Which one?" she had asked in her usual challenging tone.

Evelyn had looked the men over and settled for the one she had seen before. To her, he was the hottest out of the group. His blond hair rested above his eyebrows but was disheveled from the constant

wind along the coast. The width of his shoulders alone had her mouth watering.

“The blond,” Evelyn had whispered back to her.

“And if I get him to leave with me, what do I win?”

It had taken her a few moments to think about the reward. She hadn’t considered that part. “I’ll buy all of your drinks tonight, but if you lose, you buy mine.”

Sarah’s lips had twisted slightly, but she had nodded her head, agreeing. “All right, you’re on. But if I have to do this, then so does Julie. Julie, how about you take the brunet with the green eyes. I’d hate to have him wasted.”

Julie had laughed and raised one of her eyebrows. “Okay, Sarah. It would be a sin to pass up such a good-looking man. I think I can handle the brunet. He was the first one who caught my eye, anyway.”

They had all started laughing, and that had been it. A game that started in September had lived on and carried into the beginning of February. It had become so much a part of their lives that they looked forward to the weekends now for a whole new reason.

There had been a few curves in their game, so to speak, like the one they were in at the moment. Well, the one Evelyn was in. When the bets didn’t turn out the way they expected, they’d spice them up a bit.

Melissa had bet Sarah that she couldn’t get this man named Bill. Well, Sarah had gotten Bill, but there was one problem. She couldn’t make him come, no matter what she did. So, therefore, she bet Melissa back that she couldn’t make him come. When Melissa failed, they came and bet Evelyn.

Normally, women won’t sleep with men who their friends have had, but these women didn’t quite consider themselves normal. They were too close to care. As long as they were always safe and no feelings were involved, then they were secure to sleep with whomever they wanted.

After grabbing the ticket and paying for her lunch, Evelyn looked at her watch. It was time to get this bet over with. She had put it off the entire morning. Bill was hers, and from the picture on Sarah's phone, she didn't think she was going to regret it. If she didn't get him to come, oh well. She'd probably get hers, and that's the only thing she cared about as she approached her car.

## Chapter 2

Evelyn looked at her watch once again to make sure she was right. Shocked, she brought her gaze back down. Bill was lying there with his eyes closed, his handsome face beaded with sweat. The blond locks were starting to curl beside his ears, and right before she reached to wrap the curl around her finger, he opened his blue eyes and broke the spell. It was enough to snap her back to reality.

After fifteen minutes of her grinding her hips, of fucking him as fast as she could, his loud moans had poured through the room as he convulsed beneath her. Something about that was unnerving, for a man who supposedly hadn't come in the hours her two friends had worked on him. She had approached this with a mind-set of defeat. His coming was the last thing she had expected.

But nothing ever turned out the way she thought they would. If the truth be told, the things she relied on the most always seemed to backfire on her. But she really didn't want to think about the details of her life. Dwelling on the facts could lead her mind into places she dare not cross. It was best that she look at the situation with no emotions intact and face that she'd won the bet, and that in one hour, she was due to show a house.

Evelyn stood and walked naked toward the restroom of the small tourist hotel. Movement from behind caught her attention, but she didn't turn around. Focused on the dark brown carpet her toes were sinking into, she made her way across the small bedroom.

When the coldness of the bathroom's tile floor connected with her feet, a large arm wrapped around her waist, and she was pulled back against Bill's muscular frame.

“You didn’t come.” The air from his breath tickled her ear.

With her back molded against his body, Evelyn already had her eyes half closed. Bill’s other arm came around her hip until his fingers gripped her inner thighs and eased them apart.

“I want you to come, Evelyn. I’m not sure what made you knock on my door, but I’m not about to let you leave until I get the chance to taste you.”

A moan from the back of her throat broke through. Inch by inch, his fingers moved closer to her pussy, gripped the flesh, and kneaded it. Just as he neared, he pulled against one side of her folds. The separation was torture. The wetness seeping from her was proof enough of that.

Bill’s arm wrapped around her waist and slid up under her generous breasts. Evelyn’s nipples were desperate with wanting him to touch one, to squeeze one, anything to make the aching go away. The tingling sensation traveling from the core of her breast to the core of her stomach, attached by some woven thread of need, was almost unbearable.

Fingers edged their way between her smooth folds, working magic on her clit with every adjustment to pressure and position.

Before she could catch her breath, Evelyn’s petite body was lifted against Bill’s towering frame while he walked backward toward the bedroom. Numbly, consumed by the intense euphoria of her beckoning orgasm, she almost didn’t feel herself being seated on the small desktop.

Lips encased her nipple at the same moment two of his fingers slid inside of her. A soft cry escaped her throat at the feeling of completion those two actions caused.

Bill’s fingers began to thrust fast, which caused her back to arch. She could feel her nails digging into the wood of the desk as she tried to ground herself against the floating feeling that seemed to consume her.

Evelyn let her head fall back and felt her hair slap against the center of her back from the movement of his thumb rubbing against her clit while he pushed his fingers even faster. Over and over, he hit the perfect spot in her center, just to thrust back into her even harder the next time. Her pussy was starting to clench against him, but he pulled them out right before her orgasm could release.

Evelyn's eyes, heavy with lust, opened to catch a glimpse of his blond locks easing between her thighs. A sighed escaped her lips while she leaned all the way back against the desk and felt the cool wood against her exposed skin.

"Evelyn, are you ready to let me taste you?"

Thickness resembling sandpaper filled her throat. "Yes." She moaned at the feel of his tongue brushing against her clit.

Expertly, Bill moved down to trace her folds. At his slow pace, she wanted to scream, to grab those beautiful curls that framed his handsome face and bury him against her.

Desperate for more, Evelyn wiggled her hips. With slow flicks, his tongue brushed against her clit again, and this time, she did grab a fistful of hair. "Enough teasing," she said, staring into his eyes.

A wicked smile formed on his lips, and her orgasm exploded the moment he latched onto her pussy and sucked her folds into his mouth while sliding his tongue inside of her. It was her undoing, and her hoarse screams echoed off the walls.

Evelyn twitched with spasms while he drank in every last bit of her release. The desk felt as if it were spinning counterclockwise and slowly rocking, as if she were on a boat. The combination of the two separate feelings had her sitting up shaking and lightheaded.

"Will you come back later," Bill asked, looking up at her from his knees on the brown carpet.

It was a rule Evelyn stuck to, no matter what. She never double dipped. One man, one time, and that was it. After all, it was just a bet. One couldn't get attached to a bet, especially one who also happened to have been involved with two of her best friends.

“I’m sorry. I can’t.”

In one quick motion, she slid off the desk. Not wanting to look up, she removed her watch and continued to her original destination, the shower. Turning on the water, she listened to it pour out, letting the sound fill her ears and drown her thoughts at the same time. She got in, noticing that Bill had followed her and now stood at the door. The look she gave him caused him to stop in his advance. Maybe it was mean of her to do, but the last thing she wanted was to give him false hope.

The distant look she gave him after such intimacy couldn’t be any more bizarre than a stranger showing up at his door and kissing him into submission. Sure, he had been a little shocked at first, but his passion had quickly taken over, and before he knew it, she had slid a condom on him and fucked him senseless.

Evelyn was a take-charge kind of girl. Most guys didn’t like that, but she had yet to find one who didn’t submit to her dominant ways. She never used to be like this. Hell, years ago she would have laughed if someone would have told her how she turned out. But bitterness and hurt took the stage the moment her world crumbled.

Bill took her away from her thoughts as he handed her a towel from the doorway. She wrapped it around her and headed in the direction of her clothes, scooping the watch off the desk on her way.

“Are you sure you can’t come back tonight?” Bill whispered from behind her.

Evelyn tensed. This was the part she disliked the most. More than anyone, she knew the need for companionship. Since her sudden breakup with her ex-fiancé, Stephen, two years ago, a part of her longed to have the convenience of a partner that she could depend on for company and friendship. But a bigger part of Evelyn was scared to get her heart broken again. That was the whole reason for the love-them-and-leave-them attitude.

“I’m sorry, Bill. I can’t.”

Evelyn slid on her black lace panties and bra and refused to look at him while she buckled the black stockings into the garters. She slid her black slacks to her waist, and she buttoned them while trying to ignore the way her fingers were shaking.

Frantically, she scanned the room, looking for her red silk blouse. For the life of her, she couldn't find it. Evelyn's heart started pumping hard against her chest. Panic was setting in the longer she stayed in the room. The need to escape Bill almost felt like claustrophobia. She was suffocating from his nearness.

This was starting to happen more and more often. From what started out as a nightmare at first eased over time, but with every day that went by, oh God how her heart ached.

"Stay, please."

The red silk blouse hung down his fingers. Evelyn must have missed it when she refused to look his way. Damn it! Sarah and Melissa were going to owe her. They may only be buying drinks, but after today, she felt sure she would be drinking double. Her nerves were shot. If she hadn't known people in this town, then she might have been tempted to leave shirtless, she was so panicked.

Focusing on staying calm, Evelyn pulled the shirt out of his fingers, refusing to make eye contact. "I said I can't. Now I have to go."

Knots twisted in her chest, bringing more pain. Her throat felt like it was ready to close around a lump that threatened to choke the life out of her. She wasn't good about this part. It was so much easier to slip out while they were asleep or in the shower. Evelyn was never brave about facing them.

As quickly as she could, she tucked in her shirt and grabbed the black leather purse. Without looking back, she walked out of the room. When she slammed the door and the number fell, room number nine turned to six. Well, nine was her lucky number. It was almost like an omen slapping her in the face. *Nine, he could have been yours. Now it's six. You blew it, girl.*



Pushing the button on her keypad, she unlocked her Mustang. The car itself was just a reminder of her past troubles. Evelyn wouldn't even have this new car if it weren't for Stephen.

The police officer she had loved from the moment she met him had broken off their engagement two weeks shy of their wedding date to run off with some woman.

Everything had been perfect before the shock of his betrayal. Since he didn't have a vehicle besides his patrol car, they had traded in her car for a SUV. So much for starting a family. It was the biggest mistake she had ever made. When Evelyn had gotten the new car in his name, she never imagined that he would keep it after their breakup, only to give it to Sheila. Now that had been a slap in the face.

Angry from the memories, she sat down in her car and slammed the door. She shook her head, trying to clear the haunting thoughts of her past. It seemed that she would never get over the upset of her first love. The worst part was that she had no warning of what happened. *How can you run off with someone you met only once?* It didn't make any sense to her.

Sadly, Evelyn gazed at the now number six hotel room. Bill had opened the blinds and was looking toward her car. She didn't hesitate to start it. The tires squealed, mocking her anger as she hauled ass out of the parking lot, trying to escape the demons that were determined to chase her down.

"Don't look back, Evelyn." She whispered the words until she was out of viewing range.

With shaking hands, she grabbed the phone and dialed Melissa's number. The echoing rings filled her hollow spirit. They sounded as empty as she felt. This might have been her game, but she wasn't so sure how much longer she would last if she continued to play with fire. Eventually, everyone gets burned. She prayed that her turn wouldn't come too soon.

## Chapter 3

Showing the house to her clients had gone very well. It was perfect for them. Most of the time, Evelyn tried to stay away from the younger couples, for her own sanity, but they had been referred to her by a previous client, so there was no way for her to refuse.

They were so happy looking at the two-story starter home that it intensified the ache in Evelyn's chest, making it twist even tighter. This wasn't working. She wasn't working. Something was seriously wrong with her. She had been avoiding the truth for far too long now, prolonging the inevitable. Even now, as she admitted it to herself, she desperately tried to push the thought away.

She didn't need anyone besides her friends. At least Evelyn knew she could trust them. If she repeated this enough, maybe she'd start to believe it.

"Margaritaville" broke throughout the thick silence in her car and pulled her from the depressing thoughts. Thank God, Melissa was calling her back. She could bring Evelyn back to reality any day. The redhead was tougher than anyone she knew.

"Melissa, you owe me so big it's not even funny."

The victory in Melissa's laugh made Evelyn smile. "I told you that you wouldn't be able to do it." Melissa's cheerfulness was contagious.

"Whoa, I didn't say I didn't do it. I said you owe me big-time. It only took him fifteen minutes. The getting away part is why you owe me. I thought the guy was going to chain me to the bed so I wouldn't leave. I have to admit, I felt bad for him."

A sharp intake of breath sounded over the phone. “No fucking way you made him come that fast. I worked on him for two hours! He was like the Energizer Bunny. He kept going and going... Hold on.”

Her call for Sarah echoed throughout the real estate office. Evelyn listened while Melissa whispered to her other friend about what had happened. Sarah got on the phone.

“There’s no way. Fifteen minutes, you’re joking. Shit! Well, I got first round tonight. You better feel like drinking because we’re not stopping until it takes all three of us to carry you out.”

“That sounds better than you know. I think tonight I’ll take you up on that offer.”

Evelyn could feel her smile falling for the first time since she had gotten on the phone with them. It seemed that no matter how hard she tried, she couldn’t outrun her past, but how did one truly get over something like that? Find someone new? She wasn’t sure it was worth it.

“Are you all right?” Sarah asked in a quiet voice.

“Fine. Hey, I’m pulling into my parking lot. I’ll see you all tonight. Tell Melissa not to forget to pick me up. She has the second round.”

“Will do, honey. You get some rest. You have a big night tonight.”

“Okay, bye.” Evelyn hung up the phone and looked at her resort apartment. Most people just rented these by the day or week, sometimes the month, but she was lucky enough to snag one that went on the market for a steal. Her favorite thing about the apartment was the variety of people that came along, especially during spring break.

In less than a month, this place would be packed with tourists from all over. She almost couldn’t wait. The resort had one of the largest swimming pools in the state of Texas, not to mention the beach was practically in its backyard.

Climbing out of her car, she felt a slight chill in the air. It had to be around sixty degrees, but having grown up in Texas, it was sweater

weather to her. Anything under forty degrees and Evelyn had to be pried from her apartment. Nonstop teeth chattering wasn't the most attractive thing for a real estate agent.

Her heels clicked along the pavement while she rounded the sidewalk for her stairs. On the third step up, she felt herself come to a stop. Walking down toward her was the most gorgeous guy she had ever seen. His dark hair hung over golden eyes as he approached.

His step didn't falter, but hers sure did. Before he could notice, she dismissed him and tried to ignore her screaming body. It reacted to him upon sight, to those eyes, to those full, kissable lips. His wide, muscular chest was so visible through the white shirt he was wearing that she wanted to rip it off. Damn it, what was the matter with her? Hadn't she just finished fucking someone not two hours ago? Trying to slow her breathing, she proceeded back up to her apartment.

The stranger pressed against the railing of the narrow stairs while he waited for Evelyn to pass. Without the courage to look up, she nearly missed his smile. If it hadn't been for her peripheral vision, she would have never seen those perfect lips move.

It was almost enough to make her look, but she didn't. With a whisper, Evelyn excused herself as she moved past him and had to keep herself from running to the door. Maybe he had come for spring break a few weeks early?

Slipping her key in the lock, she tried not to ponder on what had brought him here. The last thing she needed was to think about another guy.

"Excuse me."

The male voice seemed to be almost right behind her. It made her jump in surprise. Evelyn couldn't turn around, couldn't look into those eyes again. Something about them was unsettling and all too enticing.

"Yes," she said cautiously, gripping the doorknob. The cool metal almost made her shake.

“I think you dropped this.” The amusement in his voice made her thoughts pause. What was so funny?

Damn it. Now she would have to look. Taking a deep breath, she slowly turned, avoiding direct eye contact. Instead, she looked at his lips. Big mistake. They looked so soft, so ready for her to kiss. She could almost feel them against her own. If she brought hers to brush against his, would he react and kiss her gently, or would it be one of those rough kisses that would make her forget every man she’d ever been with?

A key was raised eye level, breaking her focus from his lips. A red tag hung down from the ring, a number nine or six, depending on how one viewed it, drawn on with a black permanent marker. It was enough to stop her heart. How had she missed that before? Where in the hell had it come from? Evelyn looked down at her opened purse. She never closed it, a habit she was about to break.

“Thank you,” she said, giving the man a tight smile. No doubt he could tell she was somewhat pissed off. At least it was enough to take her focus off the desire she was feeling for this particular stranger.

Evelyn took the key, slid her fingers over the sloppily written number nine, and cracked her door. Removing her own key from the lock, she couldn’t help but feel his energy pushing against her back. She’d never felt this with a particular person before. It left her confused while she tried to find a reason to politely excuse herself.

“You’re welcome. Listen, I’m new here. I was wondering if you had any plans for later, maybe dinner.”

Evelyn closed her eyes while she faced the metal door. She let its coldness penetrate through her palm. “I’m sorry, but I can’t. I’ve already made plans for the evening. Maybe some other time.”

“I’m going to hold you to that,” he said from behind her.

Big mistake, huge. Why didn’t she just tell him no? Quickly, she turned around, but he was gone. Just like that he had disappeared. Evelyn, frantic to right her wrong, peered over the edge of the railing

and noticed the dark edge of his jeans vanishing just out of range on the bottom walkway.

“Hey, you!” Why the hell didn’t she get his name? “Hey!”

His face came into view, a look of pure amusement lighting his features. “Are you yelling at me?” He laughed.

“You know I am. How did you get down there so fast? Did you jump?”

Evelyn’s hair whirled around her face while she continued to lean over the railing to see him. The wind had picked up as the clouds covered the sun. Just holding on to the metal nearly made her teeth chatter.

“Did I jump? Now, why would I do something like that?” He smiled, bigger.

Great, a comedian. She didn’t like to be teased. It didn’t help that she was becoming lightheaded from leaning over so far.

“Do you think maybe you could come closer? I don’t think I can lean over much longer.”

“If you fall, I’ll catch you.”

His voice was filled with humor, yet something else she couldn’t quite make out. Somehow, she felt like he was serious. He seemed to have no doubt that if Evelyn fell, he could catch her. Unbelievable. Biting her lip so she wouldn’t say anything too rude, she watched him take one step forward.

“Quit messing around and get over here. I would prefer not to fall, if it’s all the same to you.”

Arrogantly, he walked back over just past the railing, looking up at her like she had missed the punch line of some joke. It was enough to annoy the hell out of her. Evelyn hated feeling like a fool, and this time, she didn’t even know why.

“About dinner, I’m not so sure that’s a good idea.”

His face fell slightly, but he looked more pleased if anything. What was the matter with this guy? She was trying to be nice, but he just wasn’t getting it.

“You already gave me your word. I’ll be here tomorrow night to pick you up at, say, seven?”

“Oh my God, are you serious? I don’t even know you. No, I can’t. It’s...complicated. I don’t do dates. Plus, I didn’t give you my word. How can you even say that?”

“I like complicated. Seven it is,” he said, nodding.

Evelyn watched him walk away. She could feel her lips part in shock. This guy had problems. Was he even sane? Well, she wouldn’t be here at seven tomorrow. He’d have fun waiting. It would serve him right for being so pushy toward her. She was, after all, a stranger to him. Didn’t most people who did dates know each other more than ten minutes?

The door closed behind her, and she locked it, still half in a daze from what had just happened. Evelyn brushed her finger against the plastic still clutched against her palm. Shit! Now she would have to go and drop off the key. Bill must have slipped it in her purse when she wasn’t looking.

What in the hell was she going to do? Evelyn collapsed on her black leather couch and kicked her stilettos to the floor. Deep breaths, that’s all she could do. Robotically, her head turned into the direction of her purse sitting beside her on the couch. The phone was sticking out of the top like a red flag. She grabbed it, knowing just who to call. Julie answered on the third ring.

“Evelyn, what’s up? You’re calling early.”

At her soothing voice, Evelyn smiled and, closing her eyes, leaned back against the cool leather. “I only had one house to show today. How are things at the office? Hopefully, Henry isn’t giving you too much trouble for being late to court.”

“No, he’s in a good mood today, thank God. Mr. Boss-Man must have got him some ass last night.”

Evelyn laughed. She couldn’t help it. Henry owned the law firm where Julie worked. She had been a paralegal there before finishing school to become a lawyer. Now, she practically ran the place when

Henry wasn't in the office. Julie was a damn good lawyer, specializing in divorce and child custody cases.

"Evelyn, what's wrong. Something is bothering you, I can tell. Talk to me."

She rolled her eyes against the tears already starting to collect. "I'm not sure. I thought the bets would help. They're not helping. If anything it's getting harder." Evelyn noticed the last of the words almost didn't make it from her lips. This was bad. Worse than she wanted to admit out loud.

"You're lonely." Julie got quiet for a few seconds. "I'm going to give you a word of advice. You've been running for too long now. I understand you don't want to get into a relationship, but you need to take the first step. Get a boy toy or fuck buddy—it'll help."

"A boy toy, what the hell is that?"

Julie laughed. "It's someone you fuck on a regular basis, no relationship attached, if you know what I mean. You fuck each other, maybe cuddle at night, and then lead your lives as if you're single, no jealousy or messy breakups. It's perfect."

Evelyn twisted her mouth. "I don't know, cuddle? It sounds a little intimate."

"That's the point, Ev. You get intimacy without a relationship. It'll fill the hole, trust me. I have one myself, and I still get to play Bets, so it's all good."

"You might have a point. Who's your boy toy? You never told me you had one."

Julie laughed again. "No way. It's too embarrassing. Just take my advice and find yourself one. I have to go. My client just got here."

Evelyn hung up the phone and looked back at the number nine. Would Bill make a good boy toy? It's not like she had to tell anyone. With a flick of her wrist, Evelyn tossed the key on her glass coffee table and tried hard not to stare at the six that twisted her heart. Nine and six, which would it be this time? Why was she starting to feel like



this was some sort of sign for her to open her eyes to something she was clearly missing?

## Chapter 4

With one last look in the mirror, Evelyn was trapped by the sight of her reflection. The mass of dark waves swirled around her face, a face that looked paler than usual. Large green eyes, trimmed in blue, were almost blacked out by her pupils.

She looked as scared as she felt. Why was the thought of possibly spending the night with Bill so hard to come to grips with? Well, for one, she hadn't slept in bed with a man since Stephen. Deep down, she knew she didn't have to do this. She didn't, so then why did she want to? Evelyn exhaled louder than necessary. She had no idea. With determination, she tried to focus on her appearance.

