

ELLORA'S CAVE *Moderne*

LYNN
LAFLEUR
TWO LOVERS
FOR

*Lavender
Lace* *Molly*

Two Lovers for Molly

Lynn LaFleur

Third in the Lavender Lace series.

A chance meeting with Julian Forrest changes author Molly Ross' mind about her bad luck with men. Julian is not only gorgeous, but intelligent and charming.

Julian loves Molly's sexy underwear. It makes his mouth water every time they make love. In less than a week, he knows he's falling in love with her. Then Lane Edison comes back into Julian's life. Despite being apart for a year, one kiss from the handsome man and Julian tumbles. He wants both Molly and Lane, but doesn't know how that can happen...until he reads a threesome scene in the book Molly is writing.

Molly loves Julian, yet feels an instant attraction when she meets Lane. Discovering the two men were once lovers is a huge turn-on. When Julian suggests a *ménage à trois*, she's more than willing to let the two men fulfill her fantasy.

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Two Lovers for Molly

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Lynn LaFleur

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Chapter One

"Why are men so stupid?" Molly Ross asked the question of her two friends, Marci Bayne and Twyla Gardiner, who sat with her at a corner table in Jennie's Java. "I'm easy to please. I don't ask for much from a guy. A little consideration, some kindness, some cuddling after sex. That isn't unreasonable. Is it?"

"No, that isn't unreasonable," Marci said. "What happened to make you think men are stupid?"

Molly looked at Marci. The beautiful forty-year-old blonde Molly had met here in Jennie's Java two months ago had become a mother figure for Molly, even though she was only fourteen years older. Molly's mother spent her time buried in a bourbon bottle, so had little time for her two daughters.

Pushing aside that pathetic image, Molly concentrated on her friend's question. "I told you two about meeting Brandon a couple of weeks ago, at the Halloween party I went to." Both her friends nodded, so Molly continued. "Really cute, really nice. We spent most of the party talking. He was funny and attentive and a great kisser."

"Sounds as if he's a winner," Twyla said.

"That's what I thought too. He came over a couple of times for dinner and a movie. We had sex Friday night." She blew out a large breath and her bangs lifted from her forehead. "Wow. Talk about fireworks."

Twyla grinned. "Fireworks are good."

"I thought so too. When he asked me to go to a club with him Saturday night, I didn't hesitate to say yes." Molly's shoulders slumped. "We ran into some friends of his and it was like being on a date with a totally different person. He turned into an inconsiderate ass. He flirted with every pretty woman close to him and completely ignored me."

A sympathetic look crossed Marci's face. "What did you do?"

"I told him I wasn't feeling well and wanted to go home. He offered to call a cab for me! Do you believe that?"

"What happened between great sex at your apartment and the club?" Twyla asked. "Such a change doesn't make any sense."

Molly looked down at the muffin crumbs in her saucer. She shouldn't let anything that jerk did hurt her. After all, she barely knew him. Still, it hurt to be brushed aside for a gal with dyed blonde hair and phony boobs.

She lifted her gaze back to her friends. "He found a woman at the club with more...substance." Molly held her cupped hands eight inches in front of her small breasts.

Twyla winced. "Ouch."

"Yeah, ouch. I asked you to give me some of your boobs, Twyla. Just one cup size. You'd still have plenty."

"Since I discovered the gorgeous bras at Lavender Lace, I don't complain about the size of my girls anymore." She grinned wickedly. "Besides, Daniel really likes them."

With a disgusted huff, Molly folded her arms across her stomach. "Great. Rub salt in the wound."

"That's not what I'm doing, Molly," Twyla said softly.

Guilt swamped Molly for sounding like a spoiled child. She treasured these two ladies' friendship and wouldn't hurt either for anything. "I know. It isn't your fault I keep getting involved with assholes." She slouched down in her chair. "Things always start out so great. I don't know what I do to drive them away." She frowned at her flat chest. "The fact that I look like a boy doesn't help."

"Stop that," Marci said firmly. "If all a man sees is your body, he isn't worth it."

Easy for you to say, Molly thought. Marci was beautiful, Twyla drop-dead gorgeous. Molly doubted if either woman had ever fretted over her looks. Neither of them had red

hair that frizzed in the least amount of humidity, or dull green eyes, or freckles scattered over her body. They both had curves that shouted WOMAN. Her body shouted STICK.

Molly rubbed her forehead. She didn't normally feel sorry for herself, but these last two weeks had really sucked.

"I'm sorry. Ignore my pity party, okay?"

"We're all allowed to feel sorry for ourselves every once in a while," Marci said. "Is there anything we can do to help?"

"Shopping," Twyla said firmly. "Last month, when I was so down before Daniel and I made up, you two took me shopping. I say it's time for us to do that again. Did you ever go to Lavender Lace?"

Molly shook her head. "I get a discount for working at Nordstrom. What little bit of bra I need, I get there."

"You were the one who turned us on to Lavender Lace," Marci said as she slung her purse's strap over her shoulder. "Your sister works there. It's way past time for you to go."

"Sexy lingerie won't help me."

"It'll make you feel better. That's what counts." Marci stood and pushed her chair under the table. "Keefe and I have meetings scheduled all day today. How about tomorrow? What's your schedule?"

"I'm off today, tomorrow and Wednesday."

"Perfect." Marci looked at Twyla. "Can you get off work a little early tomorrow?"

Twyla nodded. "No problem."

"Okay, it's settled. Lavender Lace closes at six. Let's meet there at four. That'll give us two hours to look around. Shopping first, then dinner out. Maybe a movie too."

"Works for me," Twyla said.

Molly appreciated her friends' efforts to cheer her, but looking at all that sexy lingerie at Lavender Lace would only depress her since she had no one to show it to. She opened her mouth to protest. Marci raised one finger before Molly could utter a word.

"No arguments. It's settled. We'll finalize plans here tomorrow morning." Marci glanced at her watch. "I have to go. Will you be okay?"

"Oh sure. I'm tough."

Marci squeezed Molly's shoulder. "Yes, you are."

"I'll walk out with you, Marci." Twyla gathered up her purse and empty cup. "I'll see you tomorrow, Molly."

"Okay."

After her friends left, Molly lifted the lid of her laptop. She didn't have to rush to get to work, so she might as well write a while longer. That would make her feel better.

She propped her elbow on the table, rested her chin on her fist and stared at the words on the screen. Everything she'd written this morning was complete crap. No wonder an editor didn't want to read past the first three chapters.

