

The book cover features a photograph of three models. In the foreground, a man with light brown hair and blue eyes is shown from the chest up, looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. Behind him, a woman with blonde hair and blue eyes is looking towards the camera. To the left, another man is shown from the waist up, looking off to the side. The background is dark and textured. The title 'BAD CONDUCT' is written in large, yellow, serif capital letters, and the author's name 'ASHLEY LADD' is written in smaller, white, serif capital letters below it.

# BAD CONDUCT

ASHLEY LADD

A Total-E-Bound Publication



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Bad Conduct

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**Warning:** This book contains sexually explicit content which is only suitable for mature readers. This story has been rated *Total-e-burning*.

# **BAD CONDUCT**

**Ashley Ladd**

## *Dedication*

To all the active and former military personnel, especially to all the friends I made during my tour of active duty in the Air Force.

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## Chapter One

Captain Tyler Gibson shivered from anticipation. Or was it a first class case of nerves?

Before turning on his webcam, he double-checked that his door was locked and his curtains tightly shut. Although no one should barge in on a captain's private quarters, one never knew, and he couldn't afford to be caught.

"You should stop this madness before you get busted, idiot," he murmured under his breath.

Yet, the book lured and cajoled him to practice its magic. Of all times to read the *Kama Sutra*, on a lonely deployment to Iraq probably wasn't the best. He ached to touch his lover, Bianca, and to be touched by her.

He couldn't wait to go stateside, to make Bianca his bride. He should have done it before shipping out to Iraq. If not for her concerns about their sometimes third lover, Brendan, he would have.

The book laid propped open where he could refer to it. The rest of the room was neat, ready for inspection. Hospital corners made the blanket taut on his bed. It wouldn't stay that way once he began pleasuring himself, pretending it was Bianca's hands caressing him.

An instant message signal beeped on the computer, and his heart raced. His gaze bounced to the double monitor sprouting from the steel desk.

His pulse hammered in his throat. His hands grew clammy so he wiped them down his side. His cock thrummed.

*Bianca...* His love.

He moved to open it, squinted at the screen name and his heart stopped. It was Brendan.

Chills raced down his spine, and he broke into a cold sweat. He needed to go cold turkey on the man and had tried to do so, but Brendan kept IMing and emailing.

To Tyler's shame he was still turned on by the guy. He didn't have the same type of feelings for Brendan as he did for Bianca, but he still got a hard-on thinking of the man's hot

bod. Why had Bianca given Brendan to him as a Christmas gift, wrapped in a huge red bow and nothing else?

His breath burned in his throat, and his nostrils flared. He stared at the invitation and his body burned.

God, but he was in hell.

His gut clenched, his nerves on the razor's edge.

Bianca was due at any moment, and if she got the slightest inkling he was having sex, even cyber sex, with Brendan, he feared what she would do.

If he answered Brendan's summons, could he get him off in time? If he didn't answer, Brendan would keep pinging him. Surely, Bianca would hear. Even if she didn't, he would know.

The monitor glowed like a fiend, as deadly as an armed enemy soldier. After inhaling deeply, he lowered himself to the computer chair and typed, "I can't talk. I have an important online meeting.

The message came on that Brendan was typing. Then words flashed on the screen. "With who?"

*Shit!*

He was against lying but typed anyway, "My commander. I'll email you later."

"<pout> Surely you can squeeze in a quickie." Then a nude live shot of Brendan popped onto Ty's screen.

Ty's breath grew shallow and his fingers itched as Brendan stroked his hard, shiny cock and gazed through the screen with a come hither look.

A scream strangled in Ty's throat and he wanted to throttle and fuck the guy all at the same time. Brendan could be such a bitch.

*A very sexy bitch.*

When Brendan licked his lips and thrust his hips forward as if to fuck him, Ty choked. His knees went weak, and his pulse throbbed. His cock went from flaccid to hard in two seconds flat, tenting his boxers.

"God, no," Ty whispered as he stared at his traitorous dick. This wasn't fair to Bianca. Could he really marry her when he was still turned on by a big, juicy cock?

Angry at Brendan, furious at himself, Ty banged the computer keys, starting with the caps lock. "NO! BYE." He jabbed the 'x' and considered blocking the guy. Unfortunately, that wouldn't work with Brendan. He'd just use a different email address.

Not two minutes later, while Ty was still breathing hard and pacing the floor, Bianca buzzed. Frissons of alarm warred with desire. He wondered if he'd be better off staying in Iraq where he was trapped in a fog. As long as he was here, thousands of miles away from Bianca and Brendan, he'd be able to hide his wayward emotions. He could stay in limbo.

In a cold sweat, losing his erection, Ty leaned over his keyboard and typed to Brendan. "That's my commander. You're going to get me court-martialled. Don't call me. I'll call you later tonight."

"At least you'd be home. In my arms and safe from those nasty enemy soldiers," Brendan said. "I don't know that I'll be here later. I might have a real date."

Ty knew the guy was just trying to make him jealous. But he wasn't. And if he was? So what? He liked the guy, but he wasn't in love with him like he was with Bianca.

"Another time, then. Gotta go." With that, Ty closed the IM to Brendan.

He took several deep, cleansing breaths and finger-combed his hair. Then he ran to the bathroom and splashed cold water on his face. When he saw two bright spots of damning colour in his cheeks, he scowled. "Damn!"

He stared at himself in the mirror, not liking what he saw and swore to do better by Bianca. If he could risk his life for his country, surely he could sacrifice to make his own fiancée happy.

When he returned, Bianca was gone and he slammed his fist on the desk. The keyboard skipped to the edge but he caught it before it fell.

"Still be there," he muttered. He longed to see her beautiful face, to feel the connection to home and normalcy. Knowing she was there, knowing he was fighting to keep her safe, made his tour of duty in Iraq bearable. His pulse hammered in his neck and his breath came in large gulps. "No no no. You have to still be there."

His fingers flew over the keys, and he sent an instant message to her. His gaze strayed to the open book, to a position he longed to try with her when they were together again—man on top, woman on her back but with her legs bent over her head. Since joining the Army he was in the best physical shape of his life, and he'd implored her to work out in his absence

so they could try out every position in the *Kama Sutra* when he got home, no matter how advanced.

"Answer, sweetheart. I need you." Thinking about sticking his penis in her tight ass, he grew hard again and so he caressed his cock. God, but he wished it was Bianca's hands caressing him.

"I'm here. Where were you?" Bianca answered. She turned on her webcam, and her image popped onto his screen. All she wore was a gossamer, red nightie that barely covered her breasts. The top edge of her areolas peeked over the lacy rim. The creamy slope of her breasts begged to be fondled.

He almost came but pinched the head of his shaft to stop. He wanted to come with her.

He licked his lips and stepped back where she could see him. "Um. Yummy. I can almost taste you."

"What flavour do you crave today?" She stepped aside to show him flowery bottles of strawberry, vanilla and pineapple.

"No chocolate?"

"Would I disappoint you?" She gave a naughty wink and retrieved a bottle of chocolate syrup from just out of the camera's range. "What would you like me to do with this? Pour it on your hot cock?"

He wished! He dug into a drawer and pulled out his own bottle of chocolate syrup and held it up for her view. "I can't wait 'til you can pour it all over me and lick it all off."

"Yum. I can already taste it."

"Do a sexy striptease for me, baby. Did you get my gifts?" He ogled her breasts that poked at the frothy gown and he longed to suckle them.

"You mean the dildo, love beads and vibrators?" She nodded. "They came yesterday...and so did I. Several times."

He was disappointed he'd missed seeing it, but he tamped down his frustration. He was scheduled to deploy home soon then he'd fuck her every night and not just in his imagination.

She turned on an instrumental tune he wasn't familiar with but that had a sexy beat and began to gyrate to the rhythm. She clung to her chair then ground her hips against it.



Moans rippled up his throat, and he stroked himself. Annoyed with the confining material, he shucked off his shorts.

"Ooh, babe. You look so hot, so delectable." Languorously, she licked her lips. "I long to have you inside me. Pour some chocolate onto your big, hot cock and stroke it for me. Pretend my hands are all over you."

He poured a generous amount on his cock and worked it in, but his gaze didn't leave her. "Now it's your turn. Pour chocolate on your breasts and rub your nipples between your fingers. Pretend I'm licking and kissing them."

"Um. Your lips are heavenly. Bite harder! Ooh, not that hard," she said as she got into pleasuring herself.

"Get your toys and rub the vibrator over them, too," he begged.

"Anything you say, lover." She blew him a kiss and sashayed to her stash.

As she bounced away, he enjoyed watching her cute ass in the diaphanous panties. He couldn't wait to see her pussy lips, to watch the dildo slide in and out, to pretend he was fucking her good and hard.

While he waited, he flipped the page and found another position he couldn't wait to try. It was similar to the last, but he would lie on his back with his knees bent against his chest and she would ride him.

Fortunately, a moment later she strutted back with the goodies in her hands. A broad smile stretched her ruby red lips and reached her glowing eyes. She waved the toys before him. "I brought all of them. What do you want me to do next, lover?"

Since he couldn't do to her what he really longed to, he said, "Peel off those damned panties and let me see your pussy."

Laughter bubbled off her lips. "Impatient, aren't we?"

Inch by excruciating inch she pushed her panties down her legs. She moved in a circle to give him a view of her pretty ass as well as her mound. When her underwear lay puddled around her ankles, she stepped on one side and pulled them off then she kicked them across the room. She stood gloriously naked before him.

Panting, barely able to formulate a coherent word, he commanded, "Lie on the bed and spread your legs wide. Spread your pussy lips and rub your clit. Pretend I'm between your legs."

"Only if you play with your balls and pretend it's me. I can't wait to lick them all over and take your penis in my mouth all the way to the back of my throat."

He had to pinch himself again to stop from ejaculating. They'd barely begun, and he didn't want to shorten their playtime.

She stretched her legs towards the bedposts and scooted down so that her pussy was on the edge of the bed.

If he were home, he'd stand at the edge and ram his cock all the way into her pussy. She was so pink and shiny and moist, throbbing for him. He cursed the military for separating them and screwing with their love life. He didn't know if he could survive his final two weeks here without exploding. The first thing he wanted to do when he got home was to make love to her all day and all night for at least a week home. Maybe a month.

"Does that feel good?" He loved to watch her squirm and writhe. He wanted to rock her world. "Are you wet?"

"Super wet." She pumped her hips off the bed as if they were doing it, as if there were an invisible penis inside her. As she watched him, her lids were hooded and dreamily heavy.

She licked her lips and murmured her reply in such a low and husky voice he had trouble catching the words. His fever catapulted and his cock was going to explode. "Shove that penis inside you! In and out. Hard! Now!"

The dildo was already pointed at her pussy, and she pushed it in, hard. She screamed and stroked it in and out and gyrated it around. "Oh yes. Fuck me harder, Ty. Give it to me. All of it."

"That's it, babe. I'm all the way in you, fucking you. You feel *so* good. So wet and hot."

"Ty!" She thrust her hips off the bed, and with the dildo shoved all the way into her pussy, she screamed in ecstasy.

He came long and hard. His cum squirted onto his stomach and covered his hand. It slathered his cock, but he imagined that it filled her cunt, that they were one.