Black probably wasn't the choice color to wear to make herself glow. It emphasized the paleness of her skin, which, for the coast, wasn't a good thing. The men who frequented the area seemed to like their women tanned. Oh well. The girls were waiting, and she didn't have time to contemplate what she was going to do, who she was going to be with, or what she was going to wear. One minute at a time, and if she decided to go to Bill or someone else, then she would, end of story.

Evelyn slid on her black stilettos to go along with the short black dress that hugged her curves. The open back was a little too much to wear into the cool weather, so she grabbed her black leather jacket, sliding it on. She had already transferred her makeup and ID into the black clutch and grabbed it as she walked out of the door.

The last person Evelyn expected to see was the golden-eyed stranger standing two doors down from her on the walkway. The keys stopped jingling in her hand as she froze.

“Now, now, where are you going looking like that?”

The look on the stranger’s face had her wanting to run down the stairs. My God, this guy was dangerous to her heart. He looked about ready to eat her alive. There was no hiding what his intentions were. He wanted her. That was evident from his eyes. Just thinking about the possibilities of how good they’d be together made her glance away from him. She couldn’t even risk thoughts leading in that direction.

The blood coursed like fire throughout Evelyn’s body. “I’m going out with friends. Have a great night.”

She spun around, locked the door as fast as she could, and headed right for the stairs. There was nothing to say, and she didn’t want to talk anymore. Panicked, her mind screamed for her to run. If she didn’t leave as fast as she could, she might just pull Mr. Drop-Dead-Gorgeous back into her apartment and never let him go.

As much as he would make a great boy toy, he was way too delectable. This stranger was someone a girl would fall in love with, and he wouldn’t think twice about breaking her heart. Well, that wasn’t going to happen to her again.

“Where are you and your friends going? Maybe I can meet you there.”

His words had Evelyn stumbling. She could feel herself pitching forward. Her air was suddenly cut off by a massive arm wrapping around her lower stomach.

“I told you I would catch you.”

The heat emanating from his skin was enough to warm her against the chill in the air. She still couldn’t catch her breath, which was ragged, at best. “Thank you,” she said, breathless. “You move really fast.”

The spikes of her stilettos were on the very edge of the stair. Leaning forward, she had never felt so safe. It was very disturbing. For a moment, she was sure she was going to fall down the stairs. She still could if he let go.

“Can you let me up now?” She groaned against his arm.

“Of course, although I have to admit, I kind of like you helpless like this.”

Evelyn was glad that she wasn’t facing him or she might have hit him. Plus, she would hate for him to drop her. Tumbling down the stairs in a short microfiber dress couldn’t end with a graceful landing.

The stranger spun her around in his arms, holding her against him. Without too much strength, Evelyn moved away and stepped down one step.

“So, are you going to tell me where you’re going tonight? I think I deserve that, with saving your life and all.”

“No, I’m sorry. I don’t think that would be a good idea. Plus, I have plans for afterward so...” Evelyn let her voice trail off in hope that he would catch the hint that she already had plans with someone else. Maybe he would give up and leave her alone.

“Is that right? Well, hmm. I guess I’ll see you tomorrow at seven, then. I hope you have fun tonight.”

Once again, he had managed to shock her. There was not going to be a dinner date tomorrow! Dumbfounded, she watched him walk back up the stairs and never look back. The wind raced up her legs, which caused a chill to go down her spine while she thought about what had just happened.

She wasn’t sure how long he had been out of view. It seemed she was lost in her thoughts, once again. What part of her rejection hadn’t he understood? She wasn’t meeting him for dinner, damn it!

As fast as her stilettos would carry her, Evelyn raced to her car. The parking lot was dimly lit, but the light didn’t penetrate the dark shadows that lurked in the pools of darkness between the distanced light poles.

Scanning the shadows while she made her way through the deserted lot, she searched, hesitantly. There was a feeling she couldn’t shake of being watched. It caused chills to race down her spine. Without wasting any more time, she climbed in her car, locking the

doors behind her. The cold leather bit into the back of her legs, making her teeth chatter.

Melissa had been notified earlier not to pick her up. Evelyn assumed that she knew she had plans for afterward, but Melissa didn't question her, which she was thankful for. Without lying to her, which Evelyn didn't feel good about, she wouldn't have known what to tell her.

The engine roared to life, vibrating her whole body with the purr of the GT's exhaust system. The heater came to life, giving her time to warm up before she drove the thirty minutes to Corpus Christi. The girls always met up at the Martini Bar and sometimes club-hopped until closing time at two in the morning. Just the thought of letting loose and having fun eased her tension.

Evelyn drove out of the parking lot and onto the highway that led to Corpus and let her mind play over the two new men in her life, for today. One, she didn't even know the stranger's name. He was, well...odd for one, and yet, he was gorgeous. There was no denying that. But something about him just didn't sit right with her. It had to be his eyes. They intimidated her. Evelyn had never seen anyone with that color eyes before.

Bill was great to have sex with. As for his personality, well, who knew? She didn't know the first thing about the guy besides him mumbling something about a fishing tournament he was in town for. Those things only lasted for what, a few days? Did that mean he was leaving soon?

She'd have to ask when she stopped by his room later, if she stopped by. Evelyn doubted that he would care since he left her the key to begin with. But if he was indeed leaving so soon, then how was he going to become her boy toy? Damn, that would pose a problem.

She jumped the Mustang to ninety on the deserted highway. Nervously, Evelyn looked at the clock, which read ten-thirty. She was already late and still had a good fifteen minutes before she got to the bar. Glancing over at the black scenery surrounding her, she couldn't

help but think about how it seemed to be almost closing in on her. A heavy feeling settled in her chest. The minutes rolled by while she fought to breathe.

The sound of the phone ringing without a song playing for a ringtone made her want to groan. The number was private. The thought crossed her mind whether to answer it. It could be a prospective client, but with it being so late at night, she doubted it.

“Hello?”

“Evelyn, this is Sarah. Where are you? We’ve been waiting for ten minutes. You’re usually one of the first ones here.”

“I’m a few minutes out. Whose phone are you on? It’s a private number.”

Sarah’s rich laughter echoed. “I have no idea, but he’s hot.”

“All right, give me a few minutes. I’m coming up to S.P.I.D.” The term was the abbreviation for South Padre Island Drive. It was so much easier than saying the whole damn thing.

The deserted highway turned into a cluster-fuck. It seemed everyone was going out tonight. All three lanes on each side were jam-packed with cars.

After weaving out of the endless traffic—safely, of course—Evelyn managed to exit and get on Everhart Street. The traffic wasn’t any better there, but after what felt like endless minutes, she managed to find a place to park in the crowded lot.

The large bar was crammed with people. Loud music pumped through her body while she maneuvered around the large crowds. Working her way to their regular booth, she almost got a beer spilled on her by a stumbling blonde.

“Evelyn!”

Julie ran up to her and almost knocked her down. The smell of Jack Daniel’s and Coke on her breath was enough to take Evelyn’s breath away. Jesus, she prayed that her friend wasn’t already wasted.

“Ev, there’s someone I want you to meet,” Julie said, pulling Evelyn a few feet away. “Paul, this is Evelyn.”

She gestured with her hand to a large, toned blond. The moment Evelyn looked into his eyes she gasped. They were the same golden color as the man who was staying two doors down.

For a color so odd, seeing two different people with the same uniqueness in the same day was a little shocking, to say the least.

“Ev, this is Paul,” she said, raising her eyebrows.

The movement caught Evelyn’s attention, and she watched as Julie’s finger rose to her and in slow motion pointed toward Paul. It was their initial signal.

A wicked grin crossed Evelyn’s face. This was what she needed to get her mind off the growing anxieties. Seductively, she looked back toward Paul and put on her most dazzling smile. Well, if she couldn’t have one of them with golden eyes, she might as well have the other. Paul was safe. The stranger wasn’t. At least Paul wasn’t staying practically next door. And, as attractive as he was, he didn’t have that weird pull to her.

“It’s nice to meet you, Paul.”

Evelyn shook his hand while he smiled back down at her. His hand was warm to the touch, almost too warm. It reminded her of the stranger next door. Heat rushed through her at just the thought of him. What was so special about him that her mind couldn’t push him out no matter how hard she tried?

Paul held her hand for a few seconds longer than etiquette required, which was all right with her, but he broke the connection as soon as her mind acknowledged the thought. She took a step back, right into a brick wall. The abruptness of the stop had her spinning around, and looking right into another pair of golden eyes.

“Paul, I see you’ve met my neighbor. This is the one I was telling you about earlier.”

“Evelyn’s your neighbor, really?” Paul asked, raising his eyebrows, as if they shared a secret she didn’t know about.

This wasn’t happening. She looked back and forth between the two men, so different, yet so alike. By the color of their eyes and their

build, they could have passed for relatives. Both of them had to be at least a few inches over six feet. But somehow, she didn't think they were related.

"Yes, she really is," he said, cutting his eyes toward Paul. "So, Evelyn is it? Since we were never properly introduced, I'm Brandon," her stranger said, grinning.

He held out his hand and Evelyn paused in taking it. Against her better judgment, she placed her hand into his and squeezed it a bit harder than she probably should have. His laugh had more than one head turning. The sound caused her body to react. Damn it!

All of the girls looked over, and their eyes froze on Brandon. Evelyn silently laughed to herself. This stranger was becoming a quick pain in her ass. An idea popped into her head. She could bet one of the girls to take care of him. Maybe then he would get off her back.

Evelyn raised her finger and stopped. For the life of her, she couldn't point to anyone in particular, and she wasn't sure why. Perplexed, her brain couldn't interpret what to do.

Evelyn felt puzzled. Her lips parted while she looked toward the girls. They were just as confounded as she was. What in the hell was wrong with her? Still, she was standing there with her finger pointing halfway in the air.

"Will you gentlemen please excuse us ladies? We'll be back shortly."

Melissa's voice penetrated through Evelyn's stupor, but she still remained frozen. Hands grabbed both sides of her arms. Hazy, she could feel herself moving, yet it felt more like she was floating across the room.

The door flung open, thanks to Sarah's frantic shove. "All right, what in the hell is going on with you, Evelyn? You've been acting weird all day." Agitated, she flung her blond hair over her shoulder.

"Are you not feeling well," Melissa asked, rubbing Evelyn's arm.

Relief filled Evelyn at Julie's silence. From their conversation on the phone earlier, Evelyn had no doubt she knew exactly what was



going on. “I’m fine. Just surprised, that’s all. I wasn’t expecting to see my new neighbor here.”

“You mean that hunk is your neighbor? Holy shit! You lucky bitch. No wonder you changed your mind about placing a bet. You’ve decided you want him yourself. I don’t blame you at all,” Sarah said, fixing her hair in front of the mirror.

“No, you’ve got it all wrong. You see, he’s more of a nuisance than anything. He set up a date for us at seven tomorrow, even though I told him no. He doesn’t give up. I’ve made it as clear as I possibly can. If any of you are interested, have at it.”

Even as she said the words, Evelyn’s throat threatened to close. Whatever was happening to her, it had to stop, soon. She didn’t even know this guy. There was no reason for her body or mind to be betraying her like this. He was good-looking, so what. So were all the guys she bet on.

“If you say he’s free, then I’m all over him.” Sarah looked over and smiled at her.

Evelyn tried to give her the most genuine smile she could, but failed horribly. It felt more pained than anything.

“Ev, are you sure you’re all right?” Melissa asked, concerned.

“I’m fine, really. Say, don’t you ladies owe me some drinks?”

Cheers echoed off the restroom walls, and a real smile started to appear. No more self-pity. Evelyn had had a plan when she came here, and that was to have a good time. It was time she stuck with it.

“That’s my girl,” Julie said, pulling her out of the restroom.

## Chapter 5

They sat back at their booth. Brandon and Paul were nowhere to be seen. Evelyn thanked her lucky stars and downed her first apple martini. Closing her eyes, she basked in the flavor of her favorite drink.

“We should go to the hot tub. It’s perfect weather, plus I bet we can get really naughty with whoever we decide to take,” Melissa said, looking around the crowded bar.

“Sorry, everyone, but I have a bet and I fully intend not to take him anywhere near the resort.” Evelyn searched through the groups of people for Paul. So what if he knew Brandon. A bet was a bet. Bill would just have to wait until tomorrow.

“He’s definitely scrumptious,” Julie said, downing her drink.

The laughter floated around the table as hot guys walked past. Before they knew it, everyone had a bet placed for tonight. Evelyn had to have been on her fourth apple martini when Paul and Brandon showed back up. She was laughing so hard that she almost didn’t notice. It had to have been the laughing, or the fact that she was completely bombed. Drinking wasn’t something Evelyn was very good at.

“How about a dance,” Paul asked, reaching for her hand.

Evelyn stood, still steady enough to hide how drunk she was, and laced her fingers through his. The warmth emanating from Paul had diminished considerably since the last time her hand was in his. They walked to the dance floor, and Evelyn, picking right up on the rhythm of the music, swayed her hips to the hypnotic sound.

The feel of Paul's firm body against the softness of hers had Evelyn closing her eyes, but all she could imagine was Brandon against her. Thick arms enfolded her stomach and brought her closer against him. His hard cock pressed against her lower back, and she felt the length grow with every sway of her hips.

"Let's leave, just you and me," Paul breathed against her ear.

Evelyn turned, not breaking the rhythm of her hips. Smiling, she wrapped her arms around his neck and drew him closer. Paul leaned down, bringing his arm tightly around her back and pulling her against him as he bent to whisper in her ear.

"I want you. I want to taste every inch of your body. Leave with me."

Evelyn bit her lip, feeling her body tighten in response to his words. "Maybe I will. We'll have to see. I'm not done yet with my friends. I plan to stay and get drunker still, and then if you still want to leave, we'll leave."

Paul crushed his lips to hers, engulfing her mouth with the taste of peppermint the moment his tongue slid inside. She moaned at his taste and tightened her arms around his neck. Brandon flashed behind her closed lids and she nearly gasped at the unexpected vision. At the realization of what she was doing so plainly on the dance floor, she jerked back.

"Come, let's go and sit with our friends," she said, tugging him to leave. He groaned, bringing her back against him.

"All right, we'll do drinks and have fun, but then I *will* taste you." Shivers raced down her body at his words.

\* \* \* \*

Brandon sat at the booth watching his friend and Evelyn. The smile that radiated off her face, followed by that kiss, had him clutching his fists together.

Paul wasn't someone he wanted around her. Yes, he was his friend, but Brandon had a job to do, and Evelyn was his job. He had been asked by a very good friend of his to take care of her. Not to hurt her physically, but more, emotionally.

It seemed that she took her bets very seriously, and when his friend wanted to see her again, she denied him. Taylor was never denied, and for some reason, he couldn't hypnotize her, which alone had intrigued Brandon. What human could not be swayed by a vampire's gaze? It was unheard of. The second time should have been easier.

From the flashes he had gathered the moment Evelyn had looked into his eyes, he knew that she harbored a deep hurt. His job was going to be easier than he thought.

Multiple scenes played in his head of her crying on several occasions. One in particular was of her in a wedding dress, sitting in what looked to be a bedroom. She had been clutching a bottle of liquor, burning pictures in a trash can that could have burnt the house down.

Hurt like she had been through was something Brandon never wanted her to feel again, but he had to focus on his job, and his job was to do exactly that. Paul didn't, of course, know what she had been through or what Brandon had been asked to do. He didn't have the same gift as Brandon, so he'd never know what was going on.

As they approached, Evelyn was swaying a little against Paul's side. Brandon stood from her former seat at the booth. It was time. Paul looked at him, knew he was thinking something, and gave him a look of curiosity and confusion. Brandon would have to explain things later.

\* \* \* \*

Evelyn sat down, looked at her phone, and noticed how late it was getting. Paul wanted her to leave with him tonight. He was gorgeous,

but something told her not to do it, for the first time, to reject a bet and go home. Should she? Why was she suddenly confused? Not two minutes ago, she was kissing him on the dance floor.

Everyone at the table started laughing. Looking up, Evelyn didn't see anything that was funny. She finished off the apple martini that had been waiting for her and decided for once to listen to the nagging inside her head.

"I should be going," she yelled across the table toward Sarah, who was sizing up Brandon and, never breaking her stare, just nodded her head like a puppet.

"Where are you going?" Melissa asked, from next to Evelyn.

"I'm not feeling well all of a sudden. I'll call you tomorrow. Have fun tonight, okay?"

Melissa pouted. "Do you need me to take you home? You've had a lot to drink. I don't think it would be safe for you to drive."

"I'll be fine. Fresh air will help." Evelyn grabbed her purse and stood. Paul walked over to her. Her mind raced for what she was going to tell him. Why did she feel so guilty? It wasn't like she was lying. The thought of leaving with him did make her stomach turn slightly.

"We're going to have to do a rain check. I'm not feeling so well."

Paul smiled at her tenderly. "I can take you home and get you tucked into bed. I promise to be a perfect gentleman."

"No thanks," Brandon said, wrapping his arm around Evelyn's shoulder. "I'll do that. We're neighbors after all. It'll be easier for you that way, Paul, less driving. Plus, I'm ready to go home."

Paul narrowed his eyes, looking annoyed, but remained quiet.

Sarah glanced over at Evelyn, her face close to panic. Confused, Evelyn didn't know what to do. She didn't want Brandon riding home with her. That was asking for trouble.

"Sarah lives on the island, too. I'm sure when she's ready to go you could catch a ride with her," Evelyn rushed to say.

Sarah nodded her head a little too desperately. Poor girl, Evelyn thought, she wanted this man, bad.

“Actually, I want to go home now, and since we live two doors down, it would be the easiest solution.”

Well, shit, this wasn’t good.

“Well, you see...” She tried to think of a way to come right out and say it without making herself sound like a liar. “I think I’d rather be alone. I—”

“Sounds great, you ready?” he said, cutting her off.

His arm tightened around her shoulders. Evelyn was being pulled to the door before she could even open her mouth to politely reject him. Did this guy not understand what in the hell she was trying to tell him? Maybe he did and that’s why he already had her in the parking lot. This man had rejection issues.

Thinking of something fast to stop him, she remembered what she told him earlier and didn’t care if her half-lie about not feeling good came out. “I hate to be so blunt, but I don’t think you understand. I told you earlier that I had plans for afterward. I’m not going home right now. If I’m lucky, I won’t be home until the sun rises. Get my point. Sorry to reject your friend like that, but something told me to stay away from him.”

They came to a stop in the middle of the parking lot.

“Smart girl. You *should* stay away from him. I see what you’re saying. Let me ask you a question, though. You’re obviously going to meet a man, correct?”

Evelyn was quiet for a few seconds, not sure what in the hell she was going to do when she left, but finally she decided to enlighten him. “Yes, that’s right.”

“Would you say that you love this man?”

She laughed. She couldn’t help it. “Of course not.” After she said it, she wished she could have taken it back. He was obviously getting to something, and she wasn’t sure she wanted to know.

“Then why are you going to him? You don’t love him. Do you usually give away your passion so freely?”

Anger began to thrum inside of her. “It’s none of your business what I do with my passion, as you so nicely put it. Let me give you some insight since you seem to be missing the flashing sign that so clearly says, ‘Not interested.’ I fuck whomever I want, and if I need companionship, then that’s no one’s business but mine.”

Evelyn regretted the harsh words as soon as they were out. She closed her eyes to block off the tears. He was right. She did freely give away her body, her passion, and, slowly, her soul.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have pried into your private life. Forgive me.” Brandon’s voice lowered with what sounded like regret.

His palm cupped her cheek so softly she wasn’t sure if she was imagining it. Evelyn opened her eyes and couldn’t stop the tear that collided with his thumb. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have snapped at you. Let’s go. I’ll drop you off.”

She stepped away from him and headed in the direction of the car. The lights flashed as she unlocked the door. Evelyn needed to get this guy home. If anything, he might have been right, but he also had convinced her that she needed someone more stable in her life, a damn boy toy.

“Are you okay? Really, I’m sorry. I was out of line.”

Without a word, she opened the door, gesturing for him to get in the passenger side. “I’m fine now, completely sober if you must know. Now get in.”

The engine roared, mainly from her pushing on the accelerator. It seemed that she was in one of those moods again, just like earlier with Bill. “I hope you like to go fast, Brandon, or else you got in the wrong car.”

Evelyn peeled out of the parking lot and, looking over at him, tried her best not to smile as they slid sideways onto the access road. *When you can’t outrun your problems, then outdrive them.* Well, maybe that wasn’t the best motto, but shit, it worked for her.

“How in the hell did you learn to drive like this,” he asked, clutching onto the seat.

Laughter burst from her mouth. “You really want to know?”

He looked over, his face nervous. “Yeah, tell me, I think.”

Evelyn pushed down the accelerator and jumped the speedometer to over a hundred miles an hour. “My ex-fiancé was a cop. He taught me a lot of cool things to do with a car.”

She weaved through the traffic so easily, checking all her mirrors. Soon they would be out of the city and it would be deserted again, just how she liked it. Deserted, just like her.

“So, how did the fiancé become an ex? Or is that too personal,” he asked, dropping his volume.

Evelyn let his words wash over her. She felt surprised that she suddenly wanted to spill her guts to someone, to anyone who didn’t know her on a personal level. Maybe it was his comment about giving away her passion. Whatever it was, she needed to get it off her chest.

“Stephen and I were together for a long time. I had visions of the white-picket fence, the whole nine yards. He came to me two weeks before our wedding, while my mother was doing a fitting on my dress, and told me that he couldn’t marry me”—Evelyn paused—“that he had found someone else and was in love with her. I was left to explain everything to everyone.”

Silence filled the small space, but Evelyn went on. “Her name was Sheila. They met once and the next thing I know he’s professing his undying love. I really hope, though, for his sake, he’s happy. He was a really great guy, before all that.”

Evelyn slowed down the engine to the seventy-mile-an-hour speed limit. Now that she had gotten that out in the open, out loud, she felt better. Well, that was cheaper than going to a shrink.

“I’m sorry for what’s happened. The guy was a jerk for putting you through that. Do you want me to beat the shit out of him?”



Evelyn laughed. “No, that’s okay. Assault on an officer would just put the icing on the cake. Plus, it was over two years ago. I don’t think that’s quite fair.”

“Are you still going to meet that other guy tonight?” Brandon asked.

Bill. Would she go to meet him? With a glance in Brandon’s direction, she felt her body react to his eyes. They seemed to stand out in the darkness of the car. No, no Bill tonight. Brandon was an option, though.