She'd worked so hard to create a world that an editor would love. She'd read books in her genre until her eyes burned. She'd written detailed synopses and polished her first three chapters until they were perfect. Every editor and agent who'd read her work had turned her down. Never one to give up, Molly had put that book aside and started another one. Different book, same number of rejections. Now on her third book, she wondered if this one would produce the same result as the first two.

It would if she submitted garbage like the kind that filled her screen. She highlighted the five hundred words she'd written this morning and hit the delete key.

Inspiration would help. A guy about five-ten with dark brown hair and sexy brown eyes who was an amazing lover would be perfect.

Where's my Prince Charming when I need him?

* * * * *

Julian Forrest sipped his coffee and watched the cute redhead frown at her laptop screen. Whatever she looked at obviously displeased her. He couldn't tell for sure from this distance, but he thought she'd just deleted a large amount of text. Maybe she was working on something for college. She couldn't be older than her early twenties.

He'd seen her Friday when he'd stopped in Jennie's Java for the first time. She'd been deep in conversation with the two women who'd left a few minutes ago. He'd watched her, noticing how her face lit up when she smiled.

She wasn't smiling now. In fact, she looked very close to tears.

An almost overwhelming urge to go to her and try to make her feel better washed over Julian. He didn't understand that urge, nor the strong attraction to the slim redhead. She wasn't his type at all. He wasn't a giant at five-ten, but she couldn't be much taller than five-two. Eight inches was a big difference. He preferred women closer to his own height. It made everything he enjoyed so much easier—dancing, kissing, making love.

He chuckled to himself at that last item. It had been so long since he'd made love with a woman, he'd almost forgotten how it felt to slide his hand down a woman's bare back, grip her ass, thrust inside her wet pussy.

Women were out there and available. He'd met several over the past few years who would be willing to spend time naked with him. In his early twenties, he'd have taken them up on their offer in a heartbeat. A night of sweaty sex with no worries about tomorrow would have been perfect. Now, two months from turning thirty, he wanted more. He wanted the commitment, the house, the dog, the two-point-five kids.

He'd had a couple of relationships that could have turned into marriage. But something had been missing, that special feeling deep inside that shouted "she's the one". He'd cared deeply about both women, yet couldn't say he'd loved them. He couldn't say he'd ever loved anyone.

Except maybe Lane.

Julian quickly pushed all thoughts of Lane Edison out of his mind. That relationship had been a mistake, a rebound after his breakup with Ms. Almost Right Number Two. He never should have given in to his desire to kiss Lane's lips, suck his dick, fuck his ass. But he had. And he'd loved every moment of it.

Lane's deployment to Europe put an end to their four-month-long affair. Julian had said goodbye to the naval officer a year ago and returned to looking for the special woman who would share his life.

He hadn't found anyone in Bremerton. When a job offer in Seattle came his way, he'd accepted it without hesitation. Perhaps the move to Seattle would bring him better luck at finding Ms. Right.

That thought drew his attention back to the redhead. She gathered up her laptop, purse and coat and headed for the exit. She'd been here Friday and today. He wondered if she came here every weekday.

Maybe he'd come in tomorrow morning and find out.

* * * * *

A man sat at her table the next morning.

Molly stopped in the middle of Jennie's Java and stared at the brown-haired hunk sitting at *her* table. Technically she knew he could sit anywhere he wanted to, but she always arrived a few minutes after the coffee shop opened and sat at *that* table. There were a dozen empty tables in the place. He could've picked any of them, yet he sat at *her* table.

He was messing up her routine, a routine she'd followed for months.

He looked up, directly at her. He had brown eyes. Sexy, bedroom eyes. Brown eyes always made her think of rumpled sheets, slick skin and long, deep kisses. Combined with that mane of dark hair and olive skin, he had to be one of the most attractive men she'd ever seen.

No way a hunk like that would ever notice her.

He smiled and lifted his paper cup toward her. "Good morning."

She swallowed. "Good morning."

"I didn't take your table, did I?"

"It's okay. I mean, there are a lot of tables. I'll sit at another one."

"No, please." He stood, rounded the table and pulled out the chair opposite where he was sitting...the chair where she always sat. "Join me."

Join him? That gorgeous man wants me to join him? He can't be serious.

"I guess I should introduce myself first, huh? I'm Julian Forrest. And you are...?"

"Molly. Molly Ross."

He smiled again. "Hi, Molly Ross. Join me?"

She walked the few feet to the chair and sat down. Maybe he was meeting someone and that person hadn't shown up yet. He probably just wanted someone to talk to until his friend arrived. He couldn't possibly be interested in *her*, not with the way her luck with men had been lately.

"What would you like, Molly? My treat."

"Oh no, I can't let you —"

"Please. It's the least I can do for stealing your table."

His eyes twinkled when he smiled. She'd be a fool to pass on the opportunity to talk to someone who shot her blood pressure off the scale. "Tall latte and whatever muffin they're featuring today."

He winked at her. "You got it."

A simple wink shouldn't make her heart stutter in her chest, or her tummy tighten. It did both.

All her hormones stood up and took notice when he turned and walked toward the counter. He wore a black long-sleeved sweatshirt and dark jeans. He had a runner's build—slim, but with broad shoulders and great legs. His jeans molded to his ass,

showing her it had just the right amount of fullness for her to grip while he slid his cock inside her.

Yesterday, she'd sat in this chair and imagined a man for inspiration—one about five-ten with dark brown hair and sexy brown eyes. Julian definitely fit that description.

She wondered if he was an amazing lover too.

Her pussy clenched at that thought. Brandon had been very good. He'd been one of the best lovers she'd ever had. She'd be willing to bet her next paycheck that Julian was even better.

He carried their cups to the table first, then went back for their muffins. Molly pried off the lid of her cup and took a cautious sip of the hot brew. She saw no reason to waste a paper cup every day, so usually brought her own ceramic mug. She'd hurried out of her apartment without the mug this morning since she was running late. If she'd been on time, she would've remembered her mug and gotten her table before Julian arrived.

She'd never been so thankful to be late.

"Today's muffin is lemon poppy seed," Julian said as he set her paper plate in front of her. "Hope that's okay."

"If it's a muffin, it's okay."

"I got the chocolate chip." He popped a large bite of his muffin in his mouth and chewed, watching her the whole time. "Very good."

Molly took another sip of her latte. She hadn't decided yet if she should be her usual blunt self and ask Julian why he was sitting with her, or be coy and simply enjoy his company.

She'd never been coy.

"Are you waiting for someone?" she asked, tearing her muffin in half.

"Nope."

"You just came in here for coffee?"

He took another bite of his muffin and chewed slowly, still watching her. "Do you want the truth?"