\* \* \* \*

Almost two weeks to the day later, Bianca couldn't wait for Ty to arrive home from Iraq. She chafed at the long wait, wondering if his friends had lost him or if he'd missed his flight. Knowing Brendan, Ty may have been kidnapped.

She wondered at the wisdom of throwing a surprise 'coming home' party for Ty on his first day versus meeting him at the airport all by herself and having a private rendezvous for his first week home. But Brendan had made it clear he wouldn't stand for that. He was just as anxious to see Ty and seemed to think he had just as much right to him as she did, Ty's almost wife.

That stung, and she wished there was some kind of ointment to alleviate the pain. For the thousandth time she reminded herself she was the one who'd invited Brendan into their bed, that she'd given him to Ty as a special Christmas gift a couple of years before, that they had welcomed Brendan as a third partner into their bed on numerous occasions throughout the past couple of years, and she'd loved their threesomes as much as the men. With two huge cocks fucking her at once, maybe she'd enjoyed it the most.

So why was jealousy, hot and unwelcome, raiding her emotional stores? Why was she a jumbled mess of nerves?

Why did getting married and 'settling down' mean they couldn't still enjoy the occasional ménage? She loved getting fucked by two big cocks at once, to have two men suckling her nipples at the same time. So why was she feeling so stingy and so worried?

"Stop it! It's just nerves at seeing Ty again." Being able to touch, hold and kiss Ty was far different than merely *seeing* him on a webcam. What if the chemistry wasn't there anymore? What if he'd changed?

Why was she even thinking this?

With reluctance, she admired Brendan's apartment, still wishing she'd put her foot down and told him no way! The man should have been a special events coordinator. The place looked like a scene from *Casablanca*, complete with piano player and palm trees. Brendan himself looked dapper and sexy as hell. If she wasn't miffed, and if she wasn't aching to be in Ty's arms, she'd drag the handsome devil into a threesome with Ty.

Unfortunately, she feared he was prettier than her tonight in his splendid tux and tails, with kohl making his eyes dark and dangerous. Brendan was one of the beautiful people who didn't need all that, but with it he looked too surreal for words. In comparison, she

looked dowdy in a yellow sundress splattered with tiny flowers. She'd get Brendan later for not warning her this was a fancy dress gala and for butting into Ty's homecoming.

Her friend Cecilie, also casually dressed in khaki capris and a hooded T-shirt, handed her an apple martini then stretched out in the lounge beside her. She took a sip of her drink before drawling, "Lover boy should be here soon. You look calm, cool and collected. I give you props. I'd be pulling out my hair."

A mirthless chuckle escaped Bianca's lips. "I'm a nervous wreck. Can't you hear my knees knocking? What if I don't turn him on anymore? What if something happened to him over there he didn't tell me about?"

Cecilie snorted. "I think he'd tell you if anything important was missing."

Again Bianca eyed Brendan as she ignored her friend's ribald comment and couldn't help but notice how so many of his gay friends ogled him as if he was a piece of double chocolate cake. Just once, she'd like to get that reaction from men, to be the extra rich chocolate ice cream instead of ho-hum vanilla. She'd settle, however, for being Ty's showstopper.

Antsy, about to jump out of her skin, she glanced at her watch. *Damn!* Ty was forty minutes late. She called his escort's cell phone, but it went directly to voice mail. There'd be no hors d'oeuvres left if the group took much longer. And almost everybody was already snickered off their asses.

Cecilie leaned close and whispered, "There's something I have to tell you."

Bianca wondered why her friend whispered since nobody paid attention to them. Then the serious expression on Cecilie's face made her catch her breath, and her heart stopped. "What?"

"I think you should know Brendan's planning a little seduction scene to make Ty jealous. When Ty walks in, Seth's going to hang all over him. He wants Ty all for himself."

Bianca couldn't breathe. She couldn't move. She'd known Brendan couldn't wait to be with Ty, probably wouldn't give them the space she craved, but this? She couldn't believe it. "Why do you say that?"

Cecilie's eyes widened with sympathy and sorrow. She glanced back to Brendan where he was laughing in the middle of a group of men then slid her gaze back to her. "I overheard

him. He wants Ty in his bed tonight, and he wants to make Ty so mad with jealousy that he has eyes for no one but him."

Bianca sucked in a sharp, ragged breath. Her gaze washed over her rival, and again she wondered how she, quiet and demure and without a penis, could compete with a demi-god like Brendan?

"Are you sure?" She prayed Cecilie wasn't, but knowing Brendan, she was afraid she was.

Cecilie nodded, and the light caught red highlights in her silky dark hair. "I wish I wasn't, but you should have a counter plan. He's *your* fiancé. Maybe you should station yourself at the front door and make sure he sees you first."

*Almost her husband...* But did she want a husband who loved and desired someone else more? Or at all? She'd been tortured by this thought for the past two years, and it was why she hadn't married Ty before he'd shipped out.

What if Ty *loved* Brendan? What if Ty and Brendan's relationship went beyond the physical? She didn't think she could go through with marrying him. It was time for the games to end. She should be the winner.

She pulled her thoughts short. This was all in Brendan's mind and in hers. She had no proof it was in Ty's. She knew what she had to do despite what her friend said. She inhaled deeply and stared Cecilie square in the eye. "No. I'm going to wait and see how Ty reacts. I can't hold him responsible for Brendan's schemes."

Cecilie pulled a frown. "I hope you know what you're doing. I cut a lot of these guys' hair, and I know them pretty well. It's not just about the sex. Brendan sounds like he's head over heels with your Ty."

*My Ty...*

Bianca wished she could be sure he was *her* Ty.

She twisted in her seat to get a better look at her friend. "Should I fight for him? Declare war? For the rest of my life?"

*Whew!* The thought exhausted her. She shouldn't have to fight to keep Ty's love. Either he loved her or he didn't. Maybe this would be a good test.

She made up her mind. "I'm going to stay right here and see what happens. I'll let Ty choose."

Cecilie stopped swirling her drink. "Are you sure? I mean he's just returning from war. He deserves a hero's welcome."

*Yes, but...*

This was complicated. Most soldiers weren't coming home to a love triangle. Still, Cecilie's words gave her pause. Should she greet him with open arms and figure out this mess later?

The door opened, and cheers deafened her. At least half the people in the room clicked cameras and cell phones at Ty.

Blinded by dozens of flash bulbs, Bianca froze. The only thing she could move was her gaze.

When her vision cleared, she drank in the vision of Ty, so different, so clean cut in military regalia. Gone were his beautiful long hair and his sexy beard. The thought made her tingle in delicious places. How she'd loved the way they had tickled her lips and the juncture between her thighs.

His newly clean cheeks were taut and set. His shoulders were broader, his hips leaner, and he had a new exciting aura about him. Was he *her Ty* or a killing machine?

Ty cocked his head and looked around the room. "Where's my best girl? Is Bianca here?"

Cecilie nudged her. "Wake up! That's your cue. Go to him. Forget your foolish notions, and welcome home your man."

Just as Bianca was awaking from her stupor, Brendan's seductive laughter tinkled above the crowd. Then the sea of people parted for Ty to enter and the crush held her back.

Between the cracks of the swarm she watched as Brendan fawned over Seth.

To Bianca's horror, Ty's face reddened, and he made a beeline to his male lover. He tore Seth off Brendan. His face ruddy, his nostrils flaring and his eyes narrowed, he faced off against him. In a menacing snarl, he asked, "What's the meaning of this? You're *my* guy and this is *my* homecoming. At least, you were my guy."

Bianca couldn't believe her ears. She couldn't budge. Her voice went into hiding and bile gagged her. How could Ty forget about her this fast?

Greenish tinges bruised Cecilie's mouth, too. She linked her fingers with Bianca's and squeezed. "Either go and break it up, or let's get out of here. This is a nightmare."

Bianca wished she was invisible then realised she was, at least to everybody but Cecilie. Before she wretched and totally embarrassed herself, she had to get the hell out.

But she'd also never forgive herself if she caused a scene or didn't give Ty a chance. So she stayed. And watched. And waited, giving Ty an opportunity to seek her out.

Seth punched the wall. On his way out the door he threw over his shoulder, "Just because your girlfriend didn't come doesn't mean you have to steal Brendan from me."

Ty barely gave Seth a glance then pulled Brendan into his embrace, bent him over his arm, and gave him an excruciatingly long, wet kiss as the crowd went berserk cheering, clapping and making cat calls.

The cameras and cell phones came out again, flashing in her eyes.

As spots danced before her, their kiss deepened and seemed to go on forever. Their groins ground together, and they groped one another. Then still kissing, Brendan carried Ty into his bedroom and slammed the door in the crowd's face.

Bianca couldn't believe her eyes and couldn't take another moment. "You're right. I'm so outta here."

Cecilie followed her, and they quietly slipped from the room. To both her relief and chagrin, no one, especially Ty, took notice.

Although her heart was breaking, Bianca was thankful to have found out Ty's true feelings before she made the terrible mistake of saying, "I do."

Disgusted with herself for having wasted so much time, for waiting for him while he was off at war doing only God knew what, she wrenched off her engagement ring and let it clang to the floor.

It meant less than nothing. If she kept it, it would just torture her unmercifully. She didn't give a rat's ass who found it or what they did with it.

She was declaring her freedom.

"Where are we going?" Cecilie asked, staying at her side.

"What's the sexiest, rowdiest *straight* bar in Fort Lauderdale? Take me there. I'm in the mood to get plastered and laid. Not necessarily in that order."

Cecilie cracked a grin and led Bianca to her car. "If you're sure, I know just the place."

Bianca ground her teeth and gritted out, "I'm sure." A hundred thousand percent!

\* \* \* \*

When Ty came up for air from a round of steamy kisses and his mind cleared, he looked around for Bianca, but she was nowhere to be seen. Hurt went bone deep, and he couldn't believe she wasn't here to welcome him home. She'd sounded so excited to see him, to be with him.

Worry gave him cold sweats, and he found a quiet room and called her. The phone went into voice mail so he left a message. Then he called again but still no answer.

Something bad must have happened. She wouldn't stand him up. He couldn't wait to see her and had thought she'd felt the same. He was desperate to make her his wife, and he'd thought of little else the last two years. Her letters had echoed his feelings. Now he wished he'd insisted they get married before he'd shipped off.

A hand clapped him on the shoulder and a large shadow eclipsed his. His heart raced, and he spun around. When he saw it was his friend, Kim, an ex-football player, he forced himself to breathe.

Kim shook his head, held out his hand and opened his fingers. A gold ring lay on his oversized palm. "This was just found in the hall. I thought you should know. By the way, welcome home, buddy. Good to see you."

Confused and his head pounding more with each passing breath, Ty reached for the ring. Suspicions stabbed him as he turned it this way and that to see it from all angles.

Inside, the dedication he'd lovingly had inscribed for Bianca mocked him. "Forever and always. You and me."

His heart slammed to his feet, and he cursed. Knowing the answer in his gut, he still had to confirm it. "Was Bianca here? She left?" She'd seen him kissing Brendan like a starved man. What kind of a damned fool had he been? He should have his head bashed in.

Kim nodded and looked away as if embarrassed on his behalf. "Yeah. She was here. No one saw her leave, but then we were all pretty engrossed in that blistering kiss you shared with your lover boy. Her friend's gone, too. They probably slipped out during the commotion."