The idea definitely made her uneasy. But why should it? Where was her take-charge attitude? So, she wanted this guy. He didn’t affect her like his friend had. Her brain wasn’t screaming run, just caution. Would one night of fucking Brandon be as dangerous as she made herself believe? Maybe not if she thought of it as her own personal bet. He probably wasn’t going to be in town more than a few weeks, maybe even days. What could it hurt? Tomorrow, she could just go back to ignoring him, right?

“Are you offering to take his place?” There, that wasn’t so bad. The shocked look on his face was even better. It made up for the fear she had felt.

“What exactly are we talking here, whips and chains, any torturing?”

“Not tonight.” She laughed. “You just have to please me. Do you think you can do that or is that asking too much? It could be a hard job if you’re not sure exactly what you’re doing.”

Evelyn let her words challenge him, and he knew exactly what she was doing. He wasn’t the least bit fooled. Good. Let the games begin. As long as she thought of this as a game, then she couldn’t get hurt.

## Chapter 6

Warm fingers settled on her thigh and inched toward the hem of her dress. The need to close her eyes was automatic. Instead, she focused on the headlights breaking through the blackness of the abandoned highway.

“You don’t intimidate me. As much as I like your straightforwardness, I think this time you might have bitten off more than you can chew. You won’t be disappointed.”

Evelyn looked over at him, smiling at him challengingly. He may have been full of confidence, but when it came to sex, so was she. Her record in Bets was unbeatable. There were tricks she knew that she’d never used on anyone before. It was time she pulled something out of her hat and knocked him down a peg or two.

“If you’re as good as you think you are, surprise me. Tell me something about myself that you couldn’t possibly know.”

“Like what?” He smiled. “Like how I know you’re not wearing any panties underneath that little black dress.” He moved his fingers up a fraction. “Or maybe you want me to tell you how I know that you bathe with a soap that is combined with both cherry blossoms and almonds. The heat from your body is perfuming the car with the smell. Or the thing that would shock you the most is how I know that right now, at this moment, you’re ovulating.”

Evelyn slammed on her brakes and came to a complete stop on the shoulder of the road. Her eyes cut into his golden ones. The air felt trapped inside her lungs as uncertainty took over. She knew something wasn’t right about the guy! Somehow her mind kept trying

to tell her, but she wouldn't listen. "How do you know all of that? It's impossible."

The beating of her heart increased, and her breathing, so deep that an ache was starting to fill her chest. Fear seized her mind. The no panties, all right, she might be able to buy that. The soap was questionable, but the ovulating, that was a little too much. He did say that, didn't he?

"You did say ovulating, right? I mean, I didn't just imagine that, did I? Ovulating..."

His fingers pulled her thighs apart a fraction of an inch. She watched him inhale deeply, closing his eyes. "No, you didn't imagine it. What I said was right, you're ovulating. Damn, you smell so good."

Brandon opened his eyes, looking back into hers. "So, did I tell you something only you would know? You seem afraid. I can smell the fear pouring off you. I assure you I have no intention of harming you."

"What are you?" Evelyn whispered.

The question didn't seem the least bit silly. He couldn't be human. There was no way, was there? The heat from his body, his eyes, his smell, it was too much and was starting to make her question life in general. She'd never been one to believe in anything. Evelyn considered herself a skeptic, through and through, but his serious expression shook her to the very core.

"What do you mean?" he asked, puzzled.

"Exactly what I asked. There's no way for you to know what you just said, if you're human."

He laughed. "All right, all right, I'm sorry. It was a bad joke. I only knew the no-panties thing because when you almost fell, I didn't feel any. As for the cherry blossom soap, well, let's just say it was a lucky guess. The ovulation part, truthfully, I made that up. Don't be mad. It was just to take away some of your confidence."

Evelyn heard the words, but wasn't sure if she could believe him. But what else could she believe, that some...thing was in her car? Not likely.

"That's some really good guessing you did. I'm still not sure what to think. It's a little creepy," she said, narrowing her eyes at him. Even though her brain accepted his response, something deep inside of her couldn't dismiss his words.

"Let's just forget about the joke. It was bad timing, I guess."

The hand that had never left her thigh progressed its way under her dress. Thing or not, at that moment she didn't care. He could have been the boogiemer and she would have ignored the fact. All Evelyn knew was that he was moving closer to her, hovering over the center console, and brushing his finger against her clit. His fingers were cool against the warmth of her pussy.

The need to rush home made her bring the car back onto the road. All she had to do was make it the next five miles. It beat fucking him in her passenger seat, although it was tempting.

His finger slid lower and traced her wet folds. Evelyn moaned, shifting. Hunger consumed her. The coolness of his fingers was so different from the warmth she had originally felt from him.

Brandon's lips eased down over her rapidly beating pulse on her throat. The hot wetness of his tongue had her fingers going numb from gripping the steering wheel with all of her strength.

The lights of the resort were coming into view. It wouldn't be long now. Could she make it without pulling the car over first? It was tough to say. The teasing of his fingertip rubbing along the edge of her opening was probably going to be her undoing.

"You don't seem so tough now. Do you usually like to be in control, Evelyn?"

She opened her mouth to say yes, but it came out as a scream when he plunged his finger deep inside of her. Evelyn's hips bucked forward to meet his quick thrusts. The car was slowing down, due to

her having taken her foot off the accelerator. She couldn't think past the sensations that were rushing through her.

"I like to be in control too, Evelyn. How about we let me take control tonight? Do you think you could do that?"

Evelyn, submit? It made her pause. She wasn't sure she liked that. But if she said no, would he stop pleasuring her? The last thing she wanted was to be told what to do, but she wasn't stupid enough to stop those magical fingers.

"Yes," she said huskily.

The finger slid out just as they were pulling into the dimly lit parking lot. Emptiness settled over her, leaving her feeling incomplete.

The engine died with the turn of the key, and Brandon was already opening her door. The cool wind traced the length of her legs, but she didn't feel anything due to the shock of how fast Brandon had made it all the way around to her.

He held out his hand, and she took it in awe. The light in the parking lot cast a glow over his face that made him look almost angelic. Evelyn's whole body was enflamed with a heat so intense that she felt like she had a fever. Her legs were shaking horribly as she stood.

"Your room or mine," Brandon asked, wrapping his arm around her waist. The heat that had warmed her before was gone. The only warmth she had was coming from her pussy at how his large arm flexed around her. Where was his warmth?

The question he asked infiltrated her mind. It couldn't be her apartment. That was her sanctuary, one that she didn't want clouded with memories of any man. Memories were plentiful enough in her head—no need to bring them to life.

"Yours would probably be better."

He practically carried her up the stairs, he was moving so fast. Evelyn kept her head angled toward his large chest, blocking her face from anyone who might be up late. She never had done anything like

this where she resided. It was always motels farthest away from where she lived.

The smell of his cologne had her snuggling closer. She wanted to bury her face deep against his skin, to bottle his scent and take it with her wherever she went. Evelyn shook her head, trying to clear the obsessive thoughts. They hadn't even done anything yet, and here she was, already starting to get involved.

Brandon's door swung open. He hadn't even bothered locking it. Of course, he was wearing the exact thing she had seen him in before she left. He hadn't even changed out of his red shirt and a pair of jeans. It wasn't exactly club wear, but the way the shirt hugged his body, it didn't matter. He could have left with any girl there, in a heartbeat.

The softness of Brandon's lips pressing against hers coaxed them open. He tasted like peppermint, too. Had he not drunk anything at the Martini Bar? He tasted so good, just like Paul had. Wanting to take in more of his flavor, she rubbed her tongue against his. The door clicked behind them.

Darkness was heavy against her closed lids. She opened them just in time for him to pull off her jacket, pick her up, and carry her toward the back of the apartment where the bedroom was.

Evelyn wrapped her arms around his neck and pressed her breasts against his chest. The microfiber dress was a thin veil between them. With no bra on, she thought it was almost as good as being topless. Her nipples tightened painfully against him.

Brandon made his way through the thick darkness as if he could see where he was going. She couldn't see inches in front of her face, yet he made his way around a corner and into what she assumed was the bedroom with ease.

Light washed over the room, blinding her long enough to miss seeing where she was being laid. Evelyn knew it was a bed, but she would have liked to have seen it. There was no time to glimpse anything besides the ceiling before his weight settled over her.

All thoughts vanished the moment his lips touched hers, and she could feel the bulge through his jeans press against her pussy. Wanting him closer, she wrapped her legs around his waist.

When Evelyn broke their kiss, golden eyes stared into hers. Thoughts exploded into Evelyn's mind. What was she *doing*? Hadn't she repeatedly rejected this guy? Her head swirled. Was it still the alcohol? She had felt fine in the car. The memories flooded back. Bet, right, that's what she was doing. Fingers brushed across her face and drew her eyes to him.

"Evelyn, stop thinking so much and kiss me."

Pushing away the doubts, she ran her tongue against his lips and felt him shudder. The ragged breath coming from above caressed her face, filled her lungs with his sweetness.

"You're very good at seducing men, aren't you?"

"Yes, but I'm usually not so good with taking orders. But for you, tonight I'll make an exception."

He pulled off his clothes, revealing a perfect, sculptured body. All Evelyn could do was stare at every inch of him, from his muscular chest, to his perfect abs, to his thick cock, which was hard and ready for her. Her pussy tightened just thinking about him entering her. She took off her dress as fast as she could, ripping it in the process.

Brandon didn't waste any time. At his weight lying against her, she noticed that his body seemed even cooler than before. Maybe she was just really hot. Was she getting sick?

"So, you'll do anything I tell you to?" he asked.

Brandon kissed her deeply, nearly bruising her lips. Evelyn nodded her head yes, not wanting to break away from him. He tasted so good. With the tip of her teeth, she bit the bottom of his lip and sucked it into her mouth. A groan shook her chest that vibrated all the way to the core of her stomach, making her clit pulse.

The weight of Brandon's cock came to rest on her lower stomach. She moaned at the hardness that she couldn't wait to feel sliding inside of her.

## Chapter 7

Brandon broke his lips away from Evelyn's and looked down at her. Something in his conscience told him not to do what he was about to do. Warmth began to form around the edges of his cold heart. The greenness of her eyes held so much pain and passion that he wasn't sure which one was making him react the way he was. She was a job, nothing more.

"Evelyn, tell me you want me to make love to you," he said, watching the reactions in her face.

She looked repulsed. "No, I want you to fuck me, not make love to me."

"But you're supposed to be playing the submissive, remember?" he said, gently laughing.

Evelyn rolled her eyes, making him laugh again. Something in Brandon's chest fluttered. At the new sensation, he wanted to curse. This wasn't good. He knew deep down he should stop with the love nonsense, but just thinking about fucking her without passion didn't sit well with him.

"Tell me. Whisper for me to make love to you the way no man ever has. Let me do this for you, Evelyn. I have to do this." Brandon wedged his fingers between their bodies and rubbed the outside of her wet folds. "Tell me how much you want me. Please, let me hear you say it." He slid a finger deep inside Evelyn's tight entrance.

\* \* \* \*



Evelyn moaned, staring into the golden depths of Brandon's eyes. Everything began to swim. Just looking into his eyes, she could feel herself get sucked into them. His words were enough to make her run, but his eyes kept her rooted to the bed. Just looking into them had her wanting to say the words, had her wanting to beg him to be careful and tender. The words "making love" meant a lot to Evelyn, and it was something she hadn't experienced since Stephen. Shaking her head, she tried to break away from his hypnotic gaze, but her eyes kept coming back to his.

"Tell me, Evelyn. You know you want to feel that again. Let me give it to you. All you have to do is ask."

Suddenly, she felt the pull of his eyes give way, and she was able to look away and think by herself. Did she want that? Isn't that what Julie had been talking about earlier? If she gave in, would everything get easier?

"Make love to me, Brandon. Show me what passion and pleasure are supposed to feel like."

The words poured from her mouth, and within them, something left her body. Evelyn all of a sudden felt lighter. Brandon looked down at her amazed.

"Wow, that was easier than I thought. I was expecting you to give me a hard time. Well, if you insist, I would love to," he said, smiling.

She watched him lower his face down to her and kiss her slowly. With his smooth, wet tongue, he explored, and he nibbled on her lips while both of his hands cradled her face. Evelyn was swept away at the sensations bursting through her. She had made it a rule not to kiss, to numb herself in case she ever was, but she wasn't immune to this.

Brandon's ragged breath brushed against her as he rested his forehead against hers. "Damn," he said, engulfing her in his sweet breath.

She closed her eyes at the smell, taking it all in. What he was trying to accomplish by "making love" to her, Evelyn wasn't sure.

But he obviously had issues himself, and although this was something he had started, she was going to make sure he finished it.

Gently, Evelyn copied his actions and, cradling his face, brought his lips back down to hers. This time, he wasn't gentle. Brandon attacked her mouth with such built-up passion that she let go of his face, wrapped her arms around his neck, and drew him closer.

"Why is it you affect me like this?" Brandon said against her lips.

The bed shifted as he moved down. He sucked one of her nipples into his mouth, lightly biting and pulling it toward him. A cry escaped Evelyn's throat and she couldn't stop her fingers from sinking into his hair, bringing him closer against her breast. Suction drew her deeper into his mouth until she thought she would scream.

Their nude bodies sliding against each other was electrifying. Every pore on Evelyn tingled with awareness. Fucking was one thing. Yes, you had foreplay, but not like this. He was intentionally making sure that she enjoyed everything he was doing.

Brandon moved his lips down, searing a path of fire between her ribs until he reached her lower stomach. Evelyn wiggled and moaned under his nibbling. His hands spread her thighs wide to make room for him to position his lips over her folds.

The first lick to her clit made her jump. She was so sensitive that the pleasure was almost painful. He used the wetness of his tongue to trace her, separating her, easing her apart to gain him entrance.

Feeling impatient, Evelyn twisted to look down at him. All she could see was dark hair haloed against his pale face. His golden eyes penetrated hers while he tortured her by sliding his lips back over her clit. The moment he sucked her into his mouth, Evelyn's upper body came off the bed.

"Fuck...please, you have to fuck me."

His head shook no, which caused his mouth to tug her pussy back and forth against the suction. Evelyn collapsed onto the bed, moaning. She had forgotten they were "making love." *Riiiiight.*

She cut off her thoughts before they took over. This was a game. She would have to remember that. It was her personal bet, nothing more. Yes, she was going to be intimate, but that was it, nothing more. Feelings would not be established here tonight. She'd make sure of that.

\* \* \* \*

Brandon began to plunge his tongue deeply inside of her. The taste was enough to keep him intoxicated. She tasted so pure, so sweet that he couldn't get enough. Possessiveness prodded at him while he tried to push the emotion away. He wasn't possessive about anyone. If he was going to do his job, he couldn't very well fall for her, too. Taylor had made her out to be cold, and cruel. Although he could see where Taylor might think that, he wasn't so sure that was the real her.

Evelyn's hips arched to take in more. While he continued to thrust with his tongue, he added two fingers, licking her juices off while he teased them into her. The orgasm sent spasms over her limbs and left her gasping for air as tremors shook her.

Brandon stood and opened his bedside drawer. Heavy-lidded eyes stared over at him, widening as they took in his body. Damn, that look was going to haunt his dreams. What the hell had he gotten himself into?

\* \* \* \*

Evelyn noticed how close his cock was. Still lightheaded from her orgasm, she lifted her head and rested it in his lap. Captivated, she took his thick cock in her hand. Placing her lips around the thick tip, she traced her tongue around his width in circles. Peppermint mixed with his salty pre-come enveloped her. Did he bath in this stuff? She didn't care. She wanted to drown in it, to take in as much as she possibly could.

Brandon groaned above her, stroking her hair while she plunged more of his length deeper inside of her mouth.

“Evelyn,” he whispered.

Faster, she stroked his cock, with her hand meeting her mouth. Nothing was going to put an end to what she was doing. Submissive or not, he wasn’t going to stop her from tasting him.

Evelyn’s mind went frantic with thoughts of him trying to prevent her. She didn’t ever want to stop. Something possessed her and drove her forward. Using her hand, she stroked faster and took him in deeper. He was so close. She could taste it, could feel him growing thicker under her palm.

“Evelyn, you have to stop,” he said, his voice stressed.

Brandon tried pulling back, but she sucked harder, impossibly taking in more.

“Evelyn, I’m serious, you have to stop now, or else...”

She cradled his sac, pushing up a fraction yet massaging it at the same time. Fingers gripped tighter in her hair, and then she felt it. Brandon shuddered, and she knew it was time. Something loud snapped the moment his come poured into her mouth. She took her time to swallow, letting herself memorize and bask in this exact flavor.

“Holy shit. You didn’t stop...”

Evelyn looked up at him. Tense, he still had his fingers wrapped in her hair. His other hand was on the nightstand, a now-broken nightstand. Evelyn’s jaw dropped.

“How did you do that?” she asked, bewildered. Something wasn’t right with him. His eyes were a lighter gold, almost yellow, and with the wood snapping, plus his knowing everything earlier with the smells, something wasn’t adding up. The uncertainty teased her thoughts before she could push them away.

“What do you mean?” he asked.

Brandon looked confused, like he truly didn’t know what she was talking about. Her eyes traveled to the nightstand again and then back

to his eyes. Taking in her gaze, he followed it to the table. He looked at her just as shocked as she felt. It was as though he didn't recall snapping the wood into pieces.

"I think I should go." Evelyn heard the cautiousness in her voice. A very large part of her didn't want to know what was going on. She just wanted to escape back to her apartment.

"No, don't go, please. Give me one night. That's all I ask, please."

He got quiet for a few seconds while she studied his face. The pull of his eyes had her shaking her head back and forth. It diminished within seconds. Should she do this? Would one night be okay? Surely she was overreacting about these stupid fears. He was strong, so what.

She thought his plea over and wasn't sure why, but she nodded. Brandon lifted her up onto the dark blue pillows and covered her body with his.

Evelyn stared into his yellow eyes while he lowered his face to hers. They caressed each other's lips passionately. Heaviness once again rested on her stomach. His cock was ready to go again, already. Just the thought that he would soon be inside of her had her getting wet.

\* \* \* \*

Brandon massaged Evelyn's pussy while his legs eased her thighs apart. He handed Evelyn the condom wrapper and waited while she slid it over his length. The damn thing almost didn't fit. Closing his eyes against the pressure of the condom, he couldn't help but think of her almost leaving.

Panic, like nothing he had ever felt before, had clawed at him to get her to stay. He had even tried to hypnotize her again, long enough to plead to her mind to consider it. He wouldn't have forced her against her will, but an extra push in his direction wouldn't have hurt.

Of course it didn't work. She had only been affected for a second, not long enough for him to get anything through to her mind. The second time was weaker than the first. Impossible.

Brandon held her gaze while he entered her, letting her stretch and adjust to his size. He couldn't stop staring at her. With the second thrust, he watched her expression change. Damn, she was beautiful. He could spend the rest of his life with someone like her. Possession once again gripped against his insides and mind.

What in the hell was wrong with him? Never had he let a woman affect him like this. Something about Evelyn made him feel lighter, less empty. He could feel the emotion tightening his chest, trying to worm its way into his heart.

Brandon ignored the feeling as best as he could and focused on how tightly she gripped around him. The moment her moan accompanied a slight change in pressure on his cock, he was lost.

\* \* \* \*

One of Brandon's hands held Evelyn's arms over her head at her wrists, and his other hand ran down the length of her body, as if he were memorizing every curve. Knowing the power he had, Evelyn pushed into his soft touch. She wanted to feel him stroke her, not be teased because he was afraid he would cause her pain.

The restraining of her arms turned Evelyn on more than she would have thought. She planted her heels against the blue comforter and arched her back to take his cock deeper.

"Go faster, Brandon."

Instead of going faster, he gave one powerful thrust, pushing so deep inside of her that the orgasm came out of nowhere. Screams echoed off the walls. Her pussy gripped his cock so securely it was painful, yet the intensity of her orgasm was still in full swing, shooting pleasurable jolts throughout her like a current of electrical bliss.

“That’s right, Evelyn. Scream louder. Scream my name.”

Evelyn did, over and over. Brandon smiled at her and drove into her again, over and over again. The swelling of his cock against her tightness had a moan escaping her mouth.

Brandon lowered and slid against her. The pain in her neck was replaced by the most pleasurable feeling she had ever felt in her life. An orgasm swept over her and rapidly turned into a whole mind and body fuck. Ecstasy made her press her tingling breasts harder into him.

Brandon groaned on top of her, breaking his mouth from her neck. The blood on his full lips and the look of euphoria on his face were the last things she remembered before blackness took over and she passed out.

## Chapter 8

Evelyn looked at the clock. It was close to five. The light snoring had been coming from a sleeping Brandon now for close to twenty minutes. As much as she didn't want to, she had to leave to escape the closeness.

Awakening to the most agonizing pain in her chest should have been a sign. Intimacy just might not be for her. Even unconscious, her body seemed to know and react to a stranger's nearness.

When she awoke to the pain, flashes of the previous events were a big blur in her memory. What in the hell had happened? She felt like someone had gone in and scrambled her brain. Big chunks of the events were missing. For one, she didn't even remember them finishing.

The images played in her head in a continual cycle. Brandon was buried between her thighs, and then she had his cock in his mouth, and then suddenly, he had her arms pinned and was thrusting inside of her. That was it, quick flashes and big chunks missing. Evelyn rubbed her eyes and moved at a snail's pace to the restroom.

The resort-labeled robe was lying across the bathroom counter. Knowing she had ruined her dress, she wrapped the robe around her, turned off the light, and eased her way through the now-dark room.

Tiptoeing, she managed to collect her things and escape the apartment to get back to her own. The apple-cinnamon scent embraced Evelyn as soon as she walked through the door and calmed her jumpy nerves.

Home—it was reliable and safe. So why was she feeling so guilty and empty since she left the warmth of Brandon's arms? And warm



he was, nothing like before. She could remember how cold he had gotten during the flashes, but when she left, he had felt like a furnace.

Evelyn collapsed onto her bed and stared at the ceiling. Slowly, she went over the memories that she could remember, again. All right, she remembered getting to the room, him saying they were going to “make love,” various sexual things, but how did it end? Did he even come?