"Please."

"I saw you in here yesterday. I came back in to see if you'd be here today."

She doubted if there had been five times in her life when she was speechless. This was number six.

Julian pushed aside his plate and cup and rested his forearms on the table. "There's something about you, Molly...something that drew me to you as soon as I saw you. I'd like to get to know you better and... Well, see what happens between us."

To say she was surprised would be a vast understatement. Molly couldn't believe a man as gorgeous as Julian had been attracted to her at first sight. That didn't happen to her. She'd had lovers over the years, but she'd never had a guy go out of his way to see her.

"Did I say something wrong?" he asked.

"No, no. I'm just..." She laid her muffin pieces back on the saucer. "I'm flattered, but shocked."

"Why are you shocked?" His gaze moved over her face, stopping on her lips for several seconds before he looked back into her eyes. "You're a very attractive lady."

Molly stopped herself before she released an unladylike snort. She looked in the mirror every day. She'd told Marci the first time they'd met that the best she could do was cute. She still believed that.

Julian glanced past her. "Your friend the blonde just came in." He looked back at Molly. "Do you have a pen?"

"Yeah." She rummaged through her purse and found a pen. "Here."

Julian wrote something on one of the napkins. "I moved to Seattle from Bremerton last week. I'm going back today to pick up the rest of my clothes. I'll probably spend the night with my folks and be back sometime tomorrow." He pushed the napkin and pen

over to her. "Here's my cell. I'd like to have dinner with you. Call me when you're ready. Okay?"

Molly nodded. "Okay."

Picking up his empty plate and cup, he stood. "I enjoyed meeting you, Molly."

"Me too."

He grabbed his jacket off the back of the chair and smiled at her. "Bye."

Turning in her chair, Molly watched Julian walk to the exit. She did love the way he filled out his jeans.

"Who was that?" Marci asked.

Molly turned back around to face the lovely blonde. "Julian Forrest."

"New friend?"

She looked at the phone number scrawled on the napkin by her plate. "Maybe more, if things go the way I hope they do."

Chapter Two

Llyr waited until the two customers left Lavender Lace before he walked up behind Ashlyn. Slipping his arms around her waist, he pulled her back against his chest. "Finally alone," he whispered in her ear.

Ashlyn smiled at him over her shoulder. "We may not be alone for long."

"Long enough for me to drag ye back to the storeroom."

She turned and looped her arms around his neck. "Why should I settle for a quickie when I can have hours with you at my house?"

"Because quickies are fun. And ye know I'll make it good fer ye."

"I do know that. You always make lovemaking good for me. But Shawna will be back soon from her break. I don't think it would be a good idea for her to catch us in the storeroom. Plus other customers could walk in at any time."

"Yer determined to spoil me fun."

"I'll make it up to you later."

Her kiss promised many delights once they were alone again. Llyr slid his hands down to her bottom and held it while he brushed his hardening cock across her stomach. With a simple snap of his fingers, he could have both of them nude and be buried inside her.

There were many advantages to being a god of the sea.

The soft tinkle of the bell over the door announced more customers. Reluctantly, he released Ashlyn and took a step back. It pleased him to see the desire in her eyes. She always wanted him as much as he wanted her. Even after five centuries, their desire hadn't cooled one degree.

Unable to resist teasing her, he leaned closer and whispered in her ear. "I can see yer nipples."

"Stop it." A becoming blush filled her cheeks as she adjusted her sweater. "I'd better see to my customers."

"Aye." He looked past Ashlyn to gaze at the three women who had entered the store. "I recognize the blonde and the black-haired woman."

"That's Marci and Twyla. They've become two of my best customers."

"I donna recognize the redhead."

"Neither do I." Ashlyn tilted her head and studied the young woman. "She's been hurt recently. She needs something new to cheer her up."

"Work yer magic, darlin'. I know ye can help her."

She touched his cheek and gave him a tender smile. "I'll do my best."

Ashlyn approached the three women in the Green section. The closer she got to the redhead, the more she could feel her pain. A man had hurt her, yet she also sensed a touch of excitement beneath the pain. Perhaps she'd met someone new, but wasn't sure how the relationship would progress.

She needed something to make her feel desirable and feminine. Ashlyn knew exactly what to recommend.

She stepped up behind the women in time to hear Marci say, "You should've seen him, Twyla. Very hot."

The redhead's cheeks turned pink. "Hey, knock off the teasing."

"No way," Marci said, grinning. "It's payback for when you teased me about Keefe."

"Do you think he'll be back tomorrow morning?" Twyla asked.

"I bet he will. He looked at Molly as if he wanted to start nibbling on her toes and work his way up her body."

"Hello, ladies," Ashlyn said.

Marci turned toward Ashlyn, a pale sage thong in her hand. "Hi, Ashlyn. Twyla and I brought you a new customer. This is Molly."

Ashlyn faced the redhead. Here, close to her, the excitement was stronger than the pain. "Hi, Molly. Is there something in particular you want?"

She shrugged. "Not really. I've heard wonderful things about your store. Ashlyn and Twyla decided it was time for me to see it."

"And her sister works here," Twyla said.

"Shawna is your sister?" Ashlyn asked.

Molly nodded.

"She's a great worker. I'm very lucky to have her. She's on a break now, but should be back soon."

"Molly needs something hot and sexy." Marci grinned. "There is a major stud lusting after her."

Molly's blush deepened. "Will you knock it off?"

Marci winked at Ashlyn. "Twyla and I have tried to tell Molly how attractive she is, but she won't believe us."

"Hey, I have perfect vision. I know I'm not beautiful like you and Twyla."

Ashlyn didn't want to ever hear a woman put down her looks. "A woman doesn't have to be beautiful to be attractive, Molly. The most attractive feature a woman can have is confidence in herself. I'll bet you have a lot of that."

"Not so much lately," she muttered.

Molly's answer came out soft and low, but Ashlyn heard her perfectly. "There's a new man in your life interested in you, right?"

"Well, kind of. I mean, I met him this morning and he seemed...interested."

Marci released a sound that was part laugh, part snort. "He was drooling."

"Man, I wish I hadn't been late," Twyla said. "I would've loved to see that."

Ashlyn chuckled. The three women were obviously good friends to tease so much. "Do you have a date with him, Molly?"

"No. Not yet. He gave me his phone number and asked me to call him."

"Then you need to be ready." She openly studied Molly's body. "No thongs for you. You prefer hipsters or boyshorts."

"How do you know that?" Molly asked, her eyes wide.