*Damn it to hell!*



Ty wanted to shoot himself, not only for the insensitivity of that kiss but for not looking for her first. Just how blind had he been all this time? Obviously, she wasn't as cool with his gay relationship with Brendan as he'd thought.

Now, too late, his eyes were open. Unfortunately, he was more confused than ever.

His heart ached for Bianca, for what the discarded ring alleged.

His head swirled. He wanted to hold onto and cherish the memories of what used to be, except it was becoming apparent so many of them were lies. For Bianca. Not for him.

He scrubbed his aching forehead with the heel of his hand. His breath came and went quicker than his heart thumped. He needed time in the real world to figure things out. Unfortunately, he only had a couple of weeks leave from the Army before he had to report to his next base in Alabama.

Just as he'd feared, more bullets were aimed at him here than in Iraq. Life had been simpler in enemy territory.

He clamped the cold ring in his fist, and as his mind raced to answer his own question, he asked aloud, "Do you know where she went?"

Kim's gaze studied his feet as if they'd suddenly become the most fascinating things in the world, and he shook his head. "I dunno, man. Home, maybe?"

Ty sincerely doubted that, but he didn't know where else to begin his search. If she'd seen that kiss, home was the last place Bianca would go—ever. "Shit! I gotta find her."

Kim didn't say another word, but his speculative look shouted at Ty.

Even without that look Ty felt like a jerk and wanted to give himself a swift kick.

Without saying goodbye, Ty rifled out the door, only one thought stinging his mind. He had to find his fiancée and put things right.

How, he had no clue.

## Chapter Two

Brendan's heart tripped. His jaw dropped. Not wanting to believe his eyes that Ty had just left, he blinked.

His friend, Carlton, elbowed him and tented his brow. "Wasn't that your guy who just shot out of here? Looked like he was in a big hurry. He didn't even kiss you goodbye."

Brendan couldn't catch his breath. His skin felt tight. His lips twitched, and he wanted to scream. Most of all he wanted to wipe the smirk off Carlton's face. He couldn't believe Ty would choose a breeder over him, especially not after that steamy welcome home kiss.

Was his gaydar that far off? "Stuff it."

He took inventory.

Ty's frequent emails proclaimed he'd missed him, couldn't wait to be 'with' him again.

They'd had lots of cybersex via their webcams.

That kiss earlier tonight had blazed. He hadn't been mistaken that Ty's cock was hard and hot against him, too, begging to be let out of his pants.

Carlton hitched up his chin and narrowed his eyes, half commiserating and half accusing. "You might have to face it. He wants the wife, kids and dog kind of life."

Although Brendan had known that going in, had been content to be the occasional third partner, it was no longer enough. Every time he thought of the man, liquid fire drenched his veins.

He'd missed his soldier so badly, and he'd dreamed incessantly of him. He longed for his touch, his kiss, and to feel his hard cock inside him. Growing hot all over again, he squirmed, then the thought of Ty's fiancée doused his desire.

He caught Seth's gaze, saw the pity in his friend's face, and he couldn't take it. When he looked around the room, he was mortified to catch several more pitying stares.

*Damn Ty!*

*Damn Bianca!*

*Damn all of them!*

He didn't need or want their pity. No one felt sorry for him! As much as he wanted to scream and punch something, he couldn't, wouldn't let anyone see him squirm.

He shrugged, notched up his chin and marshalled a sparkling smile. He dared anyone to know his heart was shattered. "He's not *my* guy. We don't have any strings on each other."

*Liar.* He could still taste the man on his lips, couldn't purge him from his soul.

"Uh huh. Keep telling yourself that," Carlton said.

Brendan couldn't wait for everyone to leave, especially Carlton. He chafed even as he danced and belted out karaoke. The more he ached, the louder and more off-tune he sang. If Ty asked anyone about his reaction to Ty's departure, there would be no hint of sadness.

\* \* \* \*

Bianca poured so much liquor down her throat so fast she couldn't stand much less dance. Everything was hazy. Whether the room was that smoky or her eyes were that blurry, she didn't know. She didn't give a damn.

She didn't want to care about anything, especially not about Ty.

She didn't want to think about anything, either, especially not about that kiss and how Ty had totally forgotten about her existence. "I bet he's not thought about me at all tonight. I bet that whore's got his dick inside Brendan right now. Serves me right for giving him a naked man for Christmas."

Cecilie's mouth gaped. "Don't shout that out in here. You don't want everyone to know your business."

Bianca tried to swim through her muddled mind. "I thought I was whispering."

Cecilie shook her head. "No, sweetie. Your volume's up full blast. Crank it down several notches."

Bianca lifted her beer bottle and swirled the amber liquid. She stared at her friend's distorted image through the glass, wishing her whole life wasn't as muddled. Then she half-giggled, half-sobbed and tilted sideways in her chair. "You mean the whole frickin' world doesn't already know my fiancé is bi? Gay, I mean?"

She spied a Johnny Deep lookalike at the next table and waved. The guy had long, lovely hair like Ty used to before Uncle Sam had shaved it. When the cutie grinned at her,

she gave him a smile. Or was the guy really Johnny? Did it matter? She had a thing for men with long, lovely hair—like Ty's used to be.

Bianca nudged Cecilie and pointed at the man. "Look over there. There's Johnny Depp. I'm going to give him my body. Ty—eat your heart out."

Cecilie looked over her shoulder and wrinkled her nose. She clamped her hand over Bianca's and held her down. "Ew. That's not Johnny Depp." Then Cecilie snatched Bianca's bottle and took her arm in an iron grip. "Time to go home. You've drowned your sorrows enough for one night."

Bianca scowled and pulled back. She lifted her voice. "But I haven't gotten laid yet. I have to get laid by at least one guy tonight." Two or three would be so much better. She'd show Ty she didn't need him or his cheating lover.

Johnny lifted his glass in a toast and winked at her. So did his cute friend who licked his lips and wiggled his brows.

Cecilie shoved her in the opposite direction. "Git, you. You touch either of those creeps, and you'll need rabies shots."

Bianca tripped over her feet as she waved goodbye. She shouted, "We would've been really good together."

Cecilie snorted. "You're going home with me, kiddo, where I can keep an eye on you."

Bianca was drunk but not stupid. She stuck out her tongue at her friend and scowled. "But I don't want Ty to find me." Unless it was in bed with a couple of hotties so that he'd go out of his mind with jealousy. But lonely and pining for him? Not for awhile anyway. She needed time to think and figure out what came next. She needed to get sober. "Take me to a hotel!"

Cecilie shook her head. "Are you loaded with more than booze? You can't afford that. I'll take you to Theresa's."

Theresa was another good friend. In college, the three of them had been inseparable. Still not sure Ty wouldn't find her there, she chewed her lip. But about to melt into a puddle of exhaustion, she finally nodded. Ty didn't know Theresa well so he might not think to look for her there—if he wanted to find her at all.

Who was she kidding? Ty was most likely naked and wrapped about Brendan. He probably hadn't given her a thought.

She gulped back a hot tear and trudged forward. She clung to her friend so she could stay upright. "Why do you put up with me? The world's biggest idiot."

\* \* \* \*

Frantic when Bianca wasn't home by morning, Ty set off in search of her. He went to Cecilie's house and banged on the door. When no one answered, he called Bianca.

Stumped, he sat on Cecilie's step and stared unseeingly ahead, trying to figure out the puzzle. Since it was a Saturday, Bianca wouldn't be at work. At least, she normally wouldn't be. Just in case, he called her employer, but no one answered except the answering machine.

"What are you doing on my property?" Cecilie asked, displeasure basking in her voice.

A shadow fell over him, and he looked up into a fuming female face with accusing, reptilian eyes. Unfortunately, it was alone and had auburn hair with several scary red streaks. The woman also stood there about two inches shorter than his Bianca. "Is Bianca here? I have to talk to her."

Cecilie put her hands on her hips and snorted. "No."

"She's not here?" He pushed himself to his feet.

"Are you deaf? I just said that. And no, you can't see her."

"So you know where she is? It's urgent."

Cecilie glared and didn't budge. "After that display last night, I doubt she'll ever talk to you again. I wouldn't. I really don't care to speak to you, either."

Despite his disappointment and rising anger, he kept his practiced smile in place. "It's...complicated. Please."

"What part of *no* don't you understand? And you can thank me for keeping her from jumping into bed with Johnny Depp and company. Now git. Shoo!"

*Johnny Depp? Huh?* He didn't like the sound of that one bit.

"What's going on with Johnny Depp?"

Cecilie rolled her eyes. She jerked her thumb at the road then waved her cell phone in his face. "Do I have to call the cops? Please leave. Get this into your thick skull. She doesn't want anything to do with you. Get lost."

He muttered under his breath as he ambled to his feet, "Some welcome home."

He wished an Iraqi bullet had gotten him square between the eyes. Shrapnel in his heart would've been easier than this.

\* \* \* \*

Ty racked his brain for where Bianca could be if not at home and not at Cecilie's. He called her parents even though he didn't think she'd run to them. She hadn't. Her brother had no idea where she was, either. Or so they said.

Stymied, Ty hunkered down at home, knowing she'd have to show up eventually to feed the cat and get a change of clothes. Finally, come Sunday evening, Cecilie strolled in.

The cat that had been hiding from him, meowed and wove between her legs, tickling the woman with her fluffy tail. Ty narrowed his eyes and folded his arms over his chest. "Where is she? Haven't I been punished enough?"

Cecilie jumped and clutched her throat. She whirled around, and her gaze pinpointed him with hatred. "None of your beeswax."

Ty closed his eyes and inhaled deeply. He'd never been a fan of Cecilie, and he was less so as the days passed. "Please."

Cecilie sucked in her breath. "I can't. But I'll try to get her to call you. Maybe she'll tell you where to get off, and it'll be the end of you."

Ty tried not to show his disappointment and notched up his chin. She'd echoed his thoughts, except in reverse. But he didn't want to trade unpleasanties. He had more than enough drama in his life. "Fair enough."

By the next evening, Bianca hadn't called, and Ty was losing hope. He played computer games to anesthetise the pain. What wasn't numbed was acted out aggressively shooting little green aliens on the screen and putting out 'hits' on his virtual mafia enemies.

When the doorbell rang followed by a knock, his heart jumped.

He rocketed out of his chair so fast it crashed to the ground. He jumped over it and leapt for the door.

His breath came in short bursts, and his lungs hurt. He stopped by the entryway to calm down and catch his breath. Then he realised Bianca wouldn't knock on her own door,

and his heart fell. His shoulders sagged, and he rolled his head to get the kinks out of his neck before reaching for the door.

Brendan, prettily posing and pouting, leaned against the wall. His flesh was bronzed with foundation and his lips were rouged. He cocked his finger at Ty and arched his brows then he pushed off against the wall with his booted foot and tsked at Ty. As he swaggered across the hall, his gold earring caught the light, winking.

"I've been emailing you, but you don't answer. Am I *persona non grata* now? What gives?"

Ty opened the door wide to let in his former lover but couldn't find strength enough to summon a smile. He raked his fingers through his too short hair and grimaced. "I haven't looked at my email since I've been back." He hadn't had the heart and only now wondered if Bianca may have decided to write him rather than telephone. She'd always hated the phone. He kicked himself and wished Brendan would leave him alone to check his computer.

"Well, you should. You'll find a gazillion messages from me." Brendan peeked into the living room then the kitchen filled with fast food bags Ty had left on the counters in his funk. He pirouetted then clamped his fist on his hip.