For some reason, Evelyn’s hand came to her neck. Was she supposed to remember something about that? She climbed off the bed and made her way to the restroom, looking in the mirror. Nothing was wrong with her neck, so why then did she feel like something should be there? For endless minutes she studied herself. If she could only remember, she would feel better. She hated not knowing. The last thing she needed was more anxiety about something else.

Giving up, Evelyn made her way back to the bed to get some much needed rest. She must have been drunker than she had realized. It was the only explanation she could come up with. Next time, she’d definitely catch a ride with one of her friends.

\* \* \* \*

Brandon had heard Evelyn leave. A part of him almost called out to her, but he knew that she needed space. He couldn’t believe she had slept so long. Well, he did have one hell of a time erasing some of her memories. That had barely even been accomplished, and now he knew why.

There was no doubt in his mind that Evelyn had been marked by a werewolf. How had he missed it earlier when they were having sex? It had been there, right above her left breast, and he hadn’t even noticed it. If the bond wouldn’t have been in her blood, he would have never thought to check her body.

So the question was who had marked Evelyn for his mate and then left her, never removing the mark. It was like he was holding on to

her, just in case he changed his mind. It was cruel. She'd never be able to get over him with that mark in place.

He'd have to tell Taylor. Maybe Taylor would change his mind about getting even if he knew that it wasn't her fault she couldn't be more emotional.

Brandon closed his eyes and felt the heat of her blood warming him. She had been so rich, so sweet that he hadn't wanted to ever stop. The slowing of her heart had made him look up to check on her, and before he knew it, she was gone, passed out. Fear like nothing he had ever felt before twisted his stomach, but he knew she wouldn't have been harmed from the small amount he had taken.

After checking her pulse, he had known she was going to be fine. But what had happened had something to do with her mark. It had shut her down, mentally putting her into some kind of hibernation mode. Did the person who placed the mark on her know what Brandon had done? Without a doubt. When it came to the invasion of fangs, the bond was like an alarm system, notifying the wolf that he needed to protect his mate.

Brandon got up from the bed and prepared to get dressed and ready. If he was going to place a bet, he'd bet the wolf would be coming, and soon. There was no way he was going to miss who this lucky man was. Probably one of her lovers, and he couldn't wait to see which one that might be.

\* \* \* \*

The sound of "Margaritaville" had Evelyn blinking her eyes. The first thing that ran through her mind was she must be late for work. The clock on the nightstand said it was nine o'clock.

"Fuck!" She sprang from the bed, grabbing her phone from the clutch that was still resting on the floor where she had dropped it. The moment everything came flooding back, she realized that Melissa wasn't calling to see why she wasn't at the office.

“This better be damn good.” Evelyn groaned, falling back to the bed. The racing of her heart was already providing all the lullaby she needed to get back to dreamland where she belonged. The cloudiness in her mind was still a bit disorienting.

“You should have never left last night. We had a blast.”

Evelyn laughed. It was a pitiful sound from the raw throat now plaguing her. Too much screaming, she presumed.

“Damn, that sucks to be you, but my night was beyond spectacular...I think,” she said, her words breaking at the end.

“You fucked Brandon, didn’t you?” Melissa gasped.

Evelyn laughed again, feeling her voice lose sound about halfway through. “Yes, I think I did. Too bad it won’t happen again. He was amazing from what I remember, but I don’t need to tell him that. I’m sure the whole resort heard me screaming his name.”

“You lucky bitch. I really need to find someone like that. You wouldn’t happen to know anyone, would you?”

Annoyed by the scratchy feeling, Evelyn tried clearing her throat, but that only seemed to make it worse. “I’ll find you someone. Who did Julie end up going home with last night?”

“Oh my God, you’re never going to guess. Do you remember that guy you did the bet on, Bill?”

Evelyn froze. “Yes, I remember. She went home with Bill last night? I thought she was bet to do that one guy she thought was cute.”

“Yeah, I bet her. I couldn’t resist. I wanted to see if she had as much luck as you did. He’s one lucky bastard, the only one who’s ever fucked all of us. She wasn’t really into the other guy so much. She liked Bill a lot more.”

The smile that slid across Evelyn’s face couldn’t be helped. She had been so close to seeing him there. If Brandon hadn’t shown up, then she probably would have stayed long enough to see him. Maybe she would have been the one to leave with him. It didn’t bother her, though. If she had to pick one, it would have been Brandon, even

though she couldn't remember all of their "lovemaking." And that was a damn shame.

"Yeah, you're right about that. What about Sarah? Did she leave with her bet?"

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you," Melissa said quietly.

"This has got to be good. Tell me," Evelyn said, sitting up in the bed. Her voice was barely a whisper.

"No one. She left with absolutely no one. Can you fucking believe that? It shocked my panties clear off."

Evelyn laughed, falling back to the bed. "Yeah, well, it's hard to believe. You don't think she'll be upset with the whole Brandon thing, do you?"

"She'll get over it. You know she doesn't stay fixated for long."

"Yeah, I hope not. Well, as you can hear my voice, it is about gone. I'm going back to bed. I'll call you later if I can speak."

"Yeah yeah, quit sucking dick. I think it's more a case of cock-initis. I'll get you a dose of penis-illin to make it go away."

"You bitch." Evelyn laughed. "Bye," she said and hung up.

The phone clinked against the nightstand, and Evelyn curled into a ball, hugging the robe closer around her. Who was she kidding? There was no way she was going to be able to fall back to sleep. The shower sounded very good about now.

Her legs felt like rubber, and the aches covering her body were shocking. Oh well, the price one pays for passion is well worth the pounding, she thought as she grabbed the belt of the robe.

Halfway to the restroom a knock shook her front door. The pounding of her heart was enough to make her pass out. There was no way a heart could beat so hard without eventually stopping. That knock sounded angry, like something one would see on *COPS* before they busted a door down.

Evelyn ran to the door and swung it open, afraid the neighbors would start coming out if it happened again. One look into his face and she fainted, again.

Male voices echoed in the distance. Her heavy eyes flew open, and she bolted to her feet. Big mistake. She rocked back, but she caught herself before she fell. Stephen—he was the one at her door.

“I told you she was fine. Now do you think you can leave?” Stephen barked.

Evelyn turned around to see Brandon not a foot behind her. “Evelyn, are you all right? Who the hell is this guy, anyway? He’s not the one you were going to see last night, is he?” Brandon asked, looking at Stephen with disgust.

Like something was pushing on her chest, her breath came out uneven. The room felt like it was tilting. “Brandon, it’s fine. No, he’s not the one I was going to see. This is the other one I told you about last night. This is Stephen. Stephen, this is Brandon. Now, you both are properly introduced. Don’t say I didn’t do a good deed for the day.” Evelyn cleared her throat, trying to get a grip on her voice.

She left both of them there in the middle of the living room while she put on a pot of coffee and got her thoughts into focus. This wasn’t going to be good. Something deep in her gut told her not to let Brandon leave. She couldn’t be alone with Stephen. If he tried anything, not that he would, but if he did, she was done for. Fuck, she needed some caffeine.

“Evey, tell him he can leave. I really need to talk to you.”

Evelyn peered around the kitchen and looked toward Stephen. He looked the same: blond hair; big blue eyes; and a body to mold herself against. Intrigued, she looked back and forth between the two men. Brandon was actually better-looking than Stephen, but not by much.

“Brandon’s not going anywhere, Stephen. He knows everything anyway, so go ahead and say what you need to say and then you can go.” It came out more of a whisper than anything. She had to salvage what little sound she had left.

Cockily, Brandon sat down on the couch and gave Evelyn a reassuring smile. Trying not to be too noticeable, she smiled and

looked toward the man who had torn her heart to shreds. What in the hell could he possibly want after all this time?

“Evey...”

“Don’t call me that anymore. You lost that right when you broke things off. Plus, I never really liked being called that to begin with.” It was a lie. She loved that he had given her that name. But at the moment, she couldn’t stomach it. It made things worse. The need to go to him was almost uncontrollable. Damn, she’d missed him, and she hated it. What was it about him that kept her holding on?

“Evelyn, I’m sorry,” he said, taking a few steps forward. “There’s something we need to talk about. I...miss you. I’ve been alone for the last two months trying to figure out a way to get you to forgive me. I’ve screwed up really bad. Things are not what they seem.

“I’d do anything to change the past. We can leave for Vegas right now and get married. I knew you never wanted a big wedding; I’m sorry I pushed the issue before.”

Evelyn was shocked into stillness. Had she just heard what she thought she had? As much as she had prayed to someday hear those words, something didn’t sit well. Her head swung in the direction of Brandon, who was sitting ramrod straight on the leather couch. He looked as tense as she felt.

“You don’t have to tell me anything right now. Just know that I want you back. You’ll never know how much regret I have for breaking things off. I love you, Evey. Things were complicated then. Please say you’ll at least forgive me.”

A tear spilled down her cheek, and she had never hated herself more. Weakness was something she didn’t like to show, especially to Stephen. She didn’t like giving him the satisfaction of knowing that he had damaged her as much as he had.

“Evelyn, I’m sorry. Please don’t cry. I’ll make it up to you, I promise. I know I shouldn’t have said anything about marriage yet, but just seeing you again, it slipped out. For so long, I’ve thought of this moment and, fuck, I’ve missed you beyond words.”

Stephen pulled her tightly into his arms. Repulsed, she pushed away when her cheek rubbed against the hardness of his chest. She hated how the closeness affected her. His smell, his touch, it was everything that she had been longing for. It was the whole reason she gave her body so freely to men. She had longed to find a piece of Stephen in them.

Even though she wanted nothing more than to throw herself into his arms and cry a river, something still felt off. “Stephen, I think you should go. I can’t think right now.”

The moment he took a step back, a pain stabbed into her chest. This, Evelyn was used to. She didn’t so much as flinch. How had the pain become so familiar that she could completely keep her composure and mask any sign?

“All right, I’m leaving. Just so you know... I really do still love you. You know how to get in touch with me. Call dispatch if you want me to come back over so we can talk. I’ll be at work in two hours. I really hope you call.”

With her eyes, Evelyn followed him out the door. It took all of ten seconds before she fell to her knees and let the tears come. What in the hell had just happened? Why now, after all of this time?

## Chapter 9

Brandon's hand rubbed her back, and eventually he lifted her and set her in his lap as he sat on the couch. "Evelyn, are you all right? Do you need me to get you anything?"

Her eyes felt swollen; her throat was on fire. Not to mention her wavy hair was knotted to shit. There was no denying that she was a complete and utter mess. All of that didn't matter. She was more messed up on the inside than the outside. Now *that* she would bet on.

"Coffee," she managed to say before hiccups took over.

Mentally exhausted, she rubbed her sore eyes and watched Brandon enter her kitchen. "Hey, how did you know to come over here?" Why hadn't she thought to ask that before? What was Brandon doing here?

The laugh that came from the kitchen made delicious chills go down her spine. "I came over to check on you. You were gone when I woke up. That's when I saw your door open and some strange man looming over you. I almost killed him. I thought with you on the ground and unconscious...well, what was I supposed to think? Why did you leave?"

Evelyn watched as he stood pouring coffee into one of the coffee mugs resting on a white towel on the counter. She couldn't help but shift uneasily on the couch.

"Staying the night with someone is so personal. I just don't do it. I'm sorry. It's nothing against you. I just have rules that I go by. It helps...me."

Here she was, once again spilling her guts out to this man. Poor guy. Lord only knew what he must think of her. Why he kept coming



back was beyond any conclusions she could come up with. Maybe he was a glutton for punishment.

“Do you take cream or sugar?”

Evelyn stood, walking to her cabinets. There was only one way she liked her coffee: a lot of cream and a little sugar. Brandon poured his, leaving it black. Stephen liked his coffee black. With that thought, she turned and, walking to the couch, felt him follow.

“So, do you know what you’re going to do about Steve?”

A giggle escaped her mouth. “It’s Stephen. If you call him Steve, prepare to duck—he might just hit you. He hates being called that. Don’t ask me why, I never found out.”

“I’ll remember that,” he said, grinning wickedly.

“Behave, Brandon. The last thing I want is any drama. I seem to accumulate that all on my own.”

“No kidding. What is that, three now?”

Evelyn’s eyebrows came together. “Three, what do you mean?” She raised her hand, getting his meaning. Three, Jesus! “Yes, now I have three of you to deal with. Shit, what in the hell am I going to do?”

Brandon set down his coffee cup and rested his head in her lap. It took everything she had not to spill her coffee on him. “What in the hell are you doing?”

He nuzzled his head against her thighs and lower stomach like a big cat or dog. It was rather distracting. She couldn’t form a single thought besides pushing his head deeper between her thighs. It was unnerving.

“Relax, Evelyn, just play with my hair. I like the way it feels.”

Caught off guard, she laughed. Of all the damn things he liked, he would pick his hair being played with? It might have been just her, but he seemed a little masculine to like something so feminine. Oh well, who was she to judge someone on his or her like or dislikes. She made bets on sex, for crying out loud.

Besides all of that, did she really want to be stroking some man's hair whom she had just met the day before? Evelyn had never had a guy order her around. Why was she starting now?

"Umm, Brandon, that's a little intimate, don't you think?"

"Come on, Evelyn, I asked you to play with my hair, not marry me. Not yet, anyway." He laughed.

That was the second time marriage had come up in fifteen minutes. What in the hell was with everyone and that word today? Thoughts consumed her, Stephen, Bill, and Brandon, all in such a short time. Shit, what had she gotten herself into now? Surely none of the other girls had this much trouble in life.

Evelyn hesitated while she thought through what had just happened. She hadn't even realized that while she was thinking, her fingers had grown a mind of their own and were playing with the silky softness of his hair.

Snapping herself out of her thoughts, she looked down at Brandon's closed eyes. He had such a peaceful look on his face. She smiled and, continuing to let his hair run through her fingers, studied how it was possible that every feature on his face was absolutely perfect. No one was this beautiful.

"I really need a shower, Brandon. There's nothing more that I would love to do than sit here and play the lover all day, but I have things I need to do."

Golden eyes fluttered open as bright as the sun. It was breathtaking. All she could do was stare. Every part of her body was immobile. She felt like she was sinking into a bright tunnel, being sucked down slowly but surely. It didn't scare her, quite the opposite. He could have asked anything of her and she would have done it.

"Would you like for me to join you in the shower?"

Blinking rapidly, she broke the stare. Every pore on her body tingled, begging her to give them attention. Fuck. *Here we go again.* Somehow she forced her mouth open and said the opposite of what her mind was screaming.

“Not today. I don’t have the kind of time that entails.”

“You need to go see your other lover.”

He said it more as a statement than a question, but she answered him anyway. “He’s not my lover. It was just a onetime thing. But, yes, I need to go and see him. If for anything, I need to at least return his key.”

“Will you have sex with him? You don’t have to answer if you don’t want to. I was just curious.”

Evelyn thought for a moment. “I’m not sure. I won’t make any promises.”

“Do you never lie?”

Brandon lifted his head to look at her better. She shifted on the couch, unsure exactly what he was trying to get out of knowing. It was a very simple question, yet she felt like it held so much more meaning than the words he spoke. It was a test, or at least it felt like one.

“I try not to lie. I would never say never, but I can’t remember the last time I came out and said a lie to anyone’s face. I’m not like that. I tell the truth as much as possible. Lies only cause unneeded problems.”

Silence surrounded them, and then slowly Brandon nodded his head. Was he expecting her to say she never lied and never would? Well, if she had to, there was no doubt in her mind that she wouldn’t hesitate. It wouldn’t be for herself, but maybe for her friends if they needed her protection.

Brandon stood and tilted his head at her. “Evelyn, do you know why you can’t get over Stephen?”

The bluntness of his question caught her off guard, making her somewhat defensive. “Great, I rub your hair and you think you have liberty to say whatever. No, Brandon, I do not know why. Enlighten me, please.”

He laughed. “You’re bonded. Just do me a favor. The next time you see him, ask him why he marked you if he was never planning on

making you his mate. That's all I will say for now. I'll leave it up to him to tell you. If he doesn't explain, come back and I'll take you to Ayden. He'd love to know what's going on."

Evelyn watched in horror as Brandon walked out her door. What in the hell was he talking about? His words made absolutely no sense. Well, she'd ask Stephen and see what he had to say. He'd probably run for the hills again, thinking she had lost her damn mind. Great, this was just fucking great.

Running for her phone, she grabbed it and called dispatch to get Stephen's number. Even after all this time, Cynthia remembered her. That was just luck on her part. She doubted that they would have given her his personal number if she were a stranger.

The shaking of her hands increased as the phone began to ring. Stephen answered it almost immediately.

"Hello," he said, short of breath.

"Stephen, this is Evelyn. I need to ask you a question. It might sound crazy, but I need to know."

"Ask anything, Evelyn."

The words Brandon had spoken repeated in her head. This was downright ridiculous. Oh well, here went nothing. What was the worst that could happen?

"Stephen, why did you mark me if you weren't going to keep me as your mate?"

The silence had her skin crawling. Did he know what she was asking? It sure as hell didn't make any sense to her. What did this mean?

"Evelyn, I did expect for you to be my mate. I still do. You don't understand. I had orders. I never meant... Damn, there's so much for me to explain.

"Wait... How did you know what I was, Evelyn? Who told you? It was that vampire, wasn't it? Fucking bloodsuckers, I swear." He growled into the phone. "I knew I should have torn him apart when I

had the chance, sinking his teeth into you like that. He should have seen the mark and backed off!”

The floor felt like it had fallen out from under Evelyn’s feet. She couldn’t think, couldn’t breathe. Vampire? Vampire! And what did that make him? The pressure increased in her head as she tried to put the pieces of the puzzle together. Mark, mate...vampire....werewolf? Vertigo washing over her briefly made her lean her hand against the wall.

Evelyn’s mind screamed. No way was this possible. Words were jumbling around her head a million miles a minute. She wanted to believe both of these men were playing a trick on her, but they hadn’t talked to each other in the last few minutes. How could this happen? How was this possible in today’s world and no one knew about it?

“Stephen, it doesn’t matter who told me,” Evelyn said, trying to get control of her voice. “It just matters that you confirmed it.” Again, her thoughts searched for some logical sentence for her to say. If it was true and something he had done to her was making her unable to let him go, it was beyond cruel. “Release the bond. I can’t believe you would make it impossible for me to move on after all this time. That’s what it’s there for, isn’t it? To keep us bonded to each other. You’re a werewolf, yes?”

“Yes, I am.” Silence filled Evelyn’s ear. How would she know if he released whatever bond they were talking about? Would she feel something upon it happening? Looking for something that might indicate what she was missing, she jerked the robe open. Creamy ivory skin was perfectly flawless. The only “mark” she had was...the bite Stephen had given her when they first started dating. It was barely noticeable, and just looked like a scar of teeth marks.

“Release the bond, Stephen! No more fucking with my life. It’s not fair to me. You’ve hurt me enough. I can’t do this anymore!”

“I will not release the bond. Not until you give me another chance,” he breathed out heavily. “I didn’t put you through all of this just to let you go. My love for you never wavered in the last two

years. Can't you see why I had to lie to you? I'm not letting you go, now or ever."

Evelyn screamed and slammed the phone shut. This was not how things were supposed to happen. Yes, she loved Stephen, but how much of it was her and how much was the bond that was holding them together? Brandon had mentioned a guy named Ayden. Maybe he would know what was happening. It was about time she found out for herself.

Maybe once the damn thing was gone, she could leave town. Running away from reality seemed pretty good about now. Werewolves and vampires! She still couldn't believe it. Damn, if she wasn't about to go into a full-blown anxiety attack.

Could she possibly ignore the thoughts while she dropped off Bill's key? There'd only been one way she'd known to block out the pain. The answer was one she was starting to dislike.

## Chapter 10

Evelyn squeezed the red tag tightly in her palm. The metal door loomed before her. She couldn't decide whether to knock or just go in. Well, shit. She had to make up her mind before someone she knew came driving by. True, she was close to the ferry. As long as no one came this way, she'd be safe, unless of course whoever came driving by was heading for Aransas Pass.

She could always leave the key at the front desk, but that was chickenshit, no way. Comfort was something she needed after finding out the news from Stephen, and Bill could take her mind off things. Why had it come to this? Why was it that she used other men to numb the pain?

The key slid in the lock, and Evelyn eased her way inside and shut the door quietly behind her. The shower was running, a soft splashing of water on porcelain. She dropped her purse on the bedside table and, resting against the headboard, crossed her feet at her ankles. Thoughts of what she'd just learned made her breathing almost stop. No, she wouldn't think about it!

Here, she would forget and take charge, like her old self. Unlike with Brandon, she would do as she pleased and dominate. She needed to be back in control. Nothing else was an option. Her sanity pleaded for normal, and unfortunately, to her, this was it.

Looking down, she took in her appearance. Today, she wasn't dressed like she was the previous day. No business clothes, just a pair of tight-fitting jeans and a long-sleeved University of Texas T-shirt. If one was from Texas, it was a rule—you had to have at least one

Longhorn shirt in your closet or you were officially not a Texan. Evelyn had about eight.

The water shut off, and it took everything in her to suppress a smile. Damn it, if she wasn't having fun trying to forget. Breaking and entering was so much more exciting than she would have thought.

Like a golden god, Bill walked out wearing just a towel low around his slim waist. The muscles in his chest rippled with each step. Evelyn traced her lips with her tongue while she watched the tiny beads of water run down his body. Hell, if she didn't want to go and lick them off.

Bill stopped, two feet out the door when he noticed her. The look of shock lighting his face couldn't have been more amusing.

"I didn't really think you would come back," he said, staring at her in awe.

Evelyn raised an eyebrow but, other than that, kept her emotions off her face. "Are you expecting company? I could just leave." She cleared her throat, trying her best to sound at least a little seductive.

"No, no company. Please don't leave," Bill pleaded.

Well, that was a little panicky. What was the matter with him? He couldn't be too lonely. Shit, he'd already fucked all her friends.

"I think you left something in my purse." Evelyn held up the key by the red tag and let it dangle from her fingertips.

Bill looked at it and then back to her. "You can't blame a guy for hoping."

A smile lit her face. It was about to get fun. She was a truthful person—was Bill? "So how was your night? Did you do anything interesting?"

He fidgeted under her penetrating stare.

"I went out."

"That's all. Did you meet anyone... appealing?"

He smiled. He actually fucking smiled. That only told her one thing. He wasn't going to lie. Good boy.



“Yeah, I met someone. She was very cute. Fucked real good, but she wasn’t you.”