"Maybe a bra with a bit of padding," Ashlyn continued, ignoring Molly's question. "Not too much. I have some similar to the one you're wearing now."

Molly's mouth dropped open. "How do you know that too?"

Ashlyn caught Marci and Twyla smiling at each other before Marci looked back at Molly. "Don't ask Ashlyn how she knows. She just does."

"Now for color." Ashlyn gazed at Molly's face and hair. "You have incredible red hair. Poppy would look wonderful on you. Or rust. Or olive, to match your eyes."

"Olive?" Molly asked, her nose scrunched in distaste.

Ashlyn laughed. "Don't knock it until you try it."

"You actually have lingerie in all those colors?"

"Of course. Shall I pick out some pieces and take them to a dressing room for you?"

"Go ahead, Molly," Twyla said. "Marci and I are going to look around a while."

Ashlyn watched Molly bite her lower lip. She could tell the young redhead wasn't sure about buying something so out of character for her. "Let me bring you a few pieces. You're under no obligation to buy anything. But trying on sexy lingerie always makes a woman feel good."

"Amen to that," Marci said.

Molly hesitated for several moments before she said a soft, "Okay."

Molly stripped down to her bra, panties and socks in the dressing room. She didn't know why she was doing this. She wasn't going to buy anything today. She had no reason to buy anything. She doubted if she'd ever see Julian again.

She stood before the three-paned mirror. The socks looked ridiculous, but her feet were always cold. She let her gaze slowly travel up her body. She'd always been slim, no matter what she ate. Shawna hated that. She dieted and exercised all the time to keep the shape she wanted. At least Shawna had boobs. Her sister felt no embarrassment at all to walk around the apartment naked. Molly had seen Shawna's body many times and longed for the full, round breasts and curvy hips her sister possessed.

Longing wouldn't accomplish anything. Molly had to make the most of what Mother Nature had given her, or *hadn't* given her. The lightly padded bra helped. She didn't know what to do for her nonexistent hips and butt.

"Molly?" Ashlyn said through the louvered door. "May I come in?"

"Sure."

Ashlyn entered the dressing room with lingerie overflowing her arms. Molly saw hues from pale to dark. "Wow. You *do* have every color."

"Almost." She laid her load on the built-in bench and began sorting it into piles. "I brought bras, hipsters, boyshorts and camisoles in earth tone colors. Those will go best with your complexion and hair." Ashlyn straightened and smiled. "If you think of anything else you'd like to try on or need any help, press that purple button by the mirror and I'll come back."

"Thanks."

Once Ashlyn left, Molly looked through the four piles of lingerie. She hadn't told Ashlyn any of her sizes, yet everything was exactly the right size. The woman was either psychic or very good at her job.

Molly had never worn a camisole, or at least didn't remember wearing one. She lifted an olive green one, almost the exact color of her eyes. It had small spaghetti straps and ivory lace along the bodice and hem. She held it up to her chest and looked in the

mirror. Her eyes seemed to pick up the color, turning deeper and more vibrant. Molly had always shied away from olive, thinking it a dull color. There was nothing dull about the way it made her eyes shine.

She hadn't expected to buy anything. It would be silly to spend money at Lavender Lace when she had an employee's discount at Nordstrom.

Nordstrom didn't carry an olive camisole that made the color of her eyes pop.

"Okay, this one goes in the I'll-think-about-buying stack."

The door opened and Shawna breezed in, a huge smile on her face. "Hey, sis! About time you showed up here."

Shawna never knocked at home, so Molly wasn't surprised at her unannounced entrance into the dressing room. "Marci and Twyla dragged me here."

"I spoke to them in the store. They're such nice ladies."

"You know them?"

"Sure. I've waited on them a few times." She glanced at the camisole Molly still held in front of her. "Oooh, I like that! Great color for you. Did Ashlyn pick it out?"

Molly nodded and gestured toward the four piles of lingerie. "She brought all that in for me to try on."

Shawna rifled through the piles. "All colors that will be wonderful on you. Doesn't she carry the most *gorgeous* stuff? I *love* working here." She bobbled her eyebrows. "And it's *really* nice to look at Llyr all day."

"Who – or what – is a Llyr?"

"Ashlyn's lover. Didn't you see him in the store?"

Molly shook her head.

"You'll see him when you check out. He usually runs the register." Shawna fanned her face with both hands. "H-O-T. Long black hair, blue eyes, incredible body. Ashlyn is one lucky lady to have him in her bed." Shawna pushed the piles closer together and sat at the end of the bench. "Speaking of beds, any word from Brandon?"

"No, and I don't expect to hear from him. He's history."

Sympathy filled her sister's eyes. "I'm sorry, Molly. I know you really liked him."

Molly selected a lacy bra the color of oatmeal from the pile and a matching pair of hipsters. "I only knew him a couple of weeks. It's no big deal."

"It *is* a big deal. He shouldn't have treated you that way."

"It's done. Let's not talk about him any more." After slipping on the hipsters, Molly fastened the bra and adjusted it until it was comfortable, then faced Shawna. "What do you think?"

Shawn grinned. "I think you look hot."

"You're my sister. You're supposed to give me compliments."

"I'm serious. You always wear boring white underwear. That color looks great on you." She dug through the pile until she located a bra and boyshorts in a deep rust. "Try these on."

"You realize it's crazy for me to try on all this stuff. I can't afford to buy everything I like."

Shawna tapped one finger against her lips. "I get a thirty percent discount. I'll buy whatever you want and you can pay me back."

"That wouldn't be fair."

"Ashlyn will still make a profit."

"No, Shawna. I won't do that. If I want something, I'll buy it myself." She looked in the mirror after donning the new lingerie set. Her skin almost glowed next to the rust color. "Wow. This set is gorgeous."

"You should wear that beneath a red sweater and dark brown pants. You'd be striking. But take off the white socks first," Shawna said with amusement in her voice.

"Ha ha."

"Molly?" Marci called out.

Molly cracked the dressing room door enough to stick her head out. "Here."

Smiling, Marci walked toward her. "How are you doing?"

Shawna had raved about the bra and boyshorts set, but she was always complimentary to Molly. A second opinion would be helpful for Molly to decide whether spending money on fancy lingerie would be worth it. She opened the door wider. "What do you think?"

Marci stepped into the dressing room doorway while Molly turned in a slow circle. "I think..." Marci's smile widened. "You look amazing."

"Really?"

"That is a great color for you. If I tried to wear rust, I'd look dead."

"Me too," Twyla said. She rested her head on Marci's shoulder and peeked inside the room. "Look at you! The major stud doesn't stand a chance."