In tight black jeans and a muscle shirt, the other man was mouth-watering. Ty mused at his reaction. Was he gay, not bi?

But no, he wouldn't be so fractured over Bianca if that were true, would he? So he was just a slut?

As if his dick didn't want to make a liar out of him, it flexed. It was all he could do to contain his groan.

Brendan's gaze zeroed in on the movement, and his grin blossomed. Lighted, his face was a joy to behold. "Where's our third musketeer?"

Ty wasn't sure if he should buy the innocent act. He folded his arms over his chest and gave the other man the once over. His voice came out strangled, and he cursed himself. "No. I'm mad at you. Seth lied. That was a total set up, wasn't it? Bianca was at my welcome home party, wasn't she? She saw us, and now, she won't talk to me. Don't pretend you don't know. Why'd you tell him to do it?"

Brendan put his hand over his chest and made an 'o' with his mouth. "*Moi? N'est pas*. I would *never*."

Ty screwed up his lips and stifled an oath. "Give it up. I know you did it. Why?"

Brendan plopped into a nearby lounge and propped his feet on the coffee table. "Okay. I'm guilty. For once, I wanted your attention. All of it. I've missed you like crazy. Besides, it's not like Bianca's not seen us kiss before...and more. *Much more*. She loved to watch your cock stroke in and out of me. *Close up*."

Blinded by the memory, Ty shook his head and buried his face in his hands. Bianca gave so many mixed signals he didn't know how to read them. But if Bianca hurt even half as badly as him, she was in lousy shape. "Yeah, but I totally ignored her the first day I came home. She must think I don't care about her."

Brendan wrinkled his nose and pursed his lips. "You mean how I feel when you lavish her with affection and I come second? Not that I wanted her to feel that way. I'm not heartless. I just wanted to come first with you, and when you carried me off to bed and made such sweet love to me, I forgot she was there." He looked heavenward then crossed his heart. When he levelled his gaze back on Ty, his heart overflowed in it. "I love you, man. With all my heart and soul. I was so scared you wouldn't make it home alive. Sue me."

Ty couldn't breathe. He just stared. His heart flipped. Tingles danced up his spine.

*Love?*

He was in love with Bianca. He wanted to marry her, but fucking Brendan was a lot of fun. He craved Brendan's big cock spreading his tight ass. He loved the way the guy kissed, the way he stuck his tongue all the way into his mouth. Ty was about to burst into flames just thinking about fucking Brendan. He'd missed making love to him like hell.

Was that love?

*Holy shit!*

He groaned and rubbed his two-day growth of beard. Was he in love with two people at once? Was that possible? Was it okay even though Bianca had given her blessing for him to fuck and be fucked by Brendan? For the past couple of years, he'd thought it acceptable because it turned on Bianca so. She'd really gotten into watching them fuck and be fucked by two men.

"God, I'm in a mess of trouble."

Could he, should he marry Bianca if he was in lust with someone else? Even if he loved them both?



It seemed he had a lot of self discovery to do about himself.

Brendan rose and closed the distance separating them. He knelt in front of Ty and laid his head in Ty's lap. "I'm sorry. The last thing I want to do is hurt you."

Curious, Ty had to know. "Are you in love with Bianca, too?"

He hoped so. He'd feel somewhat better if the triangle was even.

Brendan caressed Ty's leg, sneaking his hand along his thigh, closer to his cock. "I love her, I find her sexy, but no, I'm not 'in love' with her like I am with you. I ache for you. Every day you were away, I was in agony. It was torture."

Ty felt that way about Bianca, and yet, he was about to burst into flames the way Brendan was touching him. "Keep that up, and I'm going to burn to a crisp."

Brendan saucily smiled up at him as he zeroed in on Ty's cock. "That's the idea. You won't mind if I cool off? I'm so hot I'm about to explode."

Ty felt guilty and turned on all at once. He desperately needed love and solace, and he wasn't able to turn it down.

When Brendan unsnapped his pants and dragged them off, Ty wasn't in any shape to protest.

When Brendan bumped and ground his hips in a striptease, Ty slid down in his chair and pumped his cock. When Brendan belted out a Mick Jagger tune and wiggled his ass, Ty couldn't hold out.

"I've missed you, man. I dreamed about your big cock fucking the hell out of me, making me come long and hard. God forgive me, but I love how your cock feels screwing me." He also loved the musky taste and the feel of it in his mouth. It was so sexy, so decadent, the way sex should be.

Brendan winked and flicked his tongue as he danced forward.

Ty couldn't keep his gaze off Brendan's cock which grew before his eyes. Unable to help himself, he slithered off the couch and onto his knees. He licked his way up Brendan's legs and flicked his tongue across the tip of Brendan's cock. It tasted so wonderful he took a longer sip of his lover's nectar.

When Brendan moaned and pressed his groin in Ty's face, he smiled and released it. He licked his way up Brendan's belly and let his hands mould the other man's sculpted body. He laved Brendan's nipples and playfully nipped. He closed his hand around his lover's cock

and absorbed the frisson that raced through him at the touch. His cock was so warm, so velvety soft yet hard. His hair was so crisp and springy.

Quaking, Ty stood and pulled Brendan's hips to his.

They dirty danced, dipping each other to the floor. Finally unable to take Brendan's cock rubbing against his for another moment, Ty lowered his lover to the floor and coaxed him to turn over.

His heart pounding against his ribs so hard they were in danger of breaking, Ty whispered in Brendan's ear, "Get up on your knees so I can stick my dick in you and send you to the moon."

Brendan groaned. "I thought you'd never fuck me again. What are you waiting for?"

"What an impatient little bitch you are."

Brendan twisted and grasped his cock and wiggled his brow. "You call this little? This Goliath? Count yourself lucky I'm yours."

Ty's mouth watered. He warmed his hands and held Brendan's cock between them. Then he slid his fingers along the underside of his penis, seeking out his hotspots. He massaged the million dollar point in back of Brendan's scrotum then cupped his testicles and gently squeezed each one in turn, getting off on the sound of Brendan's moans.

Brendan regarded him with hooded eyes. "You've learned some new moves, lover, Should I be jealous?"

Memories taunted him. Many long, lonely nights he'd kept himself from going crazy by spending them with myriad fictional lovers he'd downloaded on his computer. He'd also indulged in non-fiction how-to sex books, some with erotic pictures. He was much better acquainted with his own body now thanks to the *Kama Sutra* and other texts than before his stint overseas. "Not at all but I read a lot."

Brendan squirmed when Ty scraped his nails lightly over his scrotum. "I'll have to start blogging less so I can read more. Did you bring any of those naughty books home? We can read them to each other."

Ty wished he could have but hadn't wanted to risk the Army's ire so he'd ditched them before shipping home. But he memorised the url's of his favourite book stores. "No, but it's easy enough to get them again."

He cracked a grin and winked. They'd have this, one last glorious time together before he gave himself fully to Bianca. "I have other new moves you'll love."

"Show, don't tell."

Ty couldn't wait to pleasure him. With the heel of his hand he massaged the fleshy mound of skin over his pubic bone. He caressed the perineum, the smooth piece of flesh between Brendan's cock and anus, and loved feeling his lover's erection grow.

Now that it was long and throbbing, he couldn't resist stroking the glans and squeezing it until drops of pre-cum pearled out of the pink slit. Longing to give his lover the best sex of his life, he ran the pad of his thumb over the velvety ridge at the back of the glans paying particular attention to the coronal ridge. He buried his head between Brendan's legs and flicked his tongue over the hot spots. He let his tongue flutter down the underbelly of the cock then sucked the meaty flesh into his mouth. As he continued, he varied pressure. Finally, he took the cock into his mouth and deep-throated it. When Brendan came, Ty swallowed every drop of his cum.

"You rock my world like no one else."

Ty couldn't wait another moment he was so hot. He turned Brendan and clamped his hands on his hips then he worked lube onto his cock before fucking his lover's ass.

"God, I've missed you, No one fucks me like you do," Brendan said, his voice breathy.

Ty pounded Brendan hard, arched back and howled. Then he quaked and came long and hard, shuddering inside his lover.

"My turn." Brendan swivelled around then mounted Ty. After he was buried deep, he slammed into Ty and his balls slapped Ty's ass. "Tell me this doesn't feel awesome, that you could live without this. That you would want to. I dare you."

Could he give this up? Or did he want Brendan's cock in him nightly? Would he crave Brendan's heavenly kisses and his strong arms?

But could he give up Bianca? Would they make him chose? Would they break his heart? Would he break one of theirs? Or both. That would kill him as much as them.

Rainbows sprang before his eyes and rapture made him forget his pain.

Finally, Brendan pulled out and dragged Ty into his arms. They lay together naked and tangled until their breathing returned to normal.

Ty caressed Brendan's broad shoulders and ran his hands over his lover's flat stomach. His gaze drank in the body beautiful enough to be a Greek statue.

Brendan sighed and kissed Ty's neck and snuggled closer. "Isn't this perfect? Just you and me sated by our love? We should get a bearskin rug, a blazing fire, and champagne. I'll tantalise you with chocolate-covered strawberries and drizzle hot soy wax down your stomach to your cock then I'll give you the best massage you ever had."

Brendan slid his finger under Ty's chin and lifted it, forcing Ty's gaze to meet his. "I brought you presents."

Ty's heart raced so fast he had difficulty breathing. His heart swelled with bliss. "You did?"

Brendan swept his tongue across Ty's shoulder blades down to his nipples. "Um hm. Naughty sex toys. I read about them in this new blog I found and I've been dying to try them with you." He squeezed Ty's nipples. "Nipple clamps, butt plugs, and beads. You haven't lived yet."

Mindless to everything except this mind-blowing pleasure, Ty was about to moan his agreement when a sound in the hall spooked him and reality blazed into his skull. His heart ground to a halt, and he couldn't breathe. Then it sped up so fast he feared his heart would explode. Adrenaline blasted through him, and he jumped up and dumped Brendan on his ass.

"God, it's Bianca. She'll wig if she finds us this way." He grabbed his clothes and threw Brendan's in his face. "Dress for heaven's sake! Hide! Don't just lie there with your cock dangling all over."

Brendan gaped at him then his eyes narrowed. Hot, bright colour suffused his neck and travelled up to his cheeks. He didn't budge. "Why? She's seen us together lots of times. She started this."

Ty tried to drag in breath and couldn't. He searched his brain for a good answer. Finally, he opted for the truth. "Because this is different. She's acting weird. She's not cool with this, us, any more. I don't want to lose her. I love her."

Except for the thud of his Adam's apple in his throat, Brendan froze. "You love *her*? What about me, man? You love *me*, too, right? All those letters we exchanged while you were

in Iraq, all those webcam sex sessions we indulged in. The mind-blowing sex we just had. I thought you loved *me* with your whole heart."

Ty felt like a heel. While he was having hot sex with Brendan, his world rocked. He forgot everything else. He was bewitched. But when he floated back to the real world, his heart and soul ached for Bianca. He had to end this. He couldn't take the wounds clouding his lover's eyes. He'd never meant to hurt him. This was just about having fun. If he'd thought Brendan loved him, ached for him the way he ached for Bianca, he'd have ended this long ago. He'd never realised what dangerous weapons hearts and penises were. Now, he knew. Too late.