Evelyn let her lips twist before she could stop them. “I’ll be sure to tell her you thought she fucked real well.”

His smile disappeared instantly. “You mean you know her?”

A wicked smile crossed Evelyn’s face. “Oh, Julie? Yeah, she’s one of my best friends, along with Melissa and Sarah. I think you might remember them, too.”

“What the hell has been going on? You and your friends used me?” Bill asked, shocked.

She could tell that he was hurt. Evelyn hadn’t meant to hurt him. Maybe she was more twisted than she had thought. “For pleasure, of course. You don’t mind, do you? I’m really sorry if I just hurt your feelings. You have to know, I’m not good with emotions.”

He slowly shrugged, lying at the end of the bed, looking at her. “I guess I don’t mind, although it’s kind of weird for best friends to be sharing a man. Don’t you think?”

“Not really, my friends and I don’t mind.” The more she looked at his body, the more she wanted to take off his towel. Yet, she wanted it to be Brandon wearing the towel or maybe Stephen. Oh shit, that thought had to go. She needed to be running away from them, not toward them.

“When are you leaving, Bill?”

His head fell to the bed, blond curls resting on his bicep. Evelyn threw a pillow at him. He smiled, caught it, folded it in half, and continued staring at her.

“I leave tonight, back to Houston.”

Her head nodded as if somehow she already knew this. “It was a pleasure meeting you, Bill.”

Faster than she could blink, he bound across the bed and was hovering above her. He pulled her beneath his now fully nude body. Tightness made her nipples tingle at the thought of his chest pressed up against hers.

“Let me have you again before I leave, please.” His lips were hovering so close to hers. All she would have to do was lean forward the tiniest fraction of an inch and their lips would touch.

“One more question.”

She looked into his eyes. Now, as they were filled with emotion, it was hard not to get lost in them.

“Ask anything, just let me have you.” Bill breathed into her face. Mint wasn’t anywhere near invigorating as peppermint.

“Do you act this way with all women? What is it about me that you like?”

He looked away from her eyes. Something that looked like raw pain filled his features. She knew that expression all too well. Her heart went out to him. “Tell me,” she whispered, using her fingertips to make him face her again.

“Grace, she was my wife. You look so much like her. I can’t help it, I’m sorry. I just miss her. I understand if you want to leave now.”

“What happened to her?” Evelyn prayed that she hadn’t passed away. That would make her feel like the biggest monster in the world. Yes, it was wrong to pity people, but she could see the amount of pain he held inside. She knew that pain, and she wanted to take it away.

“Grace divorced me. Said I worked too much and she needed someone who was there more. I travel a lot. She’s already remarried...”

Evelyn’s heart broke for him. The softness of her lips brushed against his. “I’ll give you this because I know how it feels for your heart to break, but remember one thing. I’m doing this for your desire, your companionship. I’m not your wife. I want your eyes open and on me as much as possible.”

It made no sense what she was doing. He wanted to fuck her because she reminded him of his wife, yet Evelyn wanted him to know it was her. *Great going, Evelyn, you make great fucking sense.*

“Did Julie make you come?” She couldn’t help but ask. Damn, her voice was going out again.

He shook his head no. That had surprised her. Julie did have dark hair. Maybe the blond highlights threw off the appeal. Oh well, fuck it. Who was she to judge? Didn't she search for pieces of Stephen in other men?

Wrapping her fingers in his baby-fine curls, she pulled his lips to hers. They were so soft, yet firm. Bill still felt tense. Evelyn let her tongue brush across his lower lip and sucked it into her mouth. His groan pushed through her throat, and the weight of his chest finally settled against her.

True to his word, Bill was watching her, just as she told him to. Never before had she tried kissing someone with her eyes open. Evelyn wasn't sure she liked it so much. It was way too intimate for her at the moment. For some reason, it felt right kissing Brandon, and knowing it was him. Knowing she was kissing the man lying on top of her just wasn't the same.

"Take my clothes off, Bill."

He obeyed, easing them off at a slow pace and tracing her body with his fingertips. She let him run them up the insides of her legs until he lowered his head against her pussy. Evelyn moaned, feeling him separate her folds with the pads of his thumbs.

The first lick was slow and gentle, from her opening to her clit. He moved back down, inserted his tongue inside of her, and moved it in a circular motion.

Evelyn buried her fingers in his hair. The moans poured out of her while he began to thrust his tongue, putting pressure on her clit at the same time. With a near silent scream, she pulled him up to her lips and kissed him deeply, tasting herself on his tongue. Sucking his tongue into her mouth, she felt him groan all the way into her chest.

Not wanting to take her eyes from him, she reached for her purse. Protection was something she was never without. She was always safe. The purse fell over, its contents spilling all over the small table and the floor. Evelyn felt the package, reached for it, and opened it as

fast as she could. His cock rested heavily on her lower stomach. Wetness from his excitement let her know he was ready.

Evelyn slid the condom on him and felt him plunge inside of her. The majority of the time, she was on top. She liked the control, but today, she let him lead. This was, after all, for him.

Bill stared into her eyes, never looking away from her face. She almost wished she hadn't asked him. Once again, things felt way too personal.

The length of his cock surged deeper at his increased pace. A moan came out at her when he hit her sensitive spot. Evelyn wrapped her legs around him and dug her nails into his back, not scratching but definitely leaving indentions. She could feel herself grasp around him at the pressure building.

Evelyn's tightness was being pulled with every slight withdrawal of his cock. It was sending little currents to her core, pushing her closer to the moment that her orgasm would explode and she would lose complete control.

Bill's hips dipped, causing the lower part of his stomach to brush her clit. The time was now, and her orgasm exploded. Evelyn dug her nails deeper, urged him to go faster. He did, with hard, swift thrusts that put her over the edge into pure bliss.

It wasn't long before he was convulsing on top of her, sweat causing their bodies to stick slightly to each other.

In one swift movement, Bill collapsed next to her on the bed. Surprised, she turned on her side, looking at his features. His eyes were still on her, but a smile was starting to form on his lips.

A curl fell across his cheek. Evelyn twisted the silky hair around her finger until a frown stretched across her face, and she tucked the hair behind his ear.

"Thank you, Evelyn."

The words, whispered so softly, still had the power to flip her stomach. They held so much meaning, so much pain, buried

underneath it all that she couldn't say anything. She just nodded her head and gave him a tight smile.

If she was anything, she was good at slipping out the moment things got too serious. Evelyn stood, grabbing her clothes. She could take a shower at home. Right now, she just wanted to leave.

"I should go. Have a safe trip back to Houston."

Bill smiled with heavy lids, still in such a relaxed state that he didn't sit up. Evelyn slid her clothes on as fast as she could without looking like she was trying to escape some sort of fire that had spontaneously erupted in the room.

"I guess you won't be giving me your number?"

Near-silent laughter poured out of her before she could stop it. "I'm sorry, Bill. No, I don't think that's a good idea. You know where to find me if you ever come back. The Martini Bar is one of our haunts. We're there every weekend. I really do hope I see you again."

He nodded, laying back his head. Bill's eyes closed and the lashes cast shadows on the tops of his defined cheeks. Evelyn took one last look and piled everything into her purse that had been dumped out. Without looking back, she left.

Three was now back down to two. Shit. She liked having none better. At least the odds of her getting hurt in the long run, wasn't a risk. Brandon, she wasn't so worried about. He would be gone before long, she was guessing, but that didn't eliminate Stephen.

What the hell was she going to do about him? Evelyn's mind blanked. When in doubt, sleep on it. Yeah, right. Why did she feel she was going to be just as fucked on that decision tomorrow as she was today?

## Chapter 11

Brandon clenched his fist from the sofa as he watched Stephen burst through his door. The man had serious issues, but Brandon wasn't afraid of him. There was no way Stephen alone could take him down. Brandon had been a vampire for far too long to be outsmarted by a werewolf. If it had been Ayden or Trevor, then that would have been another story.

Ayden and Trevor had been friends of his for weeks. They had met at a club called Essence, toting their lovely Nicole with them. Wow, she was gorgeous. Evelyn's and her resemblance was uncanny. Nicole was exactly who he had thought he was looking at before he realized it was his Evelyn.

Stephen's panting brought him out of his thoughts.

"Why in the hell did you tell her? Now she wants me to remove the bond. It wasn't your place to tell," Stephen growled.

"Oh, come on, Steve," Brandon said, smiling as Stephen stiffened at the name. "Do you really think it's fair to drag her along when she's been so unhappy for the last two years? Do you have any idea what she's been through? What do you think Ayden would do to you if he knew what you have done? Ayden is very serious when it comes to mates. You should know this."

"It's none of your fucking business, or Ayden's, what I do with my mate. Evelyn is mine. Do you understand that? I'm not about to relinquish my mark just so she can run off with some fucking bloodsucker. I felt you take her blood. What does she think about that? Did she enjoy it?"

Brandon didn't move. Evelyn didn't know, but what would she think if she did? "Did *you* enjoy it, Stephen? Is that why you're so upset?"

Stephen studied Brandon's face. "She doesn't remember, does she? You did something to her. That's why I got a bad migraine this morning. You fucked with her head, didn't you?"

"Do you really want her to remember? Think about it, Stephen. You may have told her what I am, but what happens if she remembers a bite? Are you willing to let your mate be turned into a vampire? I'll happily do it—perfect sex slave," Brandon said, narrowing his eyes.

Stephen growled, and they were flying into the living room wall before Brandon could blink. Damn, Stephen was quicker than he gave him credit for. With a bone-crunching hit, Stephen punched him in the mouth. Good thing he didn't feel it, although he could taste the blood on his tongue.

"You will not touch her again. If you do, I'll kill you. Do you hear me?" Stephen yelled into his face.

Brandon laughed, feeling the blood trail down his chin. Stephen's eyes were glowing a vibrant blue. He was close to shifting, which, any other day, would have been fun to fight, but not with Evelyn so near. If he killed Stephen, she'd go through extreme pain at the break of their bond by his death.

"I can't promise you that, Stephen. You see, I have my own thing going with Evelyn that I can't just walk away from. If you're smart, you'll stay clear of me." Brandon threw him against the other wall. Stephen's body left an imprint. Great, this was going to cost a fortune.

Both of them were running at each other when a yell stopped them.

"What in the fuck do you both think you are doing," Evelyn hoarsely screamed. "I can't believe this shit. I'm gone for an hour, and you go at it like fucking high school kids. Stephen, look at your uniform. It's covered in white now. And if you think you're getting

out of paying for the damage to Brandon's walls, you're sadly mistaken."

The guys both looked at her like she had lost her mind. Brandon laughed hysterically at her scolding. She was absolutely adorable when she was upset. He was sure that he'd never seen anything like it before.

\* \* \* \*

Evelyn couldn't believe her eyes. Brandon's living room was destroyed. There were two large holes in the walls, not to mention that Brandon was bleeding. Holy shit. She should have never gone anywhere. The thoughts of what they were plagued her the whole way home, but the moment she had seen them harming each other, her fear went to the back burner. She couldn't deny that she somehow felt connected to both of them. And seeing them hurt each other hurt her.

"Stephen, you better explain what the hell you're doing over here, right now," Evelyn half whispered.

The look he gave her was of complete astonishment. She raised an eyebrow and waited for him to proceed. After a sigh, he ran his fingers through his hair.

"He told you and it wasn't his business." Stephen glared at Brandon.

"She had a right to know," Brandon snapped.

Stephen opened his mouth to pop off something and thought better of it. He glared even more at Brandon.

"What?" Evelyn asked. "You both are hiding something. Brandon, obviously there is something Stephen wishes to tell me but has decided against it. Would you like to inform me?"

The haughty smile left Brandon's face immediately. He looked over with a nervous expression toward Stephen, who in turn raised a go-ahead, tough-guy eyebrow back at him. Evelyn stomped her foot



and let out a scratchy, pathetic excuse for a scream that bounced off the holey walls.

"I swear to God, if either one of you is hiding something from me, I'll...kick both of your asses. I think enough secrets have affected my fucking life already. I better not find out about another. If either of you have something to say, say it now because if I find out later, I'll be pissed."

"Evey, we can't tell you. It's better if you didn't know." Stephen walked forward and held out his hands for her.

Evelyn rolled her eyes in disgust and turned to Brandon. "We don't know each other that well, but I trust that you'll tell me the truth. What is it that I'm not supposed to know?"

Brandon put his head down and let out a ragged sigh. "Evelyn, if this was anything else, I would tell you. But you have to understand that I can't. Do you know that saying, 'If I tell you, then I'll have to kill you'? Yeah, well, in this case, I would."

The words hit Evelyn hard. Her mind raced over part of the conversation she'd had with her ex. She recalled Stephen calling Brandon a vampire. For some reason, her hands flew to her neck. Like a tidal wave, everything rushed back to her, the table breaking, the bite...

"You fucking bit me last night. Oh my God, I remember. You broke the table. You *are* a...vampire. Shit...Stephen, you were right."

Stephen groaned, slamming his fist into the wall. Evelyn jumped at the sound of the impact and the fresh hole to go along with it. Brandon collapsed to the sofa, looking paler than he originally was.

"What? Was I not supposed to know?" Evelyn then recalled his words. *If I tell you, I'll have to kill you*. Panic set in and she did the only thing she could think to do; she ran like hell. There was no way she was going to die.

Evelyn was halfway down the stairs when an arm wrapped around her waist and clamped over her mouth. A scream tried to escape, but

nothing would come out. This was a fucking resort—where was everyone? She couldn't see a single soul, anywhere.

Suddenly, as if they had just appeared, they were back in Brandon's apartment. Stephen was still standing in the same area as before, but now was pacing angrily. Evelyn kicked and tried to bite Brandon's hand. She was willing to do whatever it took to get loose so she could try to escape again.

"What the fuck are we going to do now?" Stephen snapped at Brandon.

"Well, my friend, that is up to you." Brandon released his hand from her mouth. With the amount of burning in her throat, she knew she wouldn't be able to yell for help. Her mind raced while she tried to think over a solution.

"What the fuck about me, damn it," Evelyn whispered. "I should have a say about what the hell is going to happen to me."

Stephen walked over to Brandon. "Let me take her, make her my mate, and that way no one has to know. If anyone asks, I gave you permission. She's allowed to know if she's my mate."

Brandon tilted his head to the side. "Yeah, but Evelyn doesn't want to be with you. She already asked you to remove the bond you two share."

"She hasn't even given me a chance to redeem myself. I was young and stupid. The way I ended things was all wrong. I should have never lied and said I loved someone else when I didn't," Stephen growled.

"It took you two years to remember about her. Give me a break. Plus, if she wasn't marked to begin with, I could have wiped her memory completely. If she was truly your mate then I wouldn't have been able to get to her anyway. You would have protected her. She's supposed to be glued to your side, your wife in every sense."

Evelyn could see another fight brewing. This was just beyond ridiculous. Although she feared what they were, she couldn't let them kill themselves. Her mind might have been screaming, *Run*, but her

heart wouldn't let her. "I have an idea if you both would just shut up and listen," Evelyn said, stepping away from Brandon. "How about Stephen removes the mark, and then I will gladly let you erase my memory and we can all move on like nothing ever happened. Sorry, but I'm not sure I want to be with either of you. I'd rather start off brand-new and make my own decisions."

They both looked at her. Brandon was smiling, and Stephen looked confused. The room became eerily quiet as everyone thought over the options. Stephen was the one to break the silence.

"I don't know, Evelyn. Why can't you just give me a chance? It would be so much easier."

Evelyn took a deep breath. "Because, Stephen, what happens if it doesn't work? Then what? We'll go through the same scenario as we are now? I don't think so. We should start over new while we have the chance."

"She's right, Steve. It's the best decision concerning Evelyn." Brandon walked over and cupped her face.

"No, let go of her. I won't give her up. Not to be with you," Stephen snarled, pulling Brandon off her.

In a blur of color, Brandon, with his hand around Stephen's throat, had him against the wall. Fear consumed her. She needed to think of something fast or else they were going to kill each other.

"If Evelyn wouldn't go through any pain, I'd kill you now. Keep your fucking hands off me. If I want to touch her, I will, and there won't be a damn thing you can do about it. Maybe I *should* call Ayden. He needs to get his cub in check."

"Fuck you," Stephen growled, his eyes glowing.

Just at the confirmation of seeing her ex with light coming from behind his eyes, Evelyn's stomach flipped. But what could she do. The world tilted and she tried to get a hold on herself. If they were going to come to a conclusion, they had to do it fast.

"Enough...both of you. Shit, this is absurd. If you both don't stop, then I'll never speak to either one of you again. Now, Stephen, can

you please stop attacking Brandon long enough for us to figure out what we're going to do? For one, I'm not being forced into becoming your idea of what a mate entails. And, two, I'm not sure I'm ready to bask in the life of vampirism. This shit just isn't normal and I don't like it!"

"Oh come on, Evelyn. Just me and you, days and nights of endless lovemaking," Brandon teased.

"That's my point exactly." Evelyn rolled her eyes. Her heart was pounding. Thoughts wouldn't process anymore. She kept trying to show them she wasn't afraid of what they were, but some of the unknown details scared her and left her wanting to run, regardless of what her heart made her feel. The two parts of herself, reason and feeling, fought what felt a never-winning battle.

"That hurts. It truly wounds me." Brandon let go of Stephen and walked away from him without even looking back.

"Knock it off. Now let me just think, all right," Stephen said, sitting on the couch. "How do I know as soon as I break the bond, you're not going to sink your fangs into Evelyn? I'll never know then."

"No one is sinking anything into me, is that clear?" Evelyn eyed both of them while she fought the pain in her chest. "We wipe me clean of knowing anything about Stephen coming back or Brandon sinking his...teeth into me. I don't want to know about a mark or anything I'm not supposed to. If either of you are interested in a few weeks..." Evelyn paused and went over her thought before she said it, "come back to me. That'll be the true test on whether my feelings are true or because of something one of you did. Otherwise, stay away and I'll never know. And what I don't know can't hurt me."

"But what about what happened between you and me? Do you want to remember everything but the bite?" Brandon asked.

"Yes, don't wipe that clean. Just make me think I was drunk, like I thought before."

Evelyn and Brandon turned to Stephen. He looked up angrily. “So I guess this is the part where I break our bond and everyone is happy-go-fucking-lucky. Fine, whatever. Evelyn, don’t move. This is probably going to hurt. I’m not sure. I’ve never heard of anyone breaking the bond before. It’s just something werewolves don’t do. Ever.”

“What do you mean, hurt?” Brandon asked, walking quickly to Stephen.

“Well, you didn’t think it would just go away, did you? No, she’s going to feel like the love of her life just died. She’s going to be heartbroken all over again.”

“It won’t last long, right?” Evelyn felt the all too familiar anxiety course through her. She was so tired of feeling pain.

“No, I’ll wipe your memory as fast as I can, I promise.” Brandon wrapped his arm around her, trying to comfort her.

Stephen pulled her out of his arms and tightly embraced her, burying his face in Evelyn’s hair. “I’m so sorry, please forgive me,” he whispered.

Teeth sank into the junction of her neck and shoulder, and Evelyn felt like her very soul was ripped from the confines of her body. What she had experienced when Stephen left wasn’t a fraction of what she felt when he broke his bond. The air completely left her and was replaced with a grief so overpowering that she collapsed in his arms. When the air rushed back into her lungs, her hoarse screams of agony filled the apartment.

Tears raced down Evelyn’s cheeks as she writhed and screamed. Images of their past flashed in front of her eyes, blinding her from the men. Fear like nothing she had ever felt before in her life took over her mind. She was desperate to find solace.

“Stephen! Stephen, no, come back. Make it go away! Stephen!”

Evelyn clawed to get closer to him, even if it was her physical body looking for the contact of his nearness, and what she needed was

on the inside. A tear from Stephen landed on her face as he held her still and against his chest.

“Brandon, do something, damn it! I can’t take seeing her like this.”

“Hold her head to the side. It’s the only way I can make sure I clear everything out,” Brandon snapped.

Stephen growled, but obeyed. A sharp pain made Evelyn aware of reality for the first time in her hysterics, and before she knew it, everything was black. She was falling slowly down a tunnel of darkness, and then nothing.

## Chapter 12

Brandon watched Evelyn's memories as they flooded him. Like a card catalog, he sifted through her routine for the last two days, taking out everything he could think of so she wouldn't remember. The broken table, the bite, doubts that he couldn't possibly be human.

Taking Stephen's memories had been easier. They registered to him like a red flag. She loved him, Brandon knew that, and it wasn't just the bond. Yes, the bond had been extremely strong, but Brandon caught flashes of before the bond had been placed on her.

In the thirty seconds it took him to feed, shift through her memories, and wipe out everything they needed to, he got a chance to view Evelyn's life. She was as easy to get into as any normal human, which scared him. Would another vampire take advantage of her, use his good looks to hypnotize her into doing whatever he wanted? The thought made Brandon's stomach drop.

There weren't many vampires around Corpus Christi, but he knew of one, and he left her doubts right where they were, with Paul. He wasn't going to risk Paul taking advantage of her if he wasn't around to watch over her.

Brandon eased his lips off Evelyn's neck, and he licked the wound, closing it. She'd never know she was bitten. She wouldn't even have many memories of him at all. Not any of her stroking his hair, or of sharing coffee while he comforted her, of nothing but rejecting him and a scrambled one-night stand. But there would be more, he'd make sure of that. He wasn't going anywhere.

"Is she okay? Did you get everything?" Stephen asked, lifting and cradling her in his arms.

“Yeah, I got everything. Let’s go and put her in her bed. She probably won’t wake up until the morning. Tomorrow is Sunday, right?” Brandon asked, shaking his head. He was so lost on time.

“Yeah, she’ll have a day to recuperate before she has to go back to work. Do you think she’ll be upset like she was, before you cleared everything?”

“No. I took out enough that I don’t think she’ll be that bad off. She might be quiet, a little distant, but not screaming like she was.” Brandon eased Evelyn’s hair off her face while he took in her relaxed features. She looked so peaceful, so beautiful. Wiping the streaks of tears away, he looked up at her ex-fiancé.

“Look, obviously you feel something. All right, I accept that. But we both know what is best for her, and it’s not you,” Stephen snapped. “She needs a stable home, a family...kids. Evelyn won’t get that with you. I want to give her that.”