Molly would swear she blushed from her head to her toes. She wasn't used to so much flattery at one time.

"I'd better get back to work," Shawna said as she stood. "Go crazy and get lots of pretty stuff, sis. That's what credit cards are for."

Marci stepped aside so Shawna could exit. "Take your time, Molly. Twyla and I are still trying to decide if we should buy everything we want now, or drop serious hints to our guys for Christmas presents."

Alone again, Molly slipped out of the rust set and tried on a lacy bra and hipsters in teal green. The bra barely covered her nipples, yet pushed her breasts in and up to make them appear fuller. She loved the color against her skin as much as she had the other sets she'd tried on.

The longer she looked at herself in the striking color, the more she liked it. She always dressed nicely for her job at Nordstrom, but usually stuck to less vivid colors in hopes of disguising her red hair. Maybe it was time to be more daring.

Molly fingered a long curl that lay on her shoulder. Her hair was so curly and frizzy, she usually pulled it back with barrettes and let it do whatever it wanted to.

Maybe it was time to change that too. Shawna usually trimmed the ends for her when Molly thought it was time. It'd been a long time since she'd had a professional haircut.

She wondered what Julian would think when he saw her with a different haircut and dressed in clothes of more striking colors.

Thinking of the handsome hunk slowly taking off her clothes to find her sexy underwear sent a sizzle down her spine and to her clit. The fiasco with Brandon had trampled on her self-confidence and left her wondering if another man would ever be attracted to her. She knew better, thanks to Julian.

She had tomorrow off. As soon as she left Jennie's Java in the morning, she would hit the malls for a long overdue shopping trip.

"Molly, you still okay?" Ashlyn asked through the door.

Molly smiled at her reflection. "I'm great."

Chapter Three

Julian glanced at his watch again. 7:25. Molly was late. She'd been late Tuesday morning, but only by a few minutes. He hadn't been here at Jennie's Java yesterday since he'd spent the night with his parents in Bremerton, but he'd arrived right when the doors opened at seven this morning, hoping to see her before her two friends arrived.

None of the three women was here. Julian sipped his coffee and stared at the table next to his where they should be sitting. Maybe with Thanksgiving only a week away, the ladies had taken some time off from work for early Christmas shopping.

Or maybe Molly had decided she didn't want to see him again. She hadn't called him. He kept checking his cell phone while he was visiting his parents to make sure it still worked. No calls, other than one from his sister reminding him to drop by her house before he left town.

He thought Molly would be here today. He would've sworn he saw the same awareness in her eyes that he felt the first time he saw her.

The door opened. Julian quickly glanced that direction to see an attractive redhead in a brown trench coat enter the coffee shop. A second, longer look and his stomach jumped. It was Molly, appearing a lot different than she had the other times he'd seen her.

She met his gaze and gave him a small smile. Julian stood as she walked toward him. Her hair was still curly, but barely brushed her shoulders now instead of hanging halfway to her breasts. It looked soft and shiny. Julian imagined running his fingers into the mane while he kissed her again and again and again.

"Hi," she said once she reached his table.

"Good morning."

"I'm sorry I'm late. My sister and I stayed up watching a movie last night, so it was hard for me to get up this morning."

"No problem." Julian gestured to her usual table. "Would you rather sit there?"

Molly nodded. "I'm a creature of habit."

So was he. Julian suspected he and Molly had a lot more in common than being creatures of habit. "Are your friends coming?"

"They'll be here later. Marci usually gets here about seven forty-five and Twyla about eight."

He smiled. That meant he'd have some time alone with her. "Tall latte and muffin of the day, right?"

"Right." She reached into the tan and brown tote she carried and withdrew a large white mug. "I drink my coffee in this. It saves wasting a paper cup every day."

"Very smart. Maybe I should buy one of these, if I keep coming in here every morning."

"Do you plan to do that?"

"Yes, as long as you're here."

Her smile lit up her eyes. Julian pulled out the chair so she could sit. He couldn't resist fingering a silky curl by her ear after he'd pushed her chair up to the table. "Be right back."

"Wait. Let me give you some money —"

"I got it. You can buy next time."

She smiled again. "Okay."

Julian glanced at Molly over his shoulder once he'd placed their order. She removed her coat and let it fall to the chair behind her. She wore a red sweater almost the same color as her hair. He liked the way the sweater flowed over her small breasts. He'd been with large-breasted women, but would rather hold all of a woman's breast at once while he sucked on her nipple.

The barista set Molly's mug on the counter, drawing Julian from his fantasy. That was good, since he didn't want a full-fledged hard-on in Jennie's Java.

She smiled her thanks when he set her coffee on the table. He returned a moment later with their muffins. "Apple walnut today."

"Oh good. I like those."

Julian pulled the paper wrapping off one of the two he'd bought for himself. "What happens if their muffin of the day is one you don't like?"

"I haven't had one yet I don't like, just some I like better than others." She slathered butter on the hot treat, took a bite and rolled her eyes in pleasure. "Dee-lish."

Julian chuckled at her obvious enjoyment. "You like sweets."

"I like food. It's a necessity of life, but also an indulgence. I indulge a lot."

He let his gaze slowly move over her torso as he chewed his bite of muffin. "You must work out to keep your figure."

"Actually, I don't. I walk a lot, but that's it. I've always been slim. I figure when I turn forty, it'll all catch up to me and I'll gain two hundred pounds overnight."

Julian laughed. "You have a while before that happens. How old are you?"

"Twenty-six. You?"

"Twenty-nine."

"Are you really twenty-nine, or actually thirty and don't want to admit it?"

He liked the mischief in her eyes. She seemed more relaxed today, more at ease talking to him. "I'll be thirty in January. And I always thought it was women who lied about their age, not men."

"I think women lie more about their weight than their age."

"So what do you weigh?"

"That's none of your business."

He laughed again, enjoying their banter. He watched her take a long sip of her latte. "Why didn't you call me?"

Her gaze flew back to his. Slowly she set her mug back on the table. All evidence of humor disappeared from her face. "I wanted to see you again first, to make sure..."

He waited, but she didn't complete her sentence. "To make sure of what?"

She hesitated for several moments. "To make sure you'd really come back here."

"Did you think I wouldn't?"

"Julian, you're a hunk. I don't usually attract men as handsome as you."

"I don't believe that." He looked at her hair, her face, her breasts, then back into her eyes. "I thought you were pretty the first time I saw you and you're even more so today. Your hair is different, and your makeup. You look...hot."

Her smile returned, this time with a touch of embarrassment. "A gal can't ask for a better compliment than that."