"You've been playing with me. I have a heart, too." Brendan echoed his thoughts and rose to his feet. With jerky movements, he tugged on his clothes and swivelled towards the door. "You need to decide who you are and who you want. And I won't wait forever, soldier boy. I have feelings, too. And I need love."

Simultaneously, Ty bristled and felt like a scoundrel. This wasn't fair. "You knew coming in to this that Bianca and I were a couple, that we were engaged to marry. I never said I wanted to change that."

Brendan put one hand on his hip and the other on the knob. He jutted up his chin and his eyes glittered. "You implied it loud and clear. Penises don't lie, and men who are happy with their partners don't screw other people all the time. Even on webcams." He shot a pointed look at Ty's now flaccid cock.

Ty damned his wayward cock. He wasn't so sure the damned thing was married to his heart. It had a mind of its own.

## Chapter Three

Bianca laid flat on her back, linked her hands behind her head and stared at the ceiling. She focused on a spot until it whirled and became psychedelic before her swollen eyes. Beside her, Cecilie was a blur.

"I should call Ty and at least welcome him home. We need to talk." Maybe if they'd truly *talked* more while he was overseas instead of having virtual sex via webcams, they wouldn't be in this mess. Maybe his horniness should have clued her in. She bet if she checked his computer's history, she'd find a lot of webcam sessions with Brendan, too. She wondered how many? Probably way more cybersex with Brendan than with her judging by the way they'd greeted each other the other night at Ty's coming home party.

Cecilie bit into one of the fudge brownies Bianca had baked. With chocolate bits clinging to her teeth, she mumbled, "Are you nuts? After the shabby way he treated you? If he'd been my guy, I'd introduce his tiny little pecker to my huge machete."

Bianca gasped at her friend's vehemence. She couldn't put all the blame on Ty. Maybe none. She'd introduced him to Brendan. She'd invited Brendan into their bed. She'd pushed the guy at him after finding all Ty's gay porn. No, she'd delivered Brendan gift wrapped—literally. Then she'd joined in the fun and not only let them, but coaxed them to, fuck her simultaneously.

*Fun?*

Well, yeah. Getting fucked by two men in one bed, often at the same time, had been loads of fun. Having hot, wet tongues, scalding lips and warm hands on her nipples and genitals all at the same time had been nirvana. The flood of regrets and doubts afterward hadn't been so great. The fear Ty would choose Brendan over her was tearing her apart. She didn't know how much more she could take.

She supposed it was far better to discover this now than after they'd said wedding vows and had a couple of kids and a dog. Now, it would be far easier to kick him out of a leased apartment than a jointly-owned house. Legally, at least, there'd be no mess or stress.

Bianca lifted one leg and pointed her toe at the far wall. She flexed her foot, circling it, working out the kinks in her ankle. "We've been together a long time. We've been through a lot. I owe him at least a few words. I was practically married to the man."

Cecilie laid her hand on Bianca's forehead. She shook her head and reclaimed her hand. "Nope. You're not feverish. You must be crazy. Read my lips—you don't owe that jerk anything."

Bianca twisted onto her side and fished in her purse for her phone. "Maybe you should learn to forgive and forget. You might still be with Gary and be happy instead of an old grouch."

Shutters rolled down over Cecilie's eyes, and she clamped her lips. After a long silence, she finally said, "I don't trust Gary. I can't be in a relationship without trust. Can you really?"

*Could she?*

But was the issue trust? She'd given Ty permission to be with Brendan. He wasn't lying or hiding anything. It couldn't be called *cheating* when everything was out in the open and she'd been invested in it, too, could it?

She chewed her lips and delved into her psyche. She was jealous, sure, even if she had no right. But the issues went far deeper. She didn't fulfil all of her man's needs, and she didn't own his heart. At least, she had serious doubts about that. Worse, she didn't think he truly knew his heart.

Or maybe he did...

"I can't hide forever. I'm an adult, and I'm going to act like one."

Cecilie put her hand on Bianca's arm and gave a gentle squeeze. "Just be careful, sweetie. Don't let him blind you with his sweet talk and don't let him bewitch you with that big dick."

Bianca nodded and girded her heart. She sat up, swung her legs to the floor and stood. For this, she needed privacy. She couldn't hold a serious conversation with Ty while Cecilie glared daggers or made her digs. "Excuse me."

Once she reached the sanctity of the guest room where she was bunking, she dialled Ty and paced until his voice tickled her ear. It struck her like a tidal wave, and she sank to the mattress.

"Hi," she said. Dead air hung heavily on her ears so long she feared he'd hung up. "Ty? It's me, Bianca. I thought you wanted to talk to me."

"Bianca." It sounded as if his lips caressed her name. "I've missed you. I didn't think you wanted to talk to me. Your watchdog hasn't let me near you."

"I didn't," she admitted. She twiddled with a wisp of her hair that had come loose from her pony tail. "I needed time to think, to process everything. I'm still in a jumble, but you deserve better. After all, we were engaged."

Her naked ring finger felt cold and lonely. She rubbed it, but it only wanted Ty's golden ring, not her cold flesh.

"I'm still not sure what happened. Everything's been a blur since I got back. I thought things would be so much easier being back home. I didn't mean for things to happen the way they did."

"Are you home? I mean for good?" She wondered if the Army had changed his orders last minute as they'd done before. She wasn't sure if she wanted him to be home or not. She wasn't sure if she was happy or sad she'd not recorded their webcam sexcapades.

"I don't have to go back to Iraq, but I'm not a free man yet, either. I get another ten days here then I have to report to my new base in Alabama."

*Alabama?* That sounded almost as far away as Iraq.

"Oh." And she'd wasted several days in a mad funk. "I don't remember you telling me."

"I didn't. I was trying to get stationed nearer home. Have you ever thought about living in Alabama?"

She blinked and tried to picture that part of the world, almost as foreign to her as Iraq. She'd heard the Deep South was no man's land for a Yankee. Pictures she'd seen of the place were full of trees, dark swamps and country homes. It was nothing like Ohio, her civilised, safe part of the world. Then again, was any part safe when men fucked other men and broke their women's hearts?

"No." She liked where she lived, and if she wanted to move, she'd always imagined exotic, exciting places like Japan, Germany or at least California. But mainly she'd envisioned herself by Ty's side forever, even if he lived in Siberia.

But only if he loved her — only her.



She hated this hemming and hawing and cursed the time wasted, and she blurted out, "What in the hell happened at your welcome home party? You totally forgot about me. You were so happy to see Brendan you didn't care if I was dead or alive."

Ty gulped then released a vehement swear. "I didn't know you were there. I swear I'd never ignore you or embarrass you. I've missed you so much."

Bianca believed him and felt a bit better. Still, the way he'd kissed Brendan with such fervour burned in her mind. The way they'd disappeared into the back room and closed the door had spoken volumes. His feelings for the man obviously weren't casual. She didn't believe anymore he was in that relationship just for the sex and kicks.

Could she share his heart? Could she take that chance?

Unsure, she shook her head. "You obviously missed Brendan very much. I'm not so sure you remembered I was alive."

Ty swore. "That's not fair. You're putting words in my mouth."

She blinked back tears. "Fair or not, it's how I feel." She almost blurted out questions about Brendan and webcam sex sessions, but she bit them back. Maybe she should peek at Brendan's blog to see what he'd said. He'd mentioned having one, but she'd been scared she'd find out more than she wanted to know and so had stayed away. Perhaps that hadn't been a wise course of action after all. Knowing Brendan, he was probably spilling his guts to the world.

"Let me prove it to you," Ty said.

Could he? What would he have to do to make her believe him? She wasn't sure anything would work. But could she walk away without trying? Would she ever be able to forgive herself? Still in a quandary, she heard herself say, "Okay. Meet me at Cecilie's tonight."

"I'd rather not have Cecilie around..."

And she would. No way did she want to meet with him in private. Her nerves were raw. Her traitorous body might overrule her head then where would she be? She didn't trust herself. "Then meet me at the bookstore." He'd know which one, the one where she spent hours. Lately, per Ty's request, she'd been pouring over books about sex and sex play. He'd wanted to try out new, exciting things he'd been reading about after they'd said goodnight.

"I'll be there in half an hour."

She was a mess! Her heart raced, and she wrinkled her nose at her naked toes. Half an hour wasn't enough time to paint her nails or straighten her hair. It barely gave her enough time to shower and wash away her stench. "Give me an hour."

"We've lived together for years. I just want to see you, not a bunch of goop on your face."

She sucked in a breath. She wasn't ready to live with him again. "One hour," she said firmly, already counting the seconds.

An hour also wasn't enough to get her wits together. Her emotions ended up as naked as her unpainted toes. She consoled herself that her legs were clean shaven and her teeth weren't fuzzy. She was clean and neat if not exactly gorgeous.

\* \* \* \*

At the bookstore door Bianca paused to square her shoulders, take a deep breath, and hitch her slouch purse higher onto her shoulder.

She wore a shapeless shirt and new capris. She was a size or two smaller than when he'd last saw her. Her hair had more layers and was a couple of shades darker.

Fear greater than being shot paralysed him. The sight of his lady stole his breath. She was breathtaking, almost ethereal. With shadows rimming her eyes, she looked fragile. Again, he wanted to kick himself. Had his stupidity done that to her?

He longed to sweep her into his arms and kiss away the haunted look. He yearned to bring her back to life, to revive their love.

But he was scared this was a dream, that they weren't really here, and he'd awaken to his nightmare alone.

When their gazes clicked, he melted. He didn't know if he could live without her sunshine.

In a few quick strides, he closed the gulf between them and scooped her into his embrace. He swung her around and kissed her.

Raw, desperate hunger drove him. He punished her with hard, hot kisses for daring to leave him. He willed her to open up, to forgive him, to look forward and not back.

A disapproving twitter seeped into his brain, and he remembered where they were. Needing to touch her, to keep her by his side, he cupped her elbow and led her to the cafe where students clogged the tables.

He grimaced but didn't let go of her. "Everything's a lot more crowded than before I left."

She squinted at the crowd and made a moue of her lips. "It's always like this. You probably forgot."

She ordered an espresso and a bagel and insisted on paying for his food as well as her own. "It's the least I can do for one of our returning heroes."

He blinked. He felt like anything but a hero. "Is that all I am to you? We need to talk."

Her brow furrowed and she looked around. "In Grand Central Station? This is strictly a PG place."

"So come home with me. We'll have all the privacy we need."

When her eyes widened and she inched back, he cursed himself. Despite the hot coffee burning his hands, he was about to freeze to death.

A table opened at that moment, and she darted for it, beating out a couple of old guys with a chess board. She wiped crumbs off the table. "Here is good. I'm jumpy as a toad as it is. I don't know what you truly expect of me. How much do you think I can take? How much should I?"

A mortar blast couldn't have stung more. He winced and took a swig of his drink wishing he had something stronger to spike it with. He'd never needed more courage than now or more discipline.

His head ached, and he pressed his fingers against his throbbing temples. He was less certain how to respond to her than he'd been to his commanding officer. Of course, she pulled a lot more rank. A court martial would seem of little consequence measured against a rejection by her.

A group of rowdy kids ran by and jostled them causing Bianca's drink to spill down her blouse. Not one apologised or seemed to notice what they'd caused.

"Great!" Bianca dabbed at the spreading ugly stain. She rose and grabbed her purse and a handful of napkins. "Excuse me."