Brandon watched as the big blond turned toward the door. He knew that Stephen was right. He couldn’t give Evelyn those things. Yes, he owned a house, just outside of Austin. But he was never there. The world held too much to stay in one place for long, but he’d give it up if he found the right person. As for kids, well, that was debatable.

As myth goes, vampires are dead, no heartbeat, no soul, dead once the sun comes up. Horseshit. Except for a sensitivity to fluorescent lighting and a sunburn if in the sun too long, he was fine. He could stay up for days if he wanted to—dead at night, his ass.

Brandon lived his everyday life like anyone else. So did all the other vampires. Between that and being able to make people forget about the consumption of blood, why else did everyone believe vampires were myths? No one wandered around and found vampires in coffins. That was ridiculous.

“Let’s put her to bed. And truthfully, I don’t think *you’re* right for her, Stephen. You’ve already hurt her before. What makes you think it’s not going to happen again?”



Brandon peeked out the door. The coast was clear. No one was out. He walked over, using Evelyn's key to unlock the door, and motioned Stephen to proceed.

Once Evelyn was changed and tucked into her bed, the guys looked at each other. Neither of them wanted to leave her. How long would it be until she finally woke up? Would she remember?

"To answer your question, I'm right for her because I left to protect her from what I am. If you had seen how Sheila reacted when she found out she carried lycanthropy, you wouldn't blame me for removing myself from Evelyn's life. Ayden's sister went ballistic. I'm talking suicide attempts, massive fits of rage, and the works. You really think I wanted to bring the love of my life into that situation?"

"Of course not. But I still don't think you're the one for her."

A sigh left the cop's mouth. "You'll watch over her while I'm at work, right?" Stephen's voice softened as his face filled with concern. Brandon noticed his eyes were fixated on Evelyn.

"Yeah, I was thinking that maybe I should stay until she wakes up. What could we tell her for both of us being here? For the next few days we need to keep a close watch on her,"

Stephen ran his fingers through his blond hair while he looked down toward the bed. "Just say you found her asleep in her car or something and you called the station. That's when I can say I arrived. We'll tell her she even momentarily woke up, so we knew she was okay. Do you think that will work?"

"That is the stupidest story I've ever heard, but since I can't think of anything better, it's going to have to do. What choice does she have but to believe us, anyway? The last thing she's going to remember is leaving that motel. She won't even remember the ride home." Brandon crossed his arms and studied Evelyn's face.

"What motel," Stephen snapped.

Brandon groaned and waved Stephen into the living room. This was going to be a long story, one he didn't really feel like telling. The

cop stomped his way to the couch and sat down when he realized Brandon wasn't going to continue, until he did.

"A few months ago, our dear Evelyn devised a game to keep her and her friends occupied until spring break approached."

"What kind of game?"

"A game they call Bets. One focused on men."

A look of revulsion came across Stephen's face, but Brandon continued. "You see, with a point of one of their fingers, they bet each other who they would take to a motel and fuck. If they win and get the guy to leave with them and fuck them, then the one who made the bet has to buy drinks. If not, it's the other way around and the loser buys the drinks."

Stephen paled. "And that's what she was doing when she was gone, a bet?"

Brandon laughed. "Not today she wasn't, but the guy was once one of the bets. He's the first one she fucked twice. She really likes him, you know. That much I can tell. The guy has been through hell. I guess you could say she could relate."

Stephen huffed. "I can't believe she would do this. It doesn't sound like the same Evelyn I know."

"Knew," Brandon corrected. "You don't know her anymore, Stephen. She's completely different from how she was when you were both together. Trust me, I saw everything. Listen, go to work and I'll be here watching over her until you come back...if you come back."

"I'll be back. Keep your hands off her or I'll break them. Do you hear me? Just because we share Evelyn in common doesn't mean we're friends."

Brandon laughed. "Yeah, yeah, go to work, cub."

"Quit being a smart-ass and calling me that damn name. I'll be back," Stephen said, shutting the door behind him.

The thudding of the stairs was a loud echo in Brandon's ears. When he was sure Stephen was gone, he opened his phone and hit Taylor's number. It was time he told him what was going on.

\* \* \* \*

Stephen got into his cruiser and sat there quietly for a few minutes. The game Evelyn was playing was a ticking time bomb. What happened when she pissed off the wrong guy? What happened if she was attacked? Had she lost her damn mind?

This was all his fault. How had he let things get this bad? Breaking off the engagement with Evelyn was supposed to protect her, not put her in more danger. He had never expected Sheila to take two years to accept her change.

Ayden had made him promise, had ordered and trusted him, to make sure she got better. Sheila wouldn't let Ayden anywhere near her, not after she had found out her own brother gave her lycanthropy. It had been a freak accident, but Sheila didn't care. She hated what she had become.

The cruiser came to life as Stephen started the car, and he pulled out of the parking lot. His thoughts took over while he headed to the station.

Evelyn was never supposed to find out what he was until he could win her back and explain things his own way. She needed to be eased into the situation. The way she had acted, as if the news of what they were didn't bother her, was amazing. Stephen could feel how scared she was through the bond, and he hated that she feared him. This time, he would find a way to break it to her where she would understand.

Rubbing his eyes, he tried to fit the pieces together. Never had he thought anything remotely like this was going to happen. A freaking vampire of all things. When had they come to town? Brandon knew about Ayden, so he had to have been here for a while, but why?

Vampires traveled. They did not usually stay in one place for more than a week or two.

Stephen smiled as he took Brandon's wallet out of his pocket. He was betting his name wasn't even his real one, but it wouldn't stop him from seeing what was on his file.

The wallet fell open, and he read the Texas driver's license, Brandon Charles De La Cruz.

"Yeah, right." Stephen laughed. "Austin, interesting. What is he doing down here, I wonder?"

Well, it was time he found out. Brandon De La Cruz was going to get checked out very thoroughly, and Stephen was certain that his record was going to be squeaky clean.

## Chapter 13

Evelyn yawned and stretched, feeling completely refreshed. Wow, she must have slept very well. The thoughts of Bill swamped her mind and she smiled, remembering how his hair had curled around her finger. She hoped she would get to see him again.

Light flickered as Evelyn blinked her eyes open. A hoarse scream came out of her throat at seeing two men standing at the end of her bed. Rubbing her eyes, she watched them come into focus.

“Brandon...Stephen? What in the hell is going on?”

The surprise of seeing Stephen after all this time was confusing. She always expected to feel excited or sad, but as strange as it was, she just felt shocked. He looked good, tired, but very good. The flutter of her heart made her smile. Why wasn't she angry at seeing him? Could she actually be happy at the sight of him? Surely not.

“We were just checking on you. Brandon found you passed out in your car yesterday and he called the station. I was the one who showed up. You woke up, though, twice...” Stephen said, looking over at Brandon. “We knew you would be okay. We just had to make sure.”

Evelyn squinted, trying to remember. All right, she had had amazing sex with Bill, and then she had left, and then what?

“I don't remember coming home from...” She looked up at them and thought, *What the hell, what's the point of lying?* “From Bill's.”

“Is Bill your boyfriend?” Stephen asked, pulling out a notebook. Brandon and Evelyn both looked at him.

“I don't see how that is any of your concern, Stephen,” Evelyn said, confused.

Stephen just looked up from the pad of paper and looked back down, scribbling against the sheet. Evelyn wondered what in the hell he was doing. What could he possibly be writing?

“Evelyn, you could have been slipped some kind of illegal drug. I just want to talk to this guy to make sure both of your stories match up.”

Laughter floated out of Evelyn’s mouth. “Oh, Stephen, no one drugged me.” She barely got the words out. Then her laughter died. Had she been drugged? Is that why she couldn’t remember? Bill hadn’t given her anything, but had someone the night before given her something? She was missing bits and pieces of that night, too.

“Oh my God, Stephen you might be right. I can’t remember the night before either. I went out. Brandon, you were there. Was I acting weird that you remember?”

Brandon looked over at Stephen for a split-second. Evelyn was sure that she saw him whisper, but there was no way he said anything she could hear.

“Well, you did pass out right before we finished, but you were very passionate. I guess it’s possible you were on something, but I doubt it. I think you were just drunk,” Brandon said, glaring at Stephen.

“So what was Bill’s full name and where can I find him?” Stephen gave her his serious cop expression. She wanted to smile. So many times she’d seen him use that face on other people. It was odd that he was now using it on her.

Evelyn searched her mind. “I don’t know his last name. Truthfully, I didn’t think to ask. Well, I didn’t care to, actually. His location...well, he’s on a plane, back to Houston.

“Really?” Stephen began writing down her response. “Well, what was the hotel you were staying at? I’ll get his information at the front desk.”

Evelyn once again searched her mind. She had been there plenty of times, and yet the name wouldn’t come to her. “Shit,” she said

heavily. “I don’t know. I can’t remember. What is happening to me? It’s the one closest to the ferry. It’s...it’s...”

“No need, Evelyn. I know which one you’re talking about. Do you need me to get you anything?” Stephen walked to the bed and sat on the edge.

She looked into his eyes deeply, searching for the feelings that had led to her heartache the last two years. It had been there, hadn’t it? Why did she feel so light?

“I’m fine, Stephen. Remarkably so, it seems. How have you been? Good, I hope?” Evelyn grabbed his hand. Her heart leaped at the touch, but not with pain, with excitement. Had she hit her head? Why was she so happy to see him?

“All right, I guess.” He gave her a puzzled look and glanced at Brandon.

“And Sheila, how is she?” Evelyn asked, waiting for the ache to come. It didn’t.

“Last I heard she was fine. We’re no longer together. She got her own place two months ago.”

“Really? I’m sorry to hear things didn’t work out. I know how much you loved her.” Evelyn gave his hand a squeeze trying to show her support. Hadn’t she gone through so much pain over him? Even if he had hurt her, she didn’t wish that on anyone.

“Evelyn...”

Stephen’s eyes held so much emotion. She took in a long, ragged breath. At the unidentified look that covered his face, a stabbing appeared in her chest. The pain was still there. She could feel it, hidden behind something. Great, and to think she had gotten lucky. Nope, not her.

“Stephen, don’t. Everything will be okay. I promise. If you would have asked me that yesterday, I probably would have said love was the worst thing imaginable, but you’ll get over it. See, I’m fine.” Evelyn almost choked on her words. The damn stabbing punctured her chest again. She wanted to scream, *Damn it, go away.*

Evelyn quickly climbed off the bed and noticed that she was in her nightgown. “Who changed me?” She looked back and forth between them. Did she really want to know?

“I did. I hope you don’t mind. I wanted you to be comfortable,” Brandon said, looking down.

“Thank you, both of you, for everything. If you both don’t mind, I need to jump in the shower and get dressed. There’s something I have to do today. I’m supposed to...” Evelyn trailed off, not remembering. Everything had suddenly gone blank, like that part of her mind had been wiped clean.

“I’m supposed to...damn it! I can’t remember. Sarah should know. I’ll call her. If you two want, you can both wait in the living room. I’d love to catch up on more that I’ve missed. I just really feel like I should get clean.”

“Take your time, we’ll be here when you get out,” Stephen said, walking out of the room. He still looked upset. Evelyn’s heart sank. Oh well, she wouldn’t think about that right now. She obviously didn’t get to shower after Bill. Ugh, she felt dirty.

Brandon walked out the door, and she grabbed a pair of jeans, a T-shirt, and a clean set of matching undergarments. With the water turned as hot as she could get it, she didn’t waste any time scrubbing herself clean with her body soap.

Pink flowers on the designer bottle caught her attention and she read the words on the front. *Cherry blossoms with almond extract*. Something in her memory tugged. Why was it so imperative for her to remember what type of soap she used? She couldn’t quit staring at the label. Captivated, she reread it over and over.

The smell circulated around her, clouding the steamy restroom, and still her mind pulled at a reason why the words on the bottle were so important. “Cherry blossoms and almond extract...”

Had someone said something about her soap? She felt like they had. Was it the same person who drugged her? Had she been drugged? Fuck, Evelyn wished she could remember.



The soap trailed down her back while she washed out her shampoo. The feel of Brandon caressing her brought a moan. From what she could remember, he had been amazing. She was definitely going to have to break her rules and “make love” to him again. That was just an offer too good for her to pass up.

\* \* \* \*

Brandon paced the living room nervously. “Drugged? Are you serious, Stephen? You couldn’t have come up with something other than that? And what the hell were you writing down?”

“Bill’s information, that’s what the hell I was writing down. It wouldn’t hurt to make sure the guy’s not a wanted serial killer or rapist,” Stephen snapped.

“She seems a lot better, don’t you think?” Brandon stopped long enough to look over at Stephen lounging on the couch.

“Yeah, she seems happy,” Stephen whispered. “So do you think it worked?”

Brandon gave up pacing to go sit down on the couch, too. “I don’t know, we’ll have to see. She’s better than I thought she was going to be. I’m not sure I like it so much. Evelyn’s memories are gone, but I’m not a miracle worker. She should be feeling *something*.”

The water from the shower turned off, and the guys looked at each other. With Brandon sensitive to sound he could hear almost all of her movement from the next room. He didn’t doubt Stephen could hear the same thing.

“So what now,” Stephen asked wearily.

“Now we wait until she kicks us out, or you’re free to leave now if you want. I’ll stay with her as long as she allows it. She’s probably hungry. You feel like eating?” Brandon asked. Even though he didn’t eat much human food, he still could enjoy some of it. It might not be very appetizing, but it was more habit than anything.

"I'm fucking starving. I feel like steak. What do you think?" Stephen looked toward him, but before Brandon could answer, footsteps against the carpet grabbed his attention.

"Mmm, that sounds great. I'm starving too. How about we all go to lunch?" Evelyn said, walking in and drying her hair with a towel.

"You do owe me so I guess we'll call this even." Brandon said, laughing.

"That's right, I remember." Evelyn laughed. "I believe I rejected you, repeatedly if I'm not mistaken."

"You're absolutely right. You did." Brandon looked at how beautiful she appeared without any makeup. Not very many women could look just as good with or without, but she could. Her skin was flawless. Everything about her made him want to gravitate toward her, if not to touch her, then to at least be closer to her presence.

Evelyn reached for her black flip-flops by the front door. Watching her slide them on, he noticed her pause. She stood rooted to the floor, her mouth slightly parted. Brandon could feel panic start to take over while he waited for her to do or say something.

"What's wrong," Stephen asked, walking up to her. Concern was etched on his face.

The way she shook her head back and forth gave him the impression that she was confused. "I don't know. The smell of my soap and the words on my bottle, they keep playing over and over in my mind. I think someone mentioned it. Maybe they liked it. I'm not sure. I can't remember. I just keep hearing cherry blossoms and almond extract, repeatedly. The words want to follow, but they won't come."

Brandon cleared his throat. "So whose car? I'd say mine, but I don't see how three of us are going to fit in a two-seater. What are you driving, Stephen?"

"Cruiser. My car's at the house," he said quietly.

"My car it is." Evelyn fished her keys out from her purse. "Maybe I shouldn't drive. Here, Stephen, you drive." Evelyn handed her keys

over. “Brandon can sit in the back for trying to sidetrack me, and he can kindly explain why in the world he tried to distract me from not remembering about the soap.”

Brandon opened his mouth and then closed it. “Fuck, all right. I said the information about the soap. Once I tell you this, you will remember.” Brandon kept eye contact with her while he approached.

“Think back to when we were on our way home from the bar. You told me to tell you something that I wouldn’t know. I told you...” Brandon looked over at Stephen, who was paying extra attention. “I told you,” he started over, “that you weren’t wearing any panties, that your soap was cherry blossoms with almond extract, and...”

He watched as Evelyn’s face transformed. The memory Brandon had just placed back in her head was one he really didn’t want there. It was what had started her doubt in the first place. Well, shit. Not much he could do now. It was better than her searching for something that wasn’t there. But if she had recalled the soap, what else would she recall?

“You said I was ovulating. I slammed on the brakes. I remember!” She laughed. Then her smile twisted slightly. “That was really creepy, you know? You shouldn’t joke around like that. I was sure you weren’t real. Wow, I was really drunk, wasn’t I.”

“I would have thought the same thing,” Stephen said, glaring at Brandon, who just smiled back at him. “Shall we go eat?” He held the door open for Evelyn.

Giving Stephen a smile, he watched Evelyn walk out into the salty sea air. The waves could be heard crashing even from the second-floor walkway. It was windier than usual. There was definitely a chill in the air, too.

He tried not to think of the consequences for what he’d done as they headed for the parking lot. If he knew one thing it was that locking someone’s memory wasn’t always permanent. But hopefully they could reach some sort of a conclusion before things backfired in all of their faces.

## Chapter 14

Two weeks had gone by without anything significant happening. Evelyn looked down at her watch and went back to surfing the Web on her office computer. In ten minutes, she'd be able to leave. Office duty had been hers this week, and she had to admit that this was the part she hated the most about her job. It was so boring, sitting here waiting for someone to come by.

Sure, they had a receptionist to lock up, but she was the one who took calls if anyone was interested to know the price of a certain property. The only time she got to leave was at lunch, whoopee big fucking deal. One hour out of the nine.

"Evelyn, don't look so depressed," Sarah said, walking over to her desk. Her stilettos clicked on the tile as she approached.

"Thank God. I thought I was going to go crazy. Where has everyone been today? You didn't even call me once." Evelyn glared playfully at her friend.

"Sorry, there was this cute little dish I had to shag before I started the weekend off. Now what's this I hear about you hiding Stephen out in your apartment? Are you seriously talking to him again after everything he put you through?"

Evelyn felt the sharp stab of pain in her chest. That damn feeling was happening more frequently the last two days. "I'm not hiding him out. We all watch movies at night. I forgive him. He's going through something similar at the moment. Sheila and Stephen broke it off, and he's upset. I know how that feels."

“Personally, I think you’ve lost your damn mind. I would have booted his ass right out of my house.” Sarah paused. “Wait, who is ‘we all’?” Her friend narrowed her eyes.

Evelyn blushed. “Brandon. He’s here until right after spring break, so he says. He’s really funny, actually.”

Sarah mouth parted. “He is such a hunk. And...so interested in you, I might add. I couldn’t even catch his attention that night in the bar. He watched you like a hawk. I don’t even think he blinked once. I thought you liked Paul, though. Whatever happened to him?”

Evelyn searched her memories. “Oh, him. He was hot, but something about him told me to back off. I don’t know. It was weird.”

“Well, he might be there tonight. You are going out for Bets, right? You’re not playing Betty Homemaker already, are you?” Sarah rolled her eyes.

“Of course I’m playing Bets.” Evelyn’s stomach twisted just thinking about going out to the bar. What if she got drugged again? Tonight, she vowed not to drink anything she didn’t watch made personally.

“Well, good, because you owe Melissa drinks. She did bet you, by the way, and you didn’t go through with it, so...”

“I know, I know,” Evelyn said, grabbing her purse. Finally, she could leave. Then it was off to get ready to go out. The guys weren’t planning to come over, so she didn’t have to worry about them. It was time to have a little fun, she hoped.

They walked toward the entrance of the building, waving at the receptionist on their way out. Another sharp pain had Evelyn paused at the door of her car. Trying to brace herself, she gripped her hand against the door handle.

“Hey, you all right?” Sarah asked, looking over at her from her car.

“Fine.” Evelyn tried to catch her breath. She opened the door, got in, and blindly searched for her keys. What in the hell was happening to her? It wasn’t heartburn. The aching feeling made her feel hollow.

She wanted to ball up and cry from the immense loss she felt nestling itself inside her.

The engine roared to life and she watched Sarah drive out of the lot in her shiny red Corvette. *Lucky bitch*. Oh well, Sarah didn't have a mortgage. She refused to buy a house when she swore that someday, she'd marry a guy who would do it for her. Her platinum blond friend was more the Barbie type. Everything about her radiated the perfect female. But Evelyn knew she wasn't what she appeared, no matter how hard Sarah tried to hide it.

Evelyn drove out, using one hand on the steering wheel while pushing the other against the emptiness in her chest. If anything, she felt like her heart had been ripped out. One minute she was fine, happy-go-lucky, ready to play Bets, and the next she wanted to hide so she could scream and cry at the sadness she felt.

Port Aransas wasn't that big. It took her less than five minutes to pull into the resort parking lot. Breathing deeply, Evelyn grabbed her purse and walked to the stairs. Both Stephen and Brandon were sitting in chairs in front of Brandon's window. *When had they become friends?* They argued worse than her grandmothers did. Even when they were watching movies, they sniped at each other.

Trying to climb while she used one hand to clutch the railing and the other to clutch her chest was painful. She didn't want to talk to them right now. The need to be alone consumed her. If she could use a good hour to cry for no apparent reason, then she'd feel better.

"Hey, beautiful, how was work," Brandon asked, looking over at her.

Evelyn forced a smile. "Good, I'm just tired. I'm going to go in and rest." She pushed her fist between her breasts harder at the sight of Stephen's sympathetic smile. He probably thought she was tired, but tired was the last thing Evelyn was. The need to hold Stephen, to ask him why he had left her was like whiplash. It was enough to make her nearly stumble down the stairs. Thank God, she was clutching the railing.

“Are you okay?”

Brandon was suddenly on his feet. Evelyn hadn’t even seen him stand from the chair. She looked over and Stephen was standing too. When had that happened?

Tightness consumed Evelyn’s throat. Hysterics were moments away. What in the hell was the matter with her? The thought that she might cry in front of these two guys was enough to make her angry, which for some reason brought the tears on even more.

“I’m fine, really. I’m just tired. Maybe I’m getting sick. My chest has been hurting the last few days. I’m going to nap, and then maybe I’ll see you two later.”

The guys both looked at each other with concern. Evelyn pulled out her keys and locked herself in her apartment as fast as she could. Relief that she had made it inside made her eyes blurry with moisture. Now she could release and no one could see her. Everything would be fine, and tonight she would go and have fun.

Not once did Evelyn’s head drop. She held it high while she walked to her bed and crawled under the covers. Holding the pillow to her chest and wrapping herself in a ball around it, she let the sobs pour from her.

Flashes of her past engulfed her mind, smothered her breath. The need to rush to Stephen was almost uncontrollable. The question “Why” kept repeating in her mind. He said that he loved her. He acted like he did. So then why after one weekend of Sheila visiting her brother had Stephen left her? What was it about Sheila that had made him throw away everything they had? Nothing made sense.

For endless minutes she lay sobbing, confused as to what was happening. Was she having some sort of brain meltdown?