Pushing aside his cup, he reached across the table and laid his hand over hers. "Have dinner with me tomorrow night."

"I'd like that," she said softly.

He rubbed his thumb across the back of her hand, savoring her soft skin. A scattering of freckles on her hand matched the ones on her nose and cheeks. He wondered if she had freckles all over her body. "We can go out, or you can come to my place. I'm a great cook."

It delighted him to see the humor return to her eyes. "Frozen dinners your specialty?"

He chuckled. "Actually, my mom is Italian and she taught me how to cook. I can whip up dishes that are so good they'll make you cry." He slid his thumb over her hand again. "Would it make you uncomfortable to come to my apartment?"

She shook her head. "Not at all."

"Do you have any paper and a pen?"

Molly dug in her tote again and produced the items he requested. "I'm still unpacking stuff," he said as he wrote his address on the paper. "I don't start my new

job until Monday, so hopefully I can get my place organized before you come over tomorrow."

"I don't mind if there are boxes stacked around."

"I mind." He handed the paper and pen back to her. "Do you still have my cell number?"

She nodded.

"How about six thirty? We can have a glass of wine, then eat about seven."

"That'll be perfect. I get off work at five."

Julian glanced at his watch. "Your friends should be here shortly, so I'll go. Will you be here tomorrow morning?"

"Yes."

"I'll see you then."

She smiled. "Okay."

He picked up his trash and headed for the door, glancing over his shoulder at her twice before he reached the exit. He liked how quickly he and Molly had clicked. That had never happened to him with a woman. Usually it took time to find out if he wanted to get to know a woman better. A few minutes with Molly and he knew for sure that he wanted more time with her.

A lot more time.

* * * * *

Molly's heart was still thumping in her chest when she saw Marci come in the coffee shop a few minutes later. She motioned her friend over to the table.

"Good morning," Marci said, sliding into the chair Julian had vacated. Before Molly had the chance to return the greeting, Marci's eyes grew large. "What did you do to your hair?"

Molly wrapped a curl around her finger. Julian had liked her new look, but Molly wondered if she'd done too much too soon. She knew Marci would be honest with her. "Do you like it?"

"It's gorgeous! Absolutely perfect for you." She leaned forward in her chair and her eyes narrowed. "Your makeup is different too."

"I had one of the gals at Nordstrom do it for me yesterday. I hope I duplicated it right."

"It looks perfect." Sitting back in her chair, Marci gave her a mischievous smile. "Did you do all that for the major stud?"

"I did. And he liked it."

"He was here this morning?"

Molly nodded. "He left about two minutes before you got here."

"I'm sorry I missed him."

"You'll have to come in earlier."

"And give up a naked Keefe any sooner than I have to? No way."

Molly understood that. She wouldn't want to leave a man's arms—or his bed—before she had to either. "He asked me to dinner tomorrow night at his apartment. His mother is Italian and he said he's a great cook."

"A man who is a great cook is a gift from God."

Molly knew that Keefe was an incredible cook, since she'd eaten at their house many times. Twyla hadn't been as lucky with Daniel. What he lacked in cooking skills, Twyla said he more than made up for in other domestic skills...and in the bedroom.

Molly looked toward the door to see the objects of her thoughts come in. Twyla headed for the table while Daniel walked up to the counter.

"I see you brought Mr. Wonderful this morning," Marci said with a grin as Twyla sat down, referring to Twyla's pet name for Daniel.

"I did. Unfortunately, not for pleasure. My car wouldn't start. Dead battery. I told him I could walk to work from here while he buys a new battery."

"And as long as he's here, he might as well buy your coffee too."

"Of course."

Molly turned her head and watched Daniel at the counter. Twyla had met him four weeks ago at a bed-and-breakfast in the foothills east of Seattle. They had fallen in love almost at first sight. The same thing happened with Marci and Keefe. He'd gone to work at Marshall Media as her newest vice president and they'd quickly fallen in love. Now they were co-owners of Marshall Media and as happy as two people could be.

Both her friends had found their soul mates. Maybe she had too.

Her tummy fluttered when she thought of Julian...those sexy brown eyes, the beautiful dark brown hair, his perfect body. She hadn't seen his body yet, but she had no doubt it was perfect.

"I love your hair," Twyla said to Molly. "You look very pretty today. Any special reason?"

"He was here this morning," Marci said, a grin tugging at her lips.

"Oh. That explains the different makeup and new clothes. That's a new sweater, right?"

"Yes. I went shopping yesterday. Blew my budget for the rest of the year."

"It'll be worth it." Marci leaned closer to Twyla. "She's having dinner at *his* apartment tomorrow."

"Good idea. Then you're in control of how long the evening lasts. If it doesn't go the way you want it to, you're out of there."

"And if it *does* work out," Marci said, her grin widening, "then you can find out what kind of breakfast cook he is."

"Who's cooking breakfast?" Daniel asked. He set Twyla's coffee in front of her. "Not Twyla. I can't get her out of bed early enough for breakfast."

"I've never heard you complain about keeping you in bed."

He sat in the chair beside her and leaned close, a devilish smile curving his mouth.
"Baby, you can keep me in bed any time."

Daniel kissed Twyla. Molly sighed. *Soon*, she told herself. *Tomorrow night I'll taste Julian's kiss. And maybe more than that.*

* * * * *

Julian was going to kill his sister. That would solve all his problems. Never mind that he adored Jill and she was always the first one to help him with whatever he needed. When she got on the telephone, it was next to impossible to get her to hang up. The fourth goodbye had finally released him and his throbbing ear, but only after he promised he'd call her tomorrow to tell her all about his date.

He glanced at the clock on the stove and winced. 6:25. Molly would be here any minute and he hadn't finished the main course. He'd planned to have everything ready when she got here so they could have a leisurely glass of wine and talk before they ate.

He'd missed seeing her this morning at Jennie's Java. His cell phone had rung as he was about to enter the coffee shop. His heartbeat had sped up at the sound of Molly's voice. One of her coworkers had called in sick and her supervisor asked Molly to go in early. He'd understood and admired her for working extra hours, yet didn't like that he wouldn't see her until dinner.

Shaking his head at his impatience, Julian began to lay the battered chicken breasts in the hot olive oil. He'd added the last one to the skillet when the doorbell rang.

"Shit," he muttered. *So much for having everything ready before Molly arrives.* He grabbed a dishcloth, wiped off his hands and hurried to the door.