While she was gone, he watched an older couple gaze at one another with moony eyes at a nearby table. Envy warred with warm, gooey feelings. He wanted himself and Bianca to be that way in fifty years.

Although his watch testified she'd only been gone eight minutes, it felt like a month. As she walked back to their table, a snarl twisted her lips, and he could guess it had a lot to do with the stain on her shirt. The wet material clung to her breasts and whet his appetite.

He couldn't take the stuffiness and noise another second. He rose and met her a few steps away from the table. "Let's go get chocolate ice cream. I need some fresh air." And something delicious to get his mind off how yummy she looked.

"Why not? My shirt can't get any more ruined. Why don't we play paintball while we're at it?" Before he could respond she went on in a sarcastic voice. "Oh, wait! The ice cream parlour and the paintball place closed a couple months ago."

"I guess that's why everyone's here." He'd heard about the recession, but until now, it had seemed unreal. His steady pay cheque felt better than ever in his pocket.

"Well, moonlight's still free, right? Let's take a walk." Maybe the moon would work some magic on her. At least, he wouldn't feel so claustrophobic.

She checked her watch. "For a few, I s'pose. I think I still have a job tomorrow so I can't stay out late."

He touched her arm and gazed into her eyes. "I make enough to support us both. You can quit and take a break, at least, until we get set up in Alabama. I'm due to make major, soon."

She froze and stared.

He didn't like her reaction. Pre-Brendan she would've squealed and jumped into his arms. She would've smothered him in kisses and dragged him home to their bed.

Warily, he watched her and braced himself.

After a group of teens had passed by and were several steps away, she asked, "What does the Army think about you being gay? Do they allow that now?"

He fell back a step as if pushed by a sonic boom. Headlights from an approaching car blinded him for a few seconds. When he could see her clearly again, he took a deep breath and tried to regain his equilibrium. "One. I'm not gay. Two. The Army has a 'don't ask don't

tell' policy, and I haven't told them anything about my sexuality. What they don't know won't hurt them."

Bianca stroked her chin. "So you want me to be your cover? Will Brendan move with you, too, or just visit a lot?"

Anger struck fast and furious, and he sucked in a ragged breath. Then with a muttered curse, he pulled her into his arms. "Don't demean what I feel for you, the precious thing we have. Brendan doesn't factor into my plans. You do. I love *you*. I want *you* with me. I need you."

He needed her so badly he couldn't stand it. He'd been dying in the desert, and she was his oasis. He plundered her lips and pressed closer to her body.

Her moan teased his lips. Her body melted into his. She squirmed and mumbled against his lips. "This isn't fair. You're the enemy."

*The enemy?*

*"Au contraire, babe. I'm the peace-keeping force. Let me prove it to you."*

"Seems like a hostile takeover to me," she said but didn't move.

Heartened, he lowered his voice to a huskier register. "I guaran-damn-tee, you'll like it and it won't be hostile."

Damn! Her body liked this too much. Way too much. It quivered, and her pulse raced.

And she was enjoying the banter. She liked sex, and she'd gone cold turkey in his absence. Her temperature was rising even though the night's breeze brought a drop to the mercury.

She needed him so badly, but did she dare? Even if he never saw Brendan again and never made love to anyone else but her, did she want to be a military wife? What if he was shipped back to Iraq? Wounded? Killed?

Could she take the stress?

Before the debacle with Brendan, she'd have shouted 'yes' and hidden her fears.

Now? She honestly didn't know.

"I love you, baby. Come home. Let's discuss this in private."

"Good job, soldier," a man twice Ty's age said and clapped his shoulder on his way past. Then he smiled at her and winked at Ty. "I see you had a really good thing to keep you going."

A blast of heat suffused her cheeks, and she was glad for the night's cover. Fortunately, the man didn't know what else the Captain had come home to.

Anger snapped at her, and she cut off her thoughts. If she dwelled in the morass, she was afraid she'd drown.

When the man was out of earshot, she said, "Okay. I can't sleep well at Theresa's. Her cats jump on me all night and that dog of hers won't shut up." And Cecilie who'd insisted on being there, too, wouldn't stop running her mouth about Ty. Bianca appreciated the loyalty, but she'd go crazy hearing again about what a letch Ty was.

A relieved smile curved Ty's lips, and he smoothed his hand over his crop of short hair. "I'll give you a nice, long back massage and rub your feet, just the way you like."

"No fair," she mumbled, crumbling to the bait. His hands were the most magical in the world.

The way his jaw worked, the way his chin quivered, fascinated her. She couldn't get over the play of passing car lights on his clean-shaven chin. She wondered how his smooth cheeks would feel on her pussy and along her thighs.

She wondered if she could enjoy sex as much with him if she couldn't tangle herself in his long, silky hair or wind her fingers in it.

Could she live with herself if she never found out? What would one more night cost her?

Giving herself permission to feel sexy, she donned her femme fatale persona. She wound a sexy come-hither smile around her lips and slowly licked them. She jutted out her hip, breasts then crooked her finger at him. "Let's go before I change my mind."

How she got home she wasn't sure. She texted her friends to tell them she wouldn't return that night then shut off her phone so they couldn't bother her.

Ty and Bianca's clothes were off before they reached the bedroom. He scooped her into his arms and kicked the bedroom door wide.

She nuzzled his neck and inhaled deeply of him, a mixture of sea salts and chocolate. He must've visited the beach, one of her favourite places to make out.

The moon spilled through a crack in the curtain and moonbeams danced across the bed which was rumpled but sexy as hell. She started to wonder if he'd been sleeping in it alone but shoved away the thought. When he lowered her onto the mattress and his cock was full and heavy, her mouth watered and she held out her arms to him.

With a wicked smile, he crawled on top of her and insinuated himself between her legs. He rubbed noses and gazed deeply into her eyes. Against her lips he murmured, "I'll make you happy every day of your life that you forgave me."

She started at that but then clamped her lips. If she could be sure, she'd forgive him this second. But she was far from sure.

Not wishing to spoil what could be their last night together, she plundered his lips and pulled him closer.

God she needed that cock inside, buried deep and flying her to heaven.

*Buried deep inside. Oops!*

Scared she'd almost made the second biggest mistake of her life, she shoved him off. Struggling for air, she finally pushed out one word like a bullet, "Condom."

He grunted and scowled as he always did when she made him wear one. Tonight, it was more crucial than ever.

She clamped her legs tightly until he rolled on the latex protection.

"Better?"

She nodded and rewarded him by spreading wide her legs and crooking her finger for him to join her. "Much."

As if he was about to burst, he drove immediately into her. With the frenzy of a wild man, he fucked her unmercifully.

Her heart raced. Her pulse skipped. Their bodies were so wet and slick, they slid along each other with ease.

She missed his long hair, how it tickled and caressed. She longed for his soft beard not the five o'clock stubble burning her face. It was as if she was cheating on him with another man. "If you stay in the service, you'll never have your beautiful long hair again."

Ty froze. After several moments, he said, "I'm still me."

But had she ever truly known him? Did she now? Again, she kicked the voices out of her head, intent on getting into making love to a sexy man.

*Whore...*

Well, wasn't she that if that's all he was? Just a sexy man and not the man she loved with all her heart, the man she intended to marry.

Her heart swelled. Her pussy quaked, and she met him thrust for thrust. The room spun until the ceiling disappeared, and she was sucked into a vortex as her heart was about to burst.

She exploded into a rainbow of colours. This one time wasn't enough. Ravenous, she yearned for more.

\* \* \* \*

Ty awakened to gunfire. A cold sweat enveloped him, and he grabbed for his weapon. Instead, his hands landed on a woman's naked body.

As his hand closed over a breast and the nipple became erect, his breathing slowed. Memory flooded back, and his heart stopped racing.

He wasn't in Iraq in the middle of a war zone. Enemy fire wasn't trying to kill him. He was in bed with his beloved Bianca in the safe US, and they'd made love most of the night. His world hadn't ended.

Bianca's sleep-filled voice mumbled as she pushed him away. "Get the door. Whomever they are, tell them to go away. I have to get ready for work."

He squinted at the neon clock by the bed. 7:30 a.m. It was late for her to be getting up but too damned early for visitors.

The unwelcome visitor hammered on the door again and lay on the doorbell.

Swearing under his breath, Ty hauled himself up and stepped into his pants. He rubbed his hand over his head. After a year in the military, he still missed his long hair, but at least he wasn't missing Bianca.

He peered through the peephole and spied two Army officers in full dress uniform. His heart skipped several beats, and he muttered under his breath, "What do they want?"

He sucked in a deep breath, squared his shoulders and opened the door. "Can I help you?"

The shorter of the two men, a major with greying hair at the temple and who reeked of cigarette smoke, looked him up and down. Finally, he asked, "Captain Tyler Gibson?"



Ty gulped and nodded. "Yes, sir. I'm Captain Gibson."

"You are hereby under arrest for violating proper military conduct, for making publicly known your deviant sexual preferences."

Ty did a double take. He couldn't breathe. He'd lived in fear of being found out but hadn't really believed he would be. He'd been celibate in Iraq.

A million thoughts raced through his head. Had the Office of Special Investigations intercepted his correspondence with Brendan? Had someone been following him? Had Brendan blabbed?

A small, shaking hand clamped around his arm. Warm breath coasted along his back. Bianca's voice tickled his ear, "What's going on? Who are they?"

"I'm being called in for a meeting, sweetheart. That's all. Nothing to worry about."

She sidled closer, and her fingers bit harder into him. "What's the regulation they're quoting? They said you're under arrest."

Damn!

Indigestion burned in his chest, and his throat became raw. He sent pleading glances to the men not to say anything to hurt her.

The taller, younger man who had a large gap between his front teeth, scowled. "It means he's been accused of being openly gay which is prohibited in the Army."

Bianca stiffened. Her nails grazed Ty's arm. Finally, she wrapped her arms around him as if she'd never let him go and laid her cheek on his chest. "Oh, I can assure you he's not gay. He just spent the night with me," she drawled huskily and winked.

Ty prayed that would be enough to save him, but he didn't hold out much hope. He closed his hand over hers, dragged it to his lips and nuzzled it. "You'd better get ready for work, babe. You don't want to get in trouble."

She moved between him and the enemy and glared at them. "I'm not leaving you alone here with them."

"Did you not hear what we told you, Ma'am?"

"And I told you he's with me," Bianca said. Her purr barely sheathed her claws. She felt tight, ready to pounce.

Ty wasn't sure if he was scared of what she'd do or happy that she wanted to do it. He stifled a sigh and tamped down the bile rising in his throat. He feathered a kiss across her brow. "It's okay. I don't have a choice. I have to go with them."

Her grip tightened, and she looked up pleadingly. "We'll hire a good attorney. We'll fight this."

God, he missed the civilian world right now, but not enough to wish it upon himself again like this. "I need to have military representation, but I love you for wanting to try, baby."

"Stand aside, Ma'am, or we'll have to arrest you, too."

Bianca arched a brow. "Can you? I'm not military."

Worry made Ty pull her aside and whisper, "I love you more than ever for wanting to protect me, but this isn't helping. I'll call you as soon as I'm able. Promise."

Tears welled in her eyes, and she rapidly blinked. Instead of answering him directly, she turned to his accusers, "Can't I accompany him? Can't I at least know where you're taking him?"