Evelyn screamed into the pillow as a wave of despair took over her. At the pounding on her door, the pain was suddenly gone. She sat up wiping her eyes and felt absolutely fine. The absence of her sadness left her even more confused. There, that was it. It was out and she would be fine now, at least she hoped.

Clearing her throat, Evelyn called out, “Just a minute,” and rushed to the bathroom.

Cool water had her gasping for air while she rinsed off her face. “See, you’re fine,” she said to her reflection in the mirror. But she didn’t look fine. The redness and swollenness of her eyes were a dead giveaway, not to mention her whole face was flushed.

Brandon and Stephen looked ready to break her door down. It took her a moment to ask them anything. “I thought I told you two I was taking a nap.” Evelyn tried not to make eye contact with either of them.

“We heard you scream, and you’ve been crying. What’s wrong?” Stephen took a step toward her.

This was not happening. No way had they heard her scream. It hadn’t been that loud, plus she had screamed into the pillow.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. It was probably one of the kids you heard screaming. Now if it’s all right with you I’m going back to bed.” Evelyn looked up for the first time at Stephen’s face. It was the worst mistake she could have made. She felt as if she had been impaled on a knife. Evelyn gasped, grabbing her chest, and slammed the door.

It opened immediately. Damn, she forgot to lock it! They both walked in, eying her suspiciously. The tears were already rolling down her cheeks, and there was nothing she could do about it.

“Get out! Go away! I don’t want you two here! I want to be...alone.” Evelyn could barely make out the last word, she was crying so hard.

“It didn’t work.” Brandon sighed. “What now?” He turned to Stephen.

“How do you know it didn’t work? Maybe something else is bothering her.”

Stephen took another step toward Evelyn. She jumped away from him as if he had burned her.

“Evelyn, come to me,” Stephen said calmly.



As if her body had a mind of its own, Evelyn walked forward. “No, no, I don’t want to,” she cried. Her legs carried her, but her mind was screaming no. “What is happening? Why can’t I stop?”

“Fuck, the bond’s not completely broken. I don’t know what else to do. I was just supposed to release it and everything was meant to go back to normal, so I thought,” Stephen said, more to himself than anyone else. “You can stop, Evelyn. You don’t have to come to me if you don’t want to.”

Evelyn came to a halt at his words. Did she really want to stop? All she knew was if she even so much as touched Stephen she was going to ask him why he left, cry some more, and then beg him to make love to her. That, she couldn’t do. She had way too much pride to resort to begging someone who had left her to begin with.

“You have to call Ayden and tell him what you’ve done,” Brandon said, never taking his eyes off Evelyn. “Maybe he’ll know how to break it.”

“Fuck, you’re right. The shit is going to hit the fan. Damn, he’s going to be pissed.” Stephen pulled out his phone.

“What are you both talking about?” Evelyn was furious that they kept speaking in riddles. Angry, she wiped the tears from her cheeks. She was so tired of feeling this way. The sadness she’d felt over the last two years kept mentally wearing her down. She wasn’t sure how much more she could take.

“Nothing. Why don’t we go and make some coffee?”

Brandon led her to the kitchen like a child. Evelyn didn’t care. Coffee sounded very good at the moment.

## Chapter 15

On the second ring, Ayden picked up the phone. Weight settled in Stephen's chest. There was no doubt in his mind that Ayden was going to be pissed off, but all he could think about was if Evelyn was going to be all right. He had never meant to hurt her.

"Stephen, what's up?"

"We have a problem." Stephen walked to the far end of the living room. He didn't want Evelyn to hear his conversation.

"Is it Sheila? Is she all right?" Ayden's panic was thick in his voice.

"No, Sheila is fine. I talked to her earlier. This isn't about her. There's something I haven't told you."

Ayden got quiet for a few seconds. "So tell me."

"Before you ordered me to take care of Sheila, I marked someone. I broke off our engagement and haven't seen her until recently. A part of me thought she would be fine and that after Sheila was better, I could pick up where we left off. Well, she wasn't fine, and I released the bond, but she's worse now. She's in so much pain." Stephen breathed deeply.

"You did what! Why in the hell didn't you tell me this before? I could have gotten someone else to look after Sheila. Do you know what you've done to this girl?" Ayden growled. "Stephen, you can't release the bond. I don't care what you've heard. It'll be there forever."

"What do I do? I love her. I loved her from the moment I saw her, but I don't think she loves me. She just feels what the bond wants her to feel."

Ayden took a deep breath. “No, Stephen. If she’s as bad as you say she is, the bond is only intensifying what she feels. She loves you too, or else she wouldn’t be this bad. You have to replace the bond. Having the connection severed is only hurting her more. She needs to feel it or else this will go on and only get worse.

“I really wish you would have told me. Nicole and I were only separated a week, and it was the most agonizing time in my life. I don’t know how the both of you did it for two years.”

“Thanks, Ayden. I’ll figure something out.”

“There’s nothing to figure out, Stephen,” Ayden snapped. “You have two days to replace that bond or else I’ll hunt you down myself. I will not allow anyone from my pack to put an innocent person through that much agony. Two days.” Ayden hung up the phone.

Stephen looked at it, shocked. “Shit.” Overwhelmed, he stuffed it in his pocket. How in the hell was he going to get her to fall back in love with him in just two days? That was impossible.

Brandon and Evelyn walked into the living room, both holding cups of coffee. Evelyn handed him a cup made just the way he liked it. The realization that she remembered after all this time made his heart skip. He would find a way to get her back. They were meant to be together, and he wouldn’t stop until they were.

\* \* \* \*

Evelyn felt so much better now that she’d had what she considered a breakdown. Maybe if she would have had hysterics like these two years ago, instead of crying and drinking her troubles away, she would be over Stephen already. Why was that thought not very comforting to her?

The red dress Evelyn had on was perfect for tonight. She turned, examining herself in the mirror in the restroom. The dress was one of the many curve-fitting microfiber concoctions she owned. It screamed fuck me. It was perfect.

A knock on her door had her swinging her hips. She tried her best to run in the red stilettos, but gave up and settled for a fast walk. Melissa looked absolutely stunning in a black little number. Her dark red hair haloed her face in silky waves.

“Hey, you look great,” Evelyn said, collecting her red clutch.

“Not as good as you. So how are things? Sarah told me Stephen is back in the picture. I’m not sure what I think about that, but my lips are sealed,” Melissa said, pretending to zip her lips closed. “He’s outside, by the way.”

“I figured he was. He’s always sitting out there with Brandon now. I don’t know, but I don’t want to talk about it.” The thought that the stabbing pain would come rushing back scared the crap out of her.

“No problem, I understand. Just be careful,” Melissa said softly.

“I will. You ready?”

Melissa opened the door and they walked out. A whistle had them turning toward Brandon’s door. The men both stood with their mouths parted.

“Wow, you look amazing,” Brandon breathed out, walking over to Evelyn.

“Thanks a lot,” Melissa said jokingly. “I guess I’m chopped liver.”

“No, you look amazing too.” Brandon smiled at her charmingly, but Melissa didn’t buy it.

“Yeah, yeah, save it, Romeo. You’re not fooling anyone.” Melissa looked over at Stephen. “Haven’t seen you in a while. How’ve you been?”

“Okay, I guess. I see your little group is going out tonight.” Stephen looked back over at Evelyn. Shyly, she looked down. Something between Brandon and her ex had happened earlier. One minute they were drinking coffee, the next, they excused themselves and rushed from her apartment. It was enough to make her head spin.

“Yes, we’re going out, and we’re going to be late. Ev, you ready?” Melissa was already heading down the stairs.

“Yeah, I’m right behind you. You boys have fun tonight. Don’t party it up too hard.”

“Who, us? No, we’re just going to sit here and drink. Should we save you one?” Brandon asked, smiling down at her.

*Damn, he’s gorgeous*, Evelyn thought. “No, I don’t expect to be home tonight. Thanks, though, I appreciate the offer.”

Brandon’s smile faltered. “All right, well, have fun tonight. Don’t do anything too crazy. I don’t feel like bailing you out of jail.”

“That’s me, the crazy law breaker. All right, bye, guys.” Evelyn took one last look at Stephen, and her heart dropped. She turned quickly and headed after her friend before she did something as unbelievably stupid as throw herself at him.

Melissa was waiting for her by her car, tapping her foot. “Damn, you took forever. Why are you even going out? There are two guys up there right now ready to devour you. Did you see the way Stephen was practically drooling over himself? He still wants you.”

Evelyn didn’t answer; she just stepped up into Melissa’s truck and stared out of the window while letting the words sink in. At hearing the loud exhaust, Evelyn drifted into her thoughts even more, letting the sound of the soft music flow through her.

The darkness helped her focus on the plaguing problems. Why were Stephen and Brandon hanging around each other? Stephen had other friends, didn’t he? He always had before when they were together. They used to joke and call themselves “the pack” because there were so many of them. What had happened? Had helping her out of the car that day brought them together? Or did Stephen truly not have anyone else left?

*The pack... Why was that so familiar?* Damn it, there was something to that statement that bothered her, just like with the damn soap she used. It had a pulling sensation on her mind, as if she should remember something about it. Fuck, this feeling was getting annoying.

Before Evelyn knew it, she was so consumed with trying to remember her lost memories that Melissa had to call her name twice to let her know they were there.

“Are you feeling all right? It’s like you’re in another world lately. Where’s the fun, crazy Evelyn I know?”

“She’s here, no worries.” Evelyn climbed out of the truck.

The bar was packed like always. The girls weaved through people and made it to their booth, where Sarah and Julie were already waiting. Everyone was wearing black but Evelyn. They all noticed at the same time and laughed.

“Well, we’re not going to lose Evelyn in a crowd tonight. That dress is amazing. Where in the world did you get it?” Sarah asked, scooting over for her to sit down.

“You seriously have to ask? Where do I buy all my clothes?”

Sarah nodded and pushed over Evelyn’s drink. “I had the liberty of already ordering. Second round is on you. Drink up, woman. We’re going to get you loosened up in no time.”

Looking down into the drink, Evelyn felt her stomach flip. “No one besides the two of you has been by my drink, right?”

“Of course not. Why?” Sarah asked, confused.

“I think someone slipped something in my martini the last time we were out. I have pieces missing from the whole weekend it seems.”

“Shut up, you’re shitting me,” Julie said, leaning forward, her blue eyes round with fear.

“I’m dead serious. I only remember pieces of Brandon and me fucking. He thought I was just drunk but seriously, it’s really freaking me out.”

“That is so scary. Everyone watch each other’s drinks tonight,” Sarah said seriously.

They peered into their glasses, shrugged, and drank their martinis like they were shots. In one gulp, the glasses were empty.

Five martinis later, Evelyn felt absolutely wonderful. Every guy who walked by was a potential target. Now who did she want to place a bet on tonight? Julie seemed eager enough.

Evelyn knew her type—anyone good-looking and in a suit would drive her crazy. It could have been that she was a lawyer and just liked the business type of man, but Evelyn had seen pictures of her ex-husband and knew he wore suits religiously. She was betting that was Julie's link.

The bar clientele was a mix of every type of person one could think of, even though it was considered "upscale." There were only two suits present, and Evelyn was betting neither one of those guys would cut it. Oh well, there was still the rest of the night and tomorrow. It wasn't but a few minutes after one. No hurry.

"Well, hello, beautiful ladies," someone with a deep voice said from beside Evelyn.

She looked over, and her smile fell a little. "Hey, Paul. I take it you're having fun tonight?" Evelyn asked, trying her best to keep smiling. Why did this guy make her a little uneasy? He was very good-looking. Was she overreacting?

"Better, now that I've found you. Want to go dance?" he asked, peering down at her with Brandon's eyes.

Looking at her friends, she saw them throw her an encouraging smile. Well, shit. "Sure, why not," she said, standing.

The dance floor was packed. Squeezing through, Evelyn quickly found the rhythm to the music. Paul molded to her back. The heat coming off him was warm enough for her to notice. It felt comforting, something she wanted to cuddle against. His hard body seemed even more inviting. Her heart ached for Stephen and Brandon, but she knew she had to push it away.

"I take it you're feeling better?" Paul said softly into her ear.

"Yes, I think someone put something in my drink last weekend. Pieces of my memory are missing."

Paul stiffened from behind her. “Is that so? Pieces are gone? How...odd. He paused, but quickly continued. So, how do you like Brandon as a neighbor? He doesn’t bother you too much, does he?”

“No, he’s not a bother at all. We watch movies with another friend a lot, but he never bothers me.”

“That’s good. So, how do you feel about that rain check? Do you think you’re up to it?” Paul breathed along her neck, bringing her body to life.

Evelyn closed her eyes while he wrapped his arms around her waist, holding her tightly against his hard cock. Pleasure tightened her lower stomach. Yes, she needed this, needed the distraction to get her mind off Stephen and Brandon. Both were beginning to worm their way into her vaulted life. But even as she thought it, something didn’t feel right about leaving with, not just Paul, but any man. Damn, she was confused.

“I rode with a friend,” Evelyn whispered low enough to where she was sure he hadn’t heard her.

“I brought my car. We’ll even get a place on the island. That way, it’ll be closer to where you live. How’s that?”

“Sounds good.” Heat poured from Evelyn’s body. The need to be touched heightened her senses. A whole two weeks and she hadn’t had sex once. Usually someone filled the gap until the weekend, but with Stephen and Brandon over all the time, she hadn’t even thought about it.

“Let’s go get your things, and we’ll head out.”

Evelyn nodded and led him off the dance floor. A smile formed on her face. Yes, this was the Evelyn she knew and was comfortable with, the one who had been reborn after her heart had been smashed to pieces. Now she felt better.



## **Chapter 16**

“I’m out, ladies. Melissa, thank you so very much for the ride. Be careful on your way home, or wherever you end up tonight. Call me tomorrow.” Evelyn winked at them. She grabbed her clutch off the table, and Paul pulled her body against his.

“See you ladies later. You all have a wonderful night.” Paul led Evelyn out of the crowded bar.

The grip he had on her waist tightened as they approached a two-door Mercedes. “Do you like to go fast, Evelyn?” Paul asked her, pinning her against the passenger door of the car.

Evelyn moaned while he pushed against her and his thigh rubbed against her pussy. “Yes, I love going fast.”

“Good, we’ll get there in record time. I didn’t want to scare you more than I already do,” he said and nibbled on her ear.

“What makes you think I’m scared of you?”

“Oh, you’re not anymore, but you were. I promise I don’t bite too hard. You might even enjoy it.”

Evelyn’s brows furrowed. Biting...there was that damn pulling feeling. The door opened, and she got in the two-seater sports car. Paul did exactly the same thing she had done with Brandon. He peeled out and drifted around the turn so smoothly that Evelyn smiled.

“Impressive. Say, you’re not a cop, are you?”

Rich laughter filled the car while he weaved in and out of traffic. “No, sorry, not even close.”

“You drive like one of the best.”

“Decades of practice, my dear,” Paul said, smiling at her.

“Yeah, okay.” Evelyn laughed. “Decades, my ass.”

Within five minutes, Paul had gone twice the distance. At this rate, they’d be on the island in no time. The night was just getting better and better.

The door clicked, and Evelyn looked from the lock to Paul.

“Evelyn, lean on the door and move down my way.”

Understanding his meaning, she smiled and did as he said. The windows came down and the wind whipped around furiously. Evelyn’s hair floated around her like a black curtain while she looked into Paul’s golden eyes. There was no fear, just pure exhilaration.

“Touch me,” she told him.

Paul smiled and slid his hand along her inner thigh until he reached her red silk panties. After trailing his fingers along the thin lining, he slid them inside the material and ripped her panties off.

Evelyn didn’t so much as move. She wanted more. This was exactly what she needed. Paul’s fingers trailed along her folds, smoothing in her wetness. At the brush against her clit, Evelyn moaned, sinking lower to give him more access.

“Damn, you smell good.” Paul groaned, sliding the finger with her juices into his mouth. “Fuck, you taste good, too. I want you. Come here, we’re going to try something new.”

Paul undid his pants, and Evelyn knew exactly what he wanted to do because she had thought of it at the same time. She pulled a condom wrapper out of her clutch, opened it, and slid the condom down his cock.

They were on the pitch-black highway leading to the island. Not a car was in sight. Evelyn crawled into his lap, leaning to the side to give him view of the road. Inch by inch, she slid down his length.

Her moan was carried away by the wind still whipping around them. Gripping onto the outside of the door and the roof, Evelyn began to use it for leverage to move her up and down his thickness.

The car came to an abrupt stop on the shoulder of the road and Paul turned on the hazard lights and reclined his seat, all at the same time.

“God, you’re so fucking tight. Fuck me, Evelyn,” Paul said, easing down the straps of the dress.

Still using her handholds on the car for leverage, Evelyn rode his cock hard and fast, just the way she wanted it. His hands gripped her hips while he thrust into her, inhumanly fast. Evelyn screamed as her orgasm made her tighten around him. She fell forward against his chest as he continued to thrust.

“Evelyn, let me unlock your memories. Let me taste you,” Paul whispered against her neck.

“What,” Evelyn said, dazed from her orgasm.

“Brandon made you forget. Let me help you remember. I want to see what he’s hiding. I promise I’ll tell you everything. Let me unlock what he did. Say yes.”

At the thought that Brandon had done something, she wanted to say no. But what was Paul talking about? Well, there was only one way to find out.

“Yes,” she replied.

A sharp pain in her neck turned to ecstasy at once. They both moaned at the same time. Paul’s cock thickened, and she felt his orgasm explode inside the condom.

Memories came back faster than she could see them project across her vision. Glimpses of Stephen and Brandon, a bond, mark, and knowledge poured into her in a tidal wave. It felt as if someone had smashed a sledgehammer into her chest.

Evelyn couldn’t stop the screams that tore from her throat. Paul jerked back, staring at her wide-eyed.

“Oh shit. Evelyn, what did I do? I don’t even know. Fuck! He had a lock on something.” Paul breathed heavily.

Evelyn's dress was pulled down, and she was suddenly sitting in the passenger seat, but she couldn't quit screaming from the agonizing pain.

Death at that moment would have felt better than what she was feeling. The car was going so fast that everything felt like a blur. Evelyn hugged her knees to her chest and breathed the screams in and out with deep breaths. She remembered everything.

Stephen, he had done this to her. She had agreed for him to remove the bond, but this she couldn't do. The bond hadn't been removed, just covered and locked away.

The car came to a screeching halt in the resort parking lot. Brandon and Stephen were already running toward them.

Paul jumped out of the car. "I didn't know what I was unlocking. Make her stop screaming," he yelled toward them.

Stephen scooped Evelyn out of the car, and not even hesitating, he ripped the strap of the dress completely off and sank his teeth into her. Like water to a flame, the pain disappeared with a burst of pleasure. Evelyn stood, clutching his hard frame and sobbing uncontrollably as dizziness took over. The world was shifting, and she couldn't do anything about it.

"I'm so sorry, Evey. I never meant to hurt you. God, what have I done? Please, forgive me. I love you. I've always loved you."

Black dots danced around Evelyn's eyes, and Stephen's words were the last thing she heard before unconsciousness took her.

\* \* \* \*

"What the hell were you thinking," Brandon snapped at Paul. He was two seconds away from ripping his head off. Just the fact that he had sunk his fangs into Evelyn was reason enough for him.

"Hey, you took her from me without any explanation. I wanted to know why and what happened. I had no idea you had shit locked in there for a reason. What the hell was that anyway?"

“She’s my mate,” Stephen growled at him, cradling Evelyn’s limp body in his arms.

“If she’s your mate then why aren’t you together?” Paul asked him angrily.

“It’s none of your fucking business. What the hell did you do to her? How did you unlock what Brandon did?”

“It’s not hard. A newborn could have done it. And tell me this, why, if she’s your mate, was Brandon covering your mark anyway?”

“Like I said, it’s none of your fucking business. Brandon, let’s go and get her bathed. I can smell this guy on her, and I want to put her to bed.”

Stephen took off through the parking lot at his werewolf speed. In seconds, he was inside and had Evelyn on the bed. He stared down at her sleeping figure. Her dress was completely ruined where he had ripped it to replace their bond. The fang marks were still there. Her swollen eyes made his heart break.

\* \* \* \*

Evelyn stirred, and her eyelids fluttered opened. Fear came rushing back at the intense agony she had just endured. “Stephen, oh God, Stephen, it was horrible. Please don’t take the mark off again. We don’t have to be together, but don’t take it off.” Evelyn sobbed, getting to her knees on the bed to become level with his chest.

She knew she shouldn’t do it, but she didn’t care. Her fingers clutched the dark shirt he wore. Resting her head against his chest, she took in the smell of him. A wave of comfort settled throughout her body. There was no way she’d be happy again if he wasn’t near her. Deep down, she knew that.

“Don’t worry. I’ll never take it off. I marked you as my mate and that’s what you will always be to me.” Stephen lowered himself to the bed so they could be eye level “Evelyn, there’s something I have to tell you... Sheila and I...”

“She’s my sister, and he was taking care of her, nothing more.”

Startled, she looked toward the doorway. Evelyn stared in amazement at the gorgeous man accompanied by a woman and another jaw-dropping man. Where had they come from?”

“I’m sorry. Who are you?” Evelyn lifted her torn dress.

The woman stepped around the dark-haired man. Evelyn couldn’t help but gasp. The stranger resembled Evelyn to the extent that she couldn’t break her stare.

“I’m Nicole, Ayden and Trevor’s mate. This”—she pointed to the dark-haired man in a police uniform—“is Ayden. He’s alpha to the pack. This gorgeous man over here is my other mate, Trevor. ”

“Thank you for the introductions, love,” Ayden said and kissed Nicole’s forehead. “Evelyn, Stephen called me and told me what happened when I ordered him to watch over my sister. You see, Sheila is a werewolf too. It was an accident, but she blames me. I put Stephen in charge to watch over her after I noticed that she wasn’t taking to the change as well as I hoped. Ever since she shifted for the first time, she’s avoided me. She hates me.

“I never knew Stephen had claimed a mate or I would have never asked this of him. Why he didn’t tell me, I don’t know.” Ayden glared at Stephen. “But rest assured that Sheila is better now and you can both pick up where you left off. You must have been through hell. For that, I’m sorry. Being away from one’s mate even for a day can be torture. Please accept my apologies and know that if you ever need anything you can contact me or Nicole, whoever you feel more comfortable with.”