He forgot about the time, dinner, *breathing*, the moment he saw Molly. He thought her pretty in red yesterday morning. She looked even better in gold. Her long-sleeved sweater flowed over her breasts and stopped at the top of her thighs. It was the same

color as her leggings. The formfitting pants showed him exactly how her walking shaped her slim legs.

"Hi," he said.

"Hi." She held up a tall paper bag. "I wasn't sure which wine to buy since I don't know what you're serving, but figured we couldn't go wrong with Chardonnay."

Julian smiled at her thoughtfulness. He opened the door wider and stepped aside. "Come in."

He took the bag from her after closing the door. "I got behind schedule, so I'm still cooking."

"Can I help?"

"You can keep me company in the kitchen."

She laid her tote and coat on the recliner. "Lead the way."

Julian stepped back into the kitchen just in time to turn the chicken breasts to keep them from burning. He gestured toward the two tall chairs at the island in the middle of the room. "Make yourself comfortable. I'll pour the wine as soon as these are done."

Molly slipped onto one of the chairs. "What are you making?"

"Chicken with lemon sage sauce. One of my mom's specialties."

"It sounds delicious."

"It's pretty easy to make, but I always get compliments on it."

"Is there anything I can do?"

He looked at her over his shoulder. "Just sit there and let me look at you."

She leaned forward and rested her folded arms in front of her. "You're a flatterer."

"Nope. Just telling the truth."

Julian placed the chicken in a glass dish and put it in the oven. "Okay, those have to bake about six minutes. Ready for a glass of wine?"

"Please."

He splashed the Chardonnay into two crystal wineglasses Jill had given him for special occasions. He couldn't think of an occasion more special than being with Molly. After handing one to her, he held up his glass. "What shall we drink to?"

Her nose scrunched up as she thought for a moment. "How about to new beginnings?"

Julian clinked his glass against hers. "To new beginnings."

Chapter Four

The wine hit Molly's empty stomach and gave her a gentle buzz. She'd been so busy at the store with customers, she hadn't taken a lunch break. She doubted if she would have been able to eat anyway. She didn't think she'd ever been so nervous about a date. It meant a lot to her for the evening to be perfect.

She took another sip as Julian poured the lemon sage sauce over the chicken breasts. "I'm surprised you didn't make something with a red sauce since you're half Italian."

"I figured you'd expect a typical Italian dish, so I decided to make something a little different. You like lemon, don't you?"

"Oh yes. Very much."

"Good." He added a sprig of fresh parsley to each plate. "Ready to eat?"

"Definitely. It smells incredible."

"Will you grab the bowl of salad from the refrigerator?"

"Sure."

She followed him to the table next to a large plate glass window that faced west. He lived on the fifth floor of the six-story apartment house close to Puget Sound. It was too dark to see the scenery now, but the city lights below looked like diamonds sprinkled across black velvet. She would bet he could see for miles. Molly couldn't help feeling jealous. The view from her apartment dining room consisted of an alleyway and trash bins.

He placed their plates on the table. "I'll be right back with our wine and bread."

A small autumn floral arrangement sat in the middle of the table with a white taper candle in a wooden holder at each end. He'd gone above and beyond to make

everything look nice for her. That included the living room. She'd only had time for a quick peek, but she hadn't seen any packing boxes stacked around. She wondered if Julian was always this neat, or if he'd cleaned especially for her.

She sat in the chair closest to her as he returned with a napkin-covered basket and their wine. "I hope you're hungry," he said, sitting down across from her.

"Famished. I didn't have lunch."

"Why not?"

"Too busy with customers."

He scooped a generous amount of salad from the bowl and placed it on the saucer by her plate. "Then it's a good thing I made a lot."

He smiled again and she smiled back at him. He seemed so considerate, so nice...almost too much so. She wondered why a woman hadn't already snatched up a man as handsome and charming as Julian. Molly had never met a man so perfect.

There had to be something wrong with him.

She cut into the tender chicken and took a bite. The combination of flavors danced across her tongue. She moaned with pleasure. "Oh wow. This is wonderful."

"I'm glad you like it."

"Is everything you cook this good?"

"Of course," he said, his eyes shining with humor.

"And you're still single? How can that be? Or is there an ex-wife around somewhere who didn't appreciate good food?"

"No ex-wife. I've never been married."

"Why not?"

Julian shrugged. "Never clicked with anyone well enough to want to pursue a relationship." He took a piece of warm bread from the basket and tore it in half. "What about you? No ex hanging around?"

Molly shook her head. "Just former boyfriends. Actually I can't even call them boyfriends. They were more like...temporary pastimes."

"I've had some of those too. That's part of the reason I moved to Seattle from Bremerton, plus I found a much better job."

"What do you do?"

"Computer security. I had a good job in Bremerton, but had gone as far as I could in the company. It was family owned and promotions seemed to go to family members instead of the most deserving. So I started looking around." He splashed more wine into each of their glasses. "I stopped looking when I applied for a job with Ellison-Miller Insurance. I start there on Monday."

Molly laid her fork on her plate and sat back in her chair. "You aren't serious."

"Why not?"

"That's where Twyla's boyfriend works. Daniel is VP of Finance at Ellison-Miller."

"She's one of your coffee buddies?"

Molly nodded. "Twyla is the one with black hair."

Julian chuckled. "Small world, huh?"

"Very."

She stared into his eyes for a moment before returning her attention to her food. She ate silently while thinking about how she and Julian had met. It seemed as if they were destined to meet...if not in Jennie's Java, then later at a Christmas party or some kind of get-together at Daniel's workplace.

Her heart beat a little faster at that thought.

Don't rush things, Molly. You're still getting to know each other.

"Where do you work?" Julian asked.

"At Nordstrom."

"Full-time?"

"Thirty to forty hours a week. There have been more forty-hour weeks lately. That's been nice for my paycheck."

"Do you like your job?"

"It's not my life's dream, but it's okay."

"What's your life's dream?"

Molly hesitated. She'd had guys smirk when she told them what she wanted to do with her life. "To be a writer."

Julian smiled. "Hey, that's great. Have you finished a book?"

She breathed easier at his obvious enthusiasm for her dream. "Two. I'm working on a third. No nibbles yet from an agent or editor."

"That doesn't mean you won't get one soon. Don't give up."

"I won't. I'm too stubborn to give up."

"Don't say stubborn. Say..." He looked up, as if he could find the answer floating above his head. "Determined."

The playfulness in his eyes made her smile. "I'm definitely determined." She pierced the last bite of chicken on her plate and popped it in her mouth. "Julian, this was incredible. The salad, the chicken, the bread. Everything was wonderful."

"Thank you. Did you save room for dessert? I made a chocolate ricotta pie."