"You can't come, Ma'am. We're taking him to the base." To him they said, "Get dressed in your uniform if you have it here."

Ty nodded and turned to get it. He wondered if it would be the last time he wore it, in particular his captain's bars.

## Chapter Four

Bianca didn't know what had overcome her when those military brutes tried to shanghai Ty.

She was still raw as hell, but she didn't want him to lose his career and be driven out in disgrace, either. Even if he had brought it upon himself...

She pulled her thoughts up short. Whoa! That wasn't fair. Ty might be bi or gay or green. What did that have to do with his job performance? Why should sexual orientation matter?

Or was she scared her friends and family would find out? Their neighbours? Her co-workers?

What if she could trust him enough to marry him, and they had kids? What would they think of a father who had been dishonourably discharged for being gay? Of her for marrying him? What if their friends found out? What then?

Her head pounded and she hated her thoughts. They might have been able to hide their dirty little secrets before. Now, everyone would find out if he was dishonourably discharged.

Would anyone hire him?

Would it affect her employability?

She hated herself for caring. God, was she so shallow?

What really bugged her?

She called in sick, pulled up her hair into a ponytail and threw on an old pair of jeans and T-shirt. She wasn't convinced a civilian attorney couldn't help until she'd visited several and got the same answer from all.

Basically, Ty was screwed if the Army had real evidence.

The only bright side was that he wouldn't be sent back to hostile territory. And he could stay with her.

This felt like hostile territory, however. And she wasn't positive he would choose her over Brendan now that he didn't need a cover.

Ty hadn't been gone a day, and she missed him like crazy. He consumed her thoughts. She smelled him on her sheets, in the room and on her flesh. She couldn't concentrate on anything else, not even getting down one meal.

As the sun set on an unproductive day and the stars came out to mock her, she shook her fist at the moon. "I'm not going to let this get me down."

But her heart ached, her throat burned, and her arms were as empty as her bed. Did she really want it to be empty?

No! Ty belonged there, with or without his long hair and captain's bars.

How had the OSI found him out?

\* \* \* \*

"Twitter? What in the hell is it?" Ty rubbed his ears and stared at his accusers.

The major rubbed his nose with the heel of his hand then leant forward on his elbows. "You were in Iraq not the next solar system."

Ty spread his hands wide, sighed, rose to his feet and prowled the room.

The lieutenant cleared his throat, shifted in his chair and laced his fingers. "It's sort of like blogging or email social network on the computer. Your, uh, friend's been bragging about your affair on it."

Ty gulped, and his fingers itched to wrap themselves around Brendan's throat. His blood boiled, and he strung together a long list of curses in his mind. Outwardly, he remained stoic and stared down the long-jawed man. "It's a mistake. He couldn't have meant me."

The major stomped over to the table, poked several keys on the laptop there then turned it around. A large photo of Ty and Brendan French-kissing filled the screen.

Ty's blood froze. He couldn't breathe. What in the hell had Brendan done? Why?

Was it foolishness?

Revenge?

Or was Brendan staking his claim?

Ty wished Bianca had never brought Brendan home, that she'd never given him the man as his Christmas gift.

"Do you still deny it? That's you, isn't it?"

Ty's nerves ricocheted, but he tried not to squirm. "I'd like to have legal representation before I say anything else."

The major frowned at his assistant and jerked his thumb at the door. "Get this sorry excuse for a soldier out of my sight."

"Yes, sir," the lieutenant nodded.

Sympathy flashed across the lieutenant's eyes so quickly Ty wondered if he'd imagined it. Although he wasn't anxious to be locked up in confinement away from Bianca, he couldn't wait to get away from the major so he readily accompanied the lieutenant.

It felt as if an eternity passed before his legal counsel arrived, even if it was only the next day. He'd been unable to sleep, and his muscles ached. His eyes burned, and his vision was blurry. He longed for a shower and shave.

He paced the floor of the meeting room, sneaking glances at the pimply-faced boy who was supposed to represent him. He strangled a choice curse. This kid didn't look old enough to have a bachelor's degree much less a law degree.

"Have you ever represented anyone before?" Ty bit his tongue to keep from being more derogatory. He needed this young man and prayed for a miracle.

The youth rose and squared his shoulders. He shook Ty's hand with a firm grip. "I'm Captain Connor. I've represented a few others. None, however, who were caught in the act on film. I need you to tell me everything, or I can't help you."

His bones weary, his head feeling too heavy for his neck, Ty sank onto the chair across from Connor. "What exactly do they think they have on me?"

Doom suffocated him, but just in case their information was limited to that one picture of a gay kiss and a blog post, he didn't want to give them deadly ammunition. He liked the Army. He wanted to make it his career. The civilian world scared him more than a hostile Iraqi soldier with a machine gun, especially if he had to face it with a dishonourable discharge choking him.

Connor opened a file and read for awhile before speaking. Without looking up he said, "It's not good. There are several witnesses who've testified they've seen you openly participating in gay activities, who state you've had a long-term homosexual relationship

with your boyfriend, Brendan. There are several pictures of the two of you conducting such activity. Do you wish to continue to deny it?"

Ty's shoulders sagged and he sighed. "No. But I'm bi-sexual, not homosexual. I'm engaged to marry Bianca Anton, and I broke things off with Brendan awhile ago. I had no plans to see Brendan or any other man again. Ever."

Connor shook his head. "That won't matter to the Army. There's a ban on homosexual activity by its members."

Fed up, feeling like a caged animal, Ty bit out, "It's a load of bull to think sexual orientation determines how good a soldier is."

"You've broken the rules, and that's not being a good soldier in their book," Connor said.

Anger rose in Ty's chest, and he wanted to roar, to shout at the lousy rule makers. "So I'm screwed, right? Which means you can't help me. Do I have any recourse? What are my options?"

"My counsel is to accept a General Discharge without a fight. You can't win with all the evidence against you."

Fight welled up in Ty. His fists clenched. His thighs corded. He bared his teeth. But then reality set in.

Damn Brendan!

Damn his own whoring cock!

His temples ached, and he pressed his fingers to them. "Okay. They win. Let's make this as painless and quick as possible."

Connor nodded, jotted a note in his file then snapped it shut. "That's your best bet. The military won't budge."

Ty wished he'd never heard of the fucking Army, that he'd never signed up. Why in the hell had he risked his life for the ungrateful military?

Before he left he asked, "If I worked for anyone else, would sexuality matter?"

Connor seemed to look inwardly. After a long pause he said, "You could fight most and probably win. Just not here. Not yet."

\* \* \* \*

Brendan kicked himself, but he blogged and Twittered about gay rights and the unfairness of what the military was doing to Ty. He was torqued that Ty had told several of their friends but hadn't had the decency to tell him. Still, he was angrier about the situation and what the damned military was doing to the man he loved so he stood up for him. He rallied gay rights activists. They clogged Twitter's network. They filled up the blogosphere. They appeared on the local news to protest.

He was dying not being able to see Ty, and he was worried about him being locked up like a common criminal. The guilt was ripping him apart. He hadn't meant for any of this to hurt the man he loved. He didn't want to hurt Bianca, either.

How Brendon ended up at Bianca's place, he wasn't sure, but his breath stuck in his throat, and his knuckles rapping on her door sounded like machine gun fire. When she answered with an accusing glare his heart sank to his knees.

"You have a lot of nerve. What do you want?"

He was very conscious of standing in the hallway and the neighbours' cursory glances. "Can I come in?"

She didn't move except for her knuckles whitening around the doorframe. "I'd prefer it if you don't."

The raw ache in her voice almost killed him, and he wished she'd never introduced him to Ty. When she moved to close the door, he stuck his foot in the way. But she had and they had to deal with the situation. "I'd prefer if I do."

He let himself in but stayed near the door. After deeply inhaling, he splayed his hands. "I'm sorry. I didn't know the Army would read my blog. I didn't think anybody did until the past few days. I was upset Ty chose you over me, and I vented."

She pushed her hair behind her ears and laughed ruefully. "Obviously, they read it. Nor am I so sure he picked me for the right reasons. Once this mess is over, he very well might choose you."

Hardly able to hold up his head, Brendan helped himself to the nearest chair. He studied his feet, his blurry reflection in his boots, and he scrunched his nose.

"I doubt he'll even want to talk to me again."

She strode over to him and planted her feet squarely before him. "If you're so sorry, why not let it die? Why make a big stink?"

Her shadow felt icy and foreboding, and he briskly rubbed his arms to instil warmth. "There were larger issues at stake. Gay rights. Sexual preference has no bearing on whether or not someone is a good soldier. I should be allowed to enlist if I want."

She quirked her brow and looked suspiciously like Mr. Spock. Her gaze dissected him as if she were a scientist—or as if she longed to do a lobotomy on him. "So this is about you?"

Anger boiled in his veins and catapulted him to his feet. "No, dammit! I don't want to get my head shot off in a place we shouldn't be. But a lot of other gays want to join and they're not allowed—not if they're openly gay."

She closed her eyes, and a tear squeezed out. "So Ty is a casualty of war. Your war."

"Would you prefer he went back over to Iraq with a bull's eye on his chest?"

She shuddered and hugged herself. Then she bit her lips. She blinked rapidly several times before saying, "No. But that's his decision. At least, it should have been."

Brendan jumped to his feet. "Exactly!"

Bianca narrowed her eyes. "Why are you here? To push the stake deeper into my heart?"

He stood and gathered her to his heart. He smoothed her hair away from her face. Her body felt too frail, and he frowned. "I want to help, to make up for my sins. What can I do?"

The tension ebbed from her frame, and she clung to him. A choked sob escaped her lips then another. "I don't know. The lawyers tell me you can't fight the military. There's nothing we can do except be supportive of Ty. And stop talking to the press."

Then a half giggle, half hiccough tickled his ears.

"Unless you have a time machine to go back and never talk about this in the first place."

Curses spluttered off his lips. "I wish."

If he did, he'd go back to the fateful Christmas she'd asked him for the special favour that had set all this in motion and say, "No fucking way!"

Since he couldn't, he brushed a kiss over her temple and held her close. "He needs us to be there for him no matter what. Can you do that?"



She pulled back and silently regarded him for a long time. Then she licked her lower lip and murmured, "I don't know. There was a time I thought I could accept you and him, but I don't know any more. And can you really accept him and me?"

Brendan's heart lurched. He loved Ty so very much he didn't want to let him go. But could he share him? In particular, could he if he was the part-time lover and Bianca got him full-time?

\* \* \* \*

Ty suffered the humiliation of discharge. Worse, because of Brendan, the thing was a media circus, and his face was splashed across not only local TV but the whole damned internet.

His parents were in shock. His mom said she couldn't face her neighbours or her ladies guild at church.

Several of his former platoon mates had been interviewed to say they didn't want him back, that he'd ogled their naked bodies in the shower.

His mother's pastor openly prayed for his soul on national TV.

Bianca's family declined comment, but they hadn't sent any words of encouragement, either.

Nor was the gay community wholly on his side after they discovered his engagement to Bianca.

He was an outcast.

A half-breed.

The next few days crawled by in a blur of boredom. To pass the time while he was incarcerated in a boring jail cell, he worked out doing push ups, stomach crunches and jumping jacks. He read whatever he could—the Bible and trade magazines. His stomach protested at the bad grub so he ate little.

He ached to see Bianca but had been limited to a few short visits.