Evelyn looked over at Stephen, shocked. “Why didn’t you tell me? I would have understood. You made me believe you were in love with another woman. Why?”

It had been so much easier thinking that he had fallen in love instead of thinking she had been completely passed over for a duty. That hurt.

Stephen looked down. "I was trying to protect you from finding out the truth, Evelyn. Sheila took what she'd become so hard, I thought your witnessing her actions would drive you away from me. If there was one thing I couldn't bear, it was having you fear me. I thought maybe by giving you more time, it would be easier."

"More time...more time!" Evelyn screamed. "Stephen, I would have done anything for you at the drop of a dime. You could have told me anything and I would have believed and obeyed. Yet, you took my car, my home...you took away the love of my life!"

The room spun, but Evelyn refused to get sick or pass out. This needed to come out. Everything needed to be settled tonight.

"I'm sorry, Evelyn. I really thought things would work out. I figured we'd pick up where we left off, that I could say things didn't work out between Sheila and me, and we would get back together. I never thought you'd mix with vampires and I'd have to come and save the day. I'm just glad it happened at a convenient time."

"Yes, Stephen, it was just so fucking convenient. I'm glad I could help you out with the timing. Where is Brandon?" Evelyn looked around. She needed comfort. Brandon did that for her.

He appeared through the doorway. "Ayden, Trevor, Nicole, good to see you again."

They shook hands, and Evelyn watched in awe, taking in all the hot men in her room. Lucky Nicole got two of them. Maybe she would do something like that. Two was always better than one.

Evelyn held her hand out to Brandon, who came to her. "Thank you," she said, pulling him on the bed next to her.

"For what?" Brandon asked, confused.

"For being here even though you don't have to be. My gosh, what you must think of this situation. Why you hang around still, I'll never know."

Ayden's voice cut through angrily. "Tell her."

Brandon paled considerably. Evelyn's heart rate increased. She tilted her head to look into Brandon's downcast face.

“What is he talking about, Brandon? Is there something you need to tell me?”

Golden eyes, so pained she could almost feel that stabbing again, almost but not quite, looked into hers.

“We didn’t meet on accident. I’m not here for spring break.” Brandon cut his eyes to Ayden and then turned back to her. “Taylor was one of your bets. He’s my friend. When he couldn’t get you to...be with him again, he called in a favor to me.

“I was sent here to get you to fall for me, and then I was to leave you. It was supposed to be payback. When I found out why you were cold, as he put it, I explained the situation to him, telling him you were marked. I told him I couldn’t fulfill his favor.”

Evelyn dropped his hand, stood, and walked away from the bed. “The only two men I’ve allowed in my life and you both betray me. Get out, both of you. I swear if either of you ever come to my door again, I’ll...” Evelyn’s voice trailed off. She couldn’t think of what else to say.

The shock of everything was beyond words. It was downright astounding. How could this have even happened? Everyone left the room but Nicole. She walked over very slowly, her face filled with sorrow.

“I’m sorry for what you’ve been through. If you need anything, anything at all, please call me. I’ve been where you are, believe it or not. I wasn’t parted from Ayden as long as you were from Stephen, but I know what it feels like. You see, Ayden and I have been through a lot. He left me also, for a reason at the time I didn’t know. Truthfully, I didn’t think I’d ever forgive him, but I did. I would love to tell you all about it one day, if you’re interested.”

“Thank you, Nicole. I’d like that,” Evelyn said, collapsing on the bed. Her energy seemed to drain completely out of her. The events of the day were too much for her body to take.

“Here’s my number.” Nicole handed her a business card. “I’m sorry, it’s the only thing I have with my cell phone number on it. I



don't live that far away, if you ever want to stop by. I'm sure Ayden and Trevor would love the company."

"Thanks, Nicole. I'd love to. You know where I live, too, if you're ever on the island."

Both girls laughed at their situation. "I better get in the shower. I need to change. Stephen made a mess of my dress. Thank God the material clings to your skin or else I would be flashing everyone."

"I'll let you shower. Call me," Nicole said, walking out of the room and shutting the door quietly.

Evelyn didn't move for a long time. Everything circled around her mind. She'd been mated to a werewolf, lied to by a vampire, and bitten by both. What in the hell else could happen?

## Chapter 17

The month of March was officially almost over and, with it, spring break. Brandon was still her neighbor, although she'd tried to avoid him as much as possible so she could get her thoughts together.

When Stephen wasn't working, he was at Brandon's and they usually sat outside drinking beer, watching her every move. She'd swear that a time or two, she had actually caught glimpses of them at the Martini Bar. But that of course was still debatable. It could have been she wished to see them and that's why she had.

Marker four was the spot to be, so of course, she and the girls were all there. Markers numbered the beach as far as the eye could see. The younger crowd thought the cool thing to do was drive from marker one through twelve, showing off their big trucks and expensive sports cars. Of course, there was nothing impressive when the expensive cars continued to get stuck in the loose sand.

The sun beat down on Evelyn's pale skin while she worked on getting a much-needed tan. She could hardly open her eyes, it was so bright. To make things worse, she had forgotten her sunglasses in her apartment. It wouldn't take ten minutes to walk up there to get them, but dodging the cars was something she didn't want to do.

The Bud Light can was warming in her hand. With it only being noon, she was already on her third one. Things were actually better than before. Bets was on hold until after spring break. Natalie was taking her spot. She'd told the girls that she was through.

Evelyn had plenty of time to think about what she wanted. Nicole was becoming a great friend. It seemed that if she wasn't at work, she

was hanging out with the trio, which was what she called the threesome. There wasn't a movie they hadn't watched together.

Ayden and Trevor had convinced her that if she was ever going to move on with her life, she needed to forgive Stephen. She did. He could have made better choices, but the past was the past, and she could do nothing about it. He'd tried to protect her. It had to be worth something.

As for Brandon, well, he was an altogether different story. Like her, he had made a type of pact. His was a favor, and hers was Bets. She couldn't hold that against him. What she had done to Taylor had been rude. Well, all right, she was a complete and utter bitch. Karma was a grand thing.

Evelyn finished off her beer and grabbed another one from the Styrofoam ice-chest. Last one and she was done. Then she would proceed with her preparations.

"Sarah, so tell me again what everyone's plan is for tonight?"

The platinum blonde sighed. "Really, Evelyn, you should pay more attention. First, it's Essence. Then we head to Toxic, then Stingers, and last it's the Martini Bar. Why are you asking? It's not like you're going. You have your own plan, remember? God, I still can't believe you're quitting Bets."

"The only reason I ask is just in case I'm told to take a hike, I want to know where to go to get sympathy drinks. And I have to quit Bets. It's time. Natalie will fill my shoes perfectly."

"No one will fill your shoes. You have a record that will probably remain unbeatable. The only one you lost you reclaimed the following weekend, and that sucks. My record is nowhere near that. None of ours is. Well, Melissa is the closest, but that's it. She's only been denied three times total, and that's because one of them was married."

"Yes, well, Melissa is very good, but don't underestimate Natalie. I'm telling you, there's a wild side within her that's going to blow you away." Evelyn took a big drink of her ice-cold beer.

"And how do you know this," Sarah asked skeptically.

Evelyn laughed. “The first time I met Natalie, we were both shopping at Victoria’s Secret. I watched three different guys approach her. All seemed to know her, if you know what I mean. Two of the guys even said hello to each other, and something passed between all three of them. Let’s just say she’s my kind of girl.”

“No way, that lucky bitch. I am so going to find me something like that. If you succeed in your plan, I think I’m going to have a whole new respect for you. You always pick the best-looking guys.”

Evelyn downed her beer. “Yeah, well, speaking of them, I need to go and get ready for the first stage of my plan. If I don’t show up to work on Monday then you all are allowed to call,” she said, loud enough to draw the attention of Melissa and Julie, who were huddled together whispering.

“No one is going to interrupt your weekend, Evelyn. This is big for you. Are you sure this is what you want?” Julie asked.

“There’s no doubt in my mind. It’s time.”

“Then I’m happy for you. So...what are you still doing here? Aren’t you supposed to be getting ready or something?” Julie teased.

Evelyn stood, tying her see-through skirt around her waist. Whatever it was called, a wrap, a skirt, it was cute. The dark blue material matched her sparkling blue bikini and fit perfectly around her hips.

“I will see you all Monday for lunch. You’ll hear every juicy detail imaginable. Of course, if I show up tonight I expect for you all to baby me and pledge your undying love as my friends.

“You can tell me how the perfect man will someday sweep me off my feet and I will tell you all that I already met them. It will be an endless cycle of who’s right and who’s wrong.”

“Oh, get out here and go get your Prince Charmings. Ugh, I think I’m going to be sick.” Sarah downed the rest of her beer.

Evelyn waved and laughed. Her friends might have been confident that she’d be able to snag two guys for the price of one, but she wasn’t so sure. Stephen was very possessive, and her ultimatum

would not be just him and her, happily ever after. Brandon would have to be part of the package, unless of course he didn't want to be. But she'd seen the way he looked at and reacted to her. He would want this, wouldn't he?

Thoughts raced through Evelyn's mind as she weaved in and out of the bumper-to-bumper cars and trucks driving down the sandy strip. A few guys yelled at her, but she ignored them. For the first time, Evelyn wasn't interested in any other guy who wasn't Stephen or Brandon.

What if both of them made her choose one or the other? This could completely backfire. Damn it! Evelyn couldn't quit shaking as she walked across the wooden boardwalk that led to the resort.

Couples and children passed her, headed toward the beach. She smiled watching how excited the tourists were. They looked at this place as a vacation, paradise. To Evelyn, this was home.

Getting to the stairs that led to her apartment had been one obstacle after another. The crowd was so thick that she had to wedge between people at times. It was a nonstop party, one that she used to enjoy. And to think, just months ago, she had been planning to have the time of her life during spring break. Now, she really was. This was it, her future.

Brandon and Stephen were not on the porch like she'd expected. Taken aback, she stared down to the large multi-leveled pool area. There was no way she'd spot them with so many people down there.

Turning back toward her door, she unlocked it and walked inside. The exposure to the direct sunlight was causing heat to expel off her skin like a damn heating pad. She was going to be so sunburned, even with the SPF-30 she had practically bathed in. Of course, that was hours ago.

Taking off her top, she walked toward her room. After she picked out what she wanted to wear for tonight, she'd take a shower and start preparing. Excitement and nervousness caused her to bite her lip.

Evelyn froze as soon as she entered her bedroom. Brandon was lying in her bed, his chest completely exposed. The comforter hugged around the lower part of his sculptured stomach. Just seeing him in her bed caused her pulse to quicken.

“Now that is a lovely sight to see,” Brandon said, smiling at her topless form.

“How did you...” Evelyn pointed toward the front door. It had been locked. She felt how the knob wouldn’t turn when she slid the key in the lock.

“A vampire has its ways.” Brandon flashed her a charming smile.

“Don’t take credit for something you didn’t do,” Stephen said, walking out of her closet. He was holding the same sexy lingerie Evelyn had considered wearing that night, a red silk corset with silk stockings.

Her jaw fell a little more at his half-nude body. Stephen was only wearing a pair of boxers. Her heart escalated even further at the sight of his wide chest. God, how she missed seeing him without clothing. He was downright breathtaking. The need to touch him, to smell him, brought her a step closer.

“What are you both doing here?” Her words barely came out. This was supposed to be her plan, yet they seemed to have come up with one of their own. Seeing them so relaxed, lying in her bed and going through her things, was a bit disorienting, but right.

“Well, you see, we’ve decided we’re not going to let you go. As much as Stephen loves you, he knows how I feel about you, and you about me. He respects that. It took me awhile to convince him it was for the best, but he’s agreed.”

Evelyn looked back to Stephen, whose eyes were practically smoldering while he studied her body. “You’ve agreed to that? You’d let me have both you and Brandon?”

Stephen placed the lingerie on top of the dresser. “I would do anything for you, Evelyn. Plus, Brandon’s cool in my book. He’s done a lot for both of us. Ayden and I had a talk, too. He really likes

you. He mentioned how you're always over there with Nicole. You all watch movies like we used to do."

"Yes," Evelyn said, smiling. "I missed us being together."

Stephen walked toward her and stopped an inch from her face. "I love you, Evelyn. Please say you'll think about this arrangement. I can't lose you aga—"

Evelyn cut him off by crushing her lips to his. The moment she tasted him, a feeling of completeness surged through her. This was the way they were meant to be, always. It had been years since she had tasted him, yet he tasted exactly the same, familiar...like home.

"Oh God, Evelyn. You mean it? Do you truly forgive me for what I've done?" Stephen whispered against her lips.

"Yes, please don't stop kissing me," Evelyn begged. "Don't ever stop again."

## Chapter 18

Stephen's heart felt like it had dropped in his chest. He couldn't believe that she was forgiving him. Her taste, her scent...everything that had haunted him for years filled him, satisfying the agonizing longing that had long ago eaten at his insides. She was his, forever now.

Brandon was part of the package, but Stephen was okay with that. He had turned into a very good friend who was beginning to love Evelyn as much as he did. They were both possessive men. Together, they had learned to push that aside to mutually agree that it was for everyone's best interest.

They both loved Evelyn, and she was tied to both of them in her own way. Yes, she loved Stephen. But he had seen her and Brandon together and knew that it wouldn't be long before the feelings grew into love, if they hadn't already.

Stephen kneaded Evelyn's bare back as he passionately massaged his lips into hers. The taste of beer and the sweetness on her tongue left him drowning in her taste. He wanted more, needed to taste more of her. The warmth of her skin from the sun penetrated into his fingertips while he lifted her, carrying her to the bed.

Laying her next to Brandon, Stephen removed her wrap and bikini bottoms. The strength of her scent filled him. He didn't quit inhaling until his lungs burned.

Kissing his way up her legs, he paused at her inner thighs, looking at Brandon. Brandon smiled down at him and slid down on the bed to begin kissing Evelyn.



“Peppermint,” she whispered, as his lips hovered over hers. “God, I missed the taste of peppermint. Kiss me, Brandon.”

Stephen lowered himself until he hovered directly above her folds. With another large intake of breath, he took in her scent again. Never would he get tired of what made Evelyn herself.

When Stephen couldn’t take his mouth watering anymore, he ran his tongue along her wet slit. Moans poured from both him and Evelyn. God, she tasted like heaven. Emotions so strong gripped his heart. How had he stayed away? How had he been so stupid to not tell her the truth? Yes, he had wanted to protect her, but he should have had faith in her to not leave him. That was his biggest fear, nonacceptance of what he was.

Tracing her from her clit to her opening, he teased her relentlessly. Evelyn twitched and writhed above him while she moaned into Brandon’s mouth. Over and over, he made the slow up-and-down movement, letting her juices coat his tongue.

When he eased the tip of his finger into her opening, Evelyn’s hips thrust downward, begging him for penetration. He gave it to her.

Stephen plunged his finger deep inside her, which brought her to instant orgasm. In waves, her scent assaulted his senses. It took all he had to hang onto his sanity. He wanted to tear his clothes off and thrust into her repeatedly until they both couldn’t move anymore. The need to make up for their missing time and prove his love to her was the only thing that made him slow down.

\* \* \* \*

Brandon could sense the difference in Evelyn. He knew that somehow, she had changed since alienating herself from them for almost a month. It was the longest month he had gone through in all of the decades of being a vampire. On and on it had seemed to drag. If Stephen hadn’t been there, there was no telling what he would have done. He probably would have driven himself crazy.

The warmth of Evelyn's mouth traveled down the coolness of his body. He hadn't fed yet, so therefore, he was beginning to lose his body heat. Evelyn's blood called to him, reached to him in the depths of his core. Small hands cradled his face and brought him down. The tip of her tongue traced his jawline and up his neck. Brandon shivered at the lightness of her touch, so soft it was almost nonexistent.

The weight of Evelyn's breast filled his hand while he tugged gently at her nipple with his fingers. Teeth grazed his earlobe, which caused him to shiver again. The aching of his cock swelled to painful proportions. She seemed to sense this and wrapped her hand around his thickness under the covers.

Brandon groaned, closing his eyes against the warmth. In slow, tightening strokes, Evelyn tortured him. The top part of her body came off the bed as she moaned herself through another orgasm.

Stephen's face was concealing her pussy from view. Brandon noticed the moans were coming from him too. Werewolves were different than vampires. Where Brandon got off at the taste of blood, he knew Stephen's tasting Evelyn's release was just as orgasmic for him.

Brandon watched as Stephen flipped her on her knees. She looked around, her eyes heavy with passion. It took everything in him to listen to her words. He could get lost in her beauty, forever.

"Brandon, come over here." Fingers gripped his leg to get him closer.

Moving over, Evelyn pulled the covers back and traced her tongue across the tip of his cock. Stephen entered her, causing her to moan, and in turn made Brandon moan. Just the feeling of her lips brushing against him while she swirled her tongue around his width caused him to fight for power over his body.

Tightly, he clutched the covers, resisting the urge to wrap his fingers in her hair. Control was something that was eluding him at the moment, and the last thing he would ever do was hurt Evelyn. With his strength he knew he needed to restrain more than ever.

\* \* \* \*

Stephen's thickness stretched Evelyn, filling her to the point where she wasn't sure she could take anymore. Her pussy gripped his length, and she basked in the feeling of what they had once shared. She suctioned her mouth onto Brandon, needing to take in as much of his flavor as she could. The feel of having both men inside of her at the same time was stimulating. Every inch of her body thrummed at the sensitivity.

Stephen gripped her hips and pulled her back against his cock. The slow thrusts were torture against her building orgasm.

"Again, Stephen, please." Evelyn moaned and took Brandon back into her mouth. Stephen obeyed, plunging into her while drawing her back against him.

"Like that?" he asked, repeating the motion.

"Yes, just like that. Don't stop."

The intensity increased until Evelyn's hand was stroking Brandon's cock so fast that he was moaning louder than she was. The taste of his pre-come coated her tongue, filling her senses.

"Stephen, get on your back and lay Evelyn on top of you faceup. I have to taste her," Brandon barely managed to say.

In one swift movement, Stephen brought Evelyn's back to his chest and eased them down to the bed. Bent outside Stephen's, Evelyn's legs were spread wide. When Brandon straddled her waist, she looked up at him, excited by what he was about to do.

He lowered himself until his lips brushed against her ear. "Touch me, Evelyn," he whispered.

Nothing felt better than to be trapped between them. Stephen continued to thrust as she arched her back against him. Brandon moaned at her tight grip. The feel of his tongue licking down her neck had Evelyn shivering.

Fangs sank into her neck and a cry broke from her lips. Pleasure burst through every crevice of her body. She could feel her pussy tightening around Stephen's cock. Thoughts burst through her mind as ecstasy swept through her. She couldn't help but feel the three of them as a couple was destined. This was the way it was meant to be.

"Fuck, Brandon, did you know I can feel what she feels? That is fucking amazing," Stephen said, thrusting into her faster.

Screams echoed off the walls as Stephen's cock thickened inside of her, bringing her into another orgasm. In all of the two years they'd been separated she felt her love intensify for him more than she ever thought possible.

Brandon's cock weighed heavily in her hand, and she knew at that moment that things couldn't have been more perfect. They all came in unison, hotness shooting across her stomach, breasts, and Stephen coating her insides.

Lips broke from her neck. Brandon slowly crawled off her, panting. "Holy shit. Stephen, you all right down there," Brandon asked, laughing.

"I couldn't be better." Stephen lifted Evelyn's hair out of his face. "So, who's up for a shower before we start round two?"

Evelyn smiled as Brandon wiped her off. She couldn't even open her eyes she was in such a state of euphoria.

"Well, it looks like we won the bet," Brandon said cheerfully.

Evelyn sat up on Stephen's body, feeling his semi-hard cock slide deeper into her. Holding in her moan she looked over at Brandon.

"What do you mean? What bet?"

Stephen's hand wrapped around, rubbing her clit. It took everything she had not to close her eyes.

"Oh, nothing really," Brandon said, caressing her leg. "I just asked Sarah what we could do to win you back. Wait, let me see if I can remember her exact words. Oh yes, that's right. She said, 'Win her back? Well, if you're going to win Evelyn back, you might as well

make it worth her while. I bet you guys two rounds of drinks that you can't sneak into her apartment and surprise her.'"

Evelyn laughed. Yes, that sounded like Sarah. "Well, so much for putting Bets on hold during spring break."

Brandon stiffened in front of her. Stephen paused, his fingers against her pussy.

"What?" she asked, confused at the silence.

"You're still going to play?" Stephen asked from behind her.

Once again, Evelyn laughed, feeling her pussy tighten around Stephen's cock. Her laughter died as pleasure shot through her. "No, I quit. Surely, both of you can keep me satisfied. Because you know, if you can't..."

Evelyn's words were cut off by a moan as Stephen thrust his hard cock deep inside of her. Brandon leaned over and kissed her passionately, cupping her face in his hands.

"Oh, I assure you, Brandon and I are going to keep you so satisfied you'll never engage in another bet for the rest of your life."

"Are you sure?" Evelyn tried to hide her smile as best as she could. Just knowing that they were planning to spend the rest of their lives with her had love filling her chest. No more pain or emptiness. They would always be hers, forever.

"Wanna bet on it?" they asked in unison.

# THE END

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I live in a small Texas town along the Gulf of Mexico. Family is everything to me. My mother always encouraged my reading growing up. Looking back, my earliest memories revolve around my grandmother, who was always glued to a book. Her passion for mystery is probably the reason I'm so comfortable around a police scanner. Hers was on twenty-four hours a day.

When I'm not writing, cooking, or brainstorming new ideas, you'll see me with a book in my hand. Briefly before I started writing, I was devouring a romance novel every day. For some reason, I couldn't get enough. My husband asked me the question that ultimately changed my life forever. "Why don't you try writing a book?"

At first, I laughed. Write a book? Who, me? Having never written a story in my life, I was intimidated. To satisfy my husband and to sate the curiosity that began to fester inside of me, I did. My first story was my husband's favorite. There was something that ultimately bothered me about it, though. I couldn't write a love scene to save my life. Not one that would fit inside of a "romance" book, anyway. It was way too graphic.

After doing research I came across the erotica genre and knew this was where I belonged. Details are important and with my books, the more details during their "coupling," the better.

***Also by Jennifer Salaiz***

*Passion Projected*  
*Stalk Me*

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