Molly groaned. Her full stomach battled with her taste buds over the word chocolate. "You've got to be kidding. There's no way I can eat something else now."

"So we'll have coffee now and dessert in a bit." He stood and picked up their plates. "I'll set these in the sink and start the coffee."

Molly watched him walk into the kitchen. He wore what looked like brand-new jeans and a black long-sleeved pullover. The three buttons at the neckline were unfastened, giving her a glimpse of dark chest hair. She'd stared at that hair over and over during dinner and imagined sliding her fingers through it, following it down his body until she could unfasten his jeans...

The ring of her cell phone drew her from her fantasies. Julian looked at her while placing the plates in the sink. "Go ahead and answer if you want to."

An unanswered phone drove Molly crazy, so she accepted Julian's suggestion. She found her phone in the bottom of her tote. One look at the display and she tensed. Lips pressed together so they wouldn't tremble, she dropped the phone back in her purse.

"Someone you don't like?" Julian asked.

"Someone I don't want to talk to." Needing something to do to get her mind off the phone call, she stepped up to the sink, pushed up the sleeves of her sweater and rinsed their plates.

"Hey, you don't have to do that." Julian pressed the button on the coffeemaker to start it brewing. "I have a dishwasher."

"It won't take but a few minutes to rinse these and put them in the dishwasher. Then you don't have to worry about them."

"I'll take care of this in the morning."

"Nuh-uh. I can't let dirty dishes sit in the sink until morning. One of my quirks."

He leaned back against the cabinet next to her. "Do you always get your way?"

Molly grinned. "Pretty much."

He answered her grin with one of his. "We haven't had dessert yet. That'll be more dirty dishes."

"Not a problem." She nudged his side with her elbow. "You can finish clearing off the table."

"Geez, you're bossy." He pushed away from the cabinet and walked back into the dining room. "There are already dirty dishes in the dishwasher. These will probably make a load."

"See? We can run it now and you won't have to mess with any dishes in the morning."

He set their wineglasses on the counter. "I'd rather spend time with you. Dishes can always wait."

His sweet words sent warmth rushing through her. "I'm not going anywhere. We still have lots of time."

He ran one fingertip down her cheek. "No hurry to rush home?"

"No," she said, her voice turning husky.

Heat flared in his eyes. He touched her cheek again, then went back to the dining room for the rest of the dishes.

Molly's knees turned weak. She'd thought all day about how the evening would end, if she'd spend the night with Julian. The look in his eyes proved she wouldn't be going home until morning.

Five minutes later, Molly sat on the couch next to Julian, mugs of hot coffee in both their hands. She sat with one bent knee on the cushion with her body turned so she could see him. She sipped her coffee slowly while he told her stories about his sister and growing up in Bremerton. She was content to be quiet and listen to him talk, which was unusual for her. No one could say she didn't take up more than her share of the conversation.

Julian must have realized how much he was talking because he suddenly stopped the story about how he'd tormented his sister before her first date. "Hey, I'm sorry. I'm running off my mouth without letting you say anything."

"I don't mind. I like hearing about your sister. You must love her a lot."

"She can be a pain in the ass, but she's also very special." He laid his hand on her knee. Molly could feel the warmth of his palm through her leggings. It traveled up her leg and settled between her thighs. "Do you have brothers or sisters?"

"One sister, Shawna. She's a year younger than I am."

"Are you close?"

"Very. We live together and get along great. The only time we argue is when she turns up her music too loud."

Julian chuckled. "What kind of music does she listen to?"

"Hard rock and metal." Molly shivered. "I can stand only so much before I feel as if my brains are leaking out of my ears."

"I guess that means you don't want to listen to my Metallica CDs."

She covered her eyes and groaned. "Oh no, not you too."

"Guilty. But I like other music too. Does that count?"

She peeked at him through her fingers. "Just don't play anything too hard while I'm here, okay?"

"Deal." He drained his mug and set it on the end table. "Do your parents live in Seattle?"

Molly looked down into her mug. She never talked about her parents, not to anyone. It hurt too much, especially when she talked about her mother. "I need a refill. How about you?"

She didn't give him the chance to answer her question before she rose and went back into the kitchen. She didn't want more coffee, but the few moments away from Julian would hopefully make him forget he'd asked about her parents.

"What's with the change of subject?" he asked from right behind her.

She replaced the carafe on the warming plate and faced Julian. "Your apartment is nice. I really like the open concept design. Your living room flows into the dining room and that flows into the kitchen. It's nice and...airy."

She stopped rattling when Julian touched her wrist. "Molly, if you don't want to talk about your parents, that's cool. Just tell me. I have great parents. Sometimes I forget other people don't."

The understanding in his eyes made it easier for her to talk. It would be nice to share something with Julian she'd never shared with another guy. She started to tell him about her parents when her cell phone rang again. Molly sighed.

"Believe it or not, days will pass without my phone ringing."

Julian chuckled. "Go ahead and answer it. I'll get our dessert."

"I'll turn it off after this call, I promise."

Molly set her mug on the end table by the recliner and dug her phone out of her purse again. A glance at the display revealed Shawna's cell number. Molly flipped open her phone. "Hey, sis."

"Why didn't you talk to Mom?"

Molly's gaze quickly shot to Julian. He stood at the kitchen island, watching her. "Just a sec," she said to Shawna. "It's my sister," she told Julian. "I'll just, uh, I'll be right back."

She stepped through the first open door she found, which happened to be the bathroom. "How do you know I didn't talk to Mom?"

"She told me. She said she called your cell and you didn't answer it."

"That's because I didn't want to talk to her. I've made that clear to her. I don't know why she keeps calling me."

"She's our *mother*."

"She's a drunk!"

"She's an alcoholic. That's a sickness, Molly."

Molly would never understand why Shawna always defended their mother. "She's an alcoholic who refuses to get help because there's nothing wrong with her." Molly slurred the last few words the way her mother said them when she'd been drinking. No matter how many times she and Shawna begged their mother to get help with her drinking problem, she always insisted she didn't have any problem.

Shawna remained silent for several seconds. "She asked us to come up for Thanksgiving."

"No," Molly said without hesitation. "You go if you want to, but *I'm* not."

"Please, Molly. Maybe it'll be different this time. Maybe we can convince her to get help."

Molly laughed without the least bit of humor. Her sister was only one year younger, yet sometimes she seemed to be much younger and so naïve. "You keep right on dreaming, Shawna."

"Molly —"

"I have to go. Julian is waiting for me."

She shut her phone, ending the conversation. Molly took several deep breaths to loosen the