He became intimately familiar with the ceiling. He prayed his life wasn't ruined. More importantly, he prayed Bianca's wasn't.

"Hey you, Jack LaLanne. Your attorney's here." His guard, a young, bald guy with a tough New York accent twitched his moustache and jingled the keys in his door. "D-day's here. He wants you to put on your full military dress."

His officer's bars felt heavier than the weight of the world, and he kissed them goodbye. He watched his new whiskers wash down the drain with life as he knew it.

His blood boiled, and the pulse at the base of his neck hammered, deafening him.

\* \* \* \*

Ty sat up erect and poised as he could. He focused on the tribunal proceedings as best as he could, gluing his gaze on whomever had the floor.

When the prosecuting attorney mounted huge, blown-up glossies of himself and Brendan kissing, groping, and undeniably engaging in homosexual acts while he was dressed in his military uniform, his shoulders slumped. Knots twisted in his gut so hard he thought he would throw up. His head pounded so hard he couldn't make out their words.

Did he need to?

Those photos damned him to hell.

What had possessed him to lose control while still in uniform, in front of a crowded room? He cursed his randy dick.

He couldn't blame anyone but himself. No one had put a gun to his head. He knew the rules and the consequences even if he thought them archaic.

"He isn't military material," the prosecuting attorney said as she jabbed her finger at Ty. "He definitely isn't officer material."

That stung so he sat up straighter and glared at the bony colonel.

"I wouldn't follow him anywhere, especially not into battle, and I wouldn't trust the safety of our troops to someone who shows such poor judgement."

She spun on her glossy black heels to face the judge, a full bird colonel. "There's no doubt Captain Gibson broke the law. Furthermore, he showed total disregard for his rank and for the Army. We can't afford to keep him in our ranks, for our safety or for his."

The judge tugged at his moustache and frowned at Ty. "I agree. Captain Gibson has conducted himself inappropriately and brought disgrace to both himself and the Army. We cannot afford to overlook his bad conduct, nor do we have a choice. It's against the law."

“We protest! This is commy law! We aren’t in the Dark Ages anymore! Sexuality has no bearing on job performance.”

Ty moaned at the sound of Brendan’s voice. Of its own volition, his body twisted in his chair so he could get a look at the commotion behind him.

The two MPs held Brendan as they tried to escort him out. A third MP gripped the gun in the holster on his hip.

Brendan was dressed in a conservative black suit and tie, although eye-liner rimmed his crazed eyes, and his ebony hair spiked out in several directions. He spat at the policemen and jutted out his chin. “I thought we were living in the land of the free and the brave. Obviously, it’s the land of the bigoted and the small-minded.”

Although Ty agreed with every word Brendan shouted, he sat stoically. The Army wouldn’t cave to insults, and he couldn’t afford more bad behaviour unless he wanted to land in the brig until he was too impotent to enjoy sex with anyone and Bianca and Brendan forgot what he looked like.

As Brendan was being dragged out of the courtroom to a chant of ‘gay rights’ in the corridor beyond, Ty pursed his lips and gave a slight nod.

Several mind-numbing moments later, Ty was a civilian without a job. In a daze, he roamed the streets, wondering what to do next. He knew he should feel grateful to be free and not locked up to rot in a military jail, but he didn’t feel much of anything except panic.

Going out of business signs and deserted stores were almost as prevalent as places open for business. Gone were the Help Wanted signs from the convenience stores and gas stations that had always been there before his stint overseas.

He dropped a few quarters in a newspaper stand and thumbed to the classifieds. Sales opportunities requiring money up front but few real employment opportunities littered the columns.

As the sun set over the city as well as his hopes and dreams, he made his way home. At least, he hoped Bianca would let him in. It hadn’t escaped his notice that she hadn’t been at his trial like Brendan, and he didn’t know what to make of her absence.

\* \* \* \*

Bianca chewed her already shredded fingernails. She stared at the damned clock and wondered where Ty was. She couldn't get into TV or books so stared at the walls.

She was startled awake by the click of the door. Disoriented, she jerked up and blinked. She was still in the living room. The cat jumped off her and squeezed under the couch.

A long shadow entered the room and someone else's breathing filled the air.

"Bianca, baby." Ty's shadow seemed to sit in her lap a second before he cradled her in his arms and crushed her against his heart.

"You're home." Her heart cried with a mixture of sorrow. She pulled back to gaze at his face, and she searched his eyes.

His mouth was pinched and his cheeks had grown gaunter. Ghosts fluttered through his eyes.

If she wasn't careful, she'd drown in his misery. She pressed her lips to his and murmured, "I'm so sorry. So sorry."

His lips moulded to hers then a raw whisper tore from him. "You know? You weren't there. You didn't come."

"But I did!" Her muscles jumped and the memories of the day crowded in. "They wouldn't let anybody in."

"I saw Brendan..."

Brendan's name burned in still-open wounds. Once again, Brendan earned brownie points and she was in the minus range. She inhaled deeply. "Brendan barged in through a barricade of policemen."

She shook her head. Jerry Springer would've loved to get that episode on film. She prayed Brendan wouldn't go there. She had no desire to have her private life dragged through the mud. So far the press had mostly left her out of it.

She wrinkled her nose. Of course, they'd be more interested in the flamboyant, egocentric Brendan over her quiet, low-keyed self.

"Penny for them." Ty slid his finger under her chin and tipped her face forcing her to gaze in his eyes.

Did he really want to know? "They're not very Christian."

"Tell me!" he roared and moved closer again. "I want us to work this out, to come out on top."

She wanted that, too, but was she prepared to live in a fishbowl and have her life dissected?

Her heart lurched.

What was the alternative? Give up on love? Let it die without a fight?

"I had visions of you, me and Brendan duking it out on Jerry Springer. That he and I would be clawing out each other's eyes."

Ty's eyes widened, and his jaw dropped. "Do you two really hate each other so much? Or me?"

Bianca was tired and scared. "I don't hate him. But I'm deathly scared that you'll choose him, if not right away then later on. I don't have a cock so how can I satisfy you? Sorry that sounds so crass, but that's the truth."

What little was left of Ty's tan drained from his face, and his jaw dropped. Finally, he said in a low rumble, "I love you because you're you. I just want to be with you for the rest of my life. You complete me."

He closed the gap between them and traced her trembling lips with his finger. "Your sunny yet provocative smile."

He cupped her cheek. "You're angelic face."

He brushed her lid with his thumb. "You're soulful eyes that I'm drowning in as I speak."

He sifted her hair through his fingers. "You're gorgeous hair."

Then he laid his hand over her heart. "But most of all, your good heart and soul."

She twitched beneath the warmth of his hand suddenly feeling devilish, she grinned, curled her fingers around his and lowered it to her breast. "So you don't like these?"

Mischief darkened his eyes, and he slid his arms around her, pulled her close, and he rubbed her butt. His cock swelled against her tummy. "Oh. I love your sexy breasts and ass, too. They've been the stars of my dreams."

Her heart flipped, and she quaked with desire. She moulded herself closer and tilted her face for a kiss. She tossed him a crooked grin, slid her arms around him and rested her hands on his tight ass. "I've been dreaming about you, too. Guess I'm addicted to you."

She sniffed his shirt then swept her tongue along the side of his neck. "I'm getting pretty high on you right now."

Laughter burst from his lips, and his eyes twinkled. "Babe, I can take us way higher than this, so high we'll never come down."

She thanked God for lifting his spirits and bringing him back safe for second chances.

His cock throbbed, and she massaged it. "I crave you and this. I know how wonderful I feel when you're inside me, fucking me. I see why you like it."

She started to ask if he could really live without ever feeling such an incredible sensation again but stopped herself. Should she dictate his forever? Should she deny the man she loved something so awesome?

Her head shook of its own volition. She loved him too much. Surely they could compromise.

"What's wrong, baby?"

She blinked and refocused on him. "Nothing. Not with us. I want you to be happy. I don't want to deny you sex with men if that's what makes you happy."

Ty scowled and swore. His fingers bit into her thighs. In a raw voice, he cried, "Christ, baby. I told you I want you, only you. I want us to get married as soon as I find a job whenever that might be. Please believe me."

Joy bubbled off her lips, and she pressed her palms against his cheeks. "I believe you. I'm saying you can still have sex with a man. Occasionally. If I'm part of it."

"You don't have to do that—"

"I do. I want you to be happy. I want us to be happy."

Wariness pushed the hurt out of his eyes. "Is this a test? Give me an 'A+'. I only want you."

She rocked against him. "No test. I mean it."

"Tonight's our night, and I want you now." Before she could reply, he swung her into his arms and carried her to their room.

She remembered how she'd tossed away their engagement ring, and she frowned. As he laid her on the bed, she wrinkled her nose. "I, uh, have a confession you won't like."

He paused at the foot of the bed where he was crawling up. His head snapped up. He winced. "You met someone else while I was away?"

She rolled her eyes then sobered. She held up her naked hand and wiggled her fingers. "No. But it's not good. Uh, I threw away your ring."

Expecting anger or at least sorrow, she winced. When he chortled, she did a double take. She narrowed her eyes. "That's funny?"

Ty stood and dipped his hand in his pocket and pulled out something tiny that reflected light. She stared at it as he turned it.

Her ring!

Aghast and giddy all at once, she squealed and put her hand to her mouth. "Where'd you get that?"

"One of my friends found it and told me how you'd run off from the party..." His voice cracked and he perched on the side of the bed and captured her hand.

"Can you ever forgive me? Will you wear my ring again and never take it off?"

Butterflies swarmed in her stomach, and she was so happy she could fly. Choked up she sprang forward and fiercely hugged him. She wagged her fingers under his nose. "Please do the honours."

He slid off the bed and got down on his knees. He gazed deeply into her eyes. "Marry me, baby. Let's not wait any longer. I was a fool not to officially make you mine before I went overseas."

Tears stung her eyes. One slipped down her cheek then another. Quaking, she nodded. "I want that, too."

Reverently, he kissed her ring finger then slid on the band of gold. Then he kissed his way up her arm. He crawled onto the bed and plundered her lips.

"It works better with our clothes off." She squirmed and tugged down his pants. Then she pushed off his underwear.

He chuckled and rolled to her side. "Not if my legs are trapped in my drawers."

On fire, she slid out of her clothes while he still struggled with his. She clucked her tongue. "Tsk ts. They let you handle firearms?"

An adorable blush stole up his neck and settled in his cheeks. "I never tried to fire a weapon with my pants about my knees.

She took pity more on herself than him and helped him. "How did you survive without me?"

"It was pure hell and torture. I never want to be without you again."

It had been for her, too. Her mirth evaporated and she shivered. She wouldn't let the Army, Brendan or anything else come between them again.

"You're home now," she whispered and held out her arms.

A wicked smile curved his lips and he fit himself between her legs and drove his cock long and deep. "Now, I'm home and I ain't leaving."



## About the Author

Ashley Ladd lives in South Florida with her husband, five children, and beloved pets. She loves the water, animals (especially cats), and playing on the computer.

She's been told she has a wicked sense of humour and often incorporates humour and adventure into her books. She also adores very spicy romance, which she weaves into her stories.

Email: [chinara@aol.com](mailto:chinara@aol.com)

Ashley Ladd loves to hear from readers. You can find her contact information, website and author biography at <http://www.total-e-bound.com>.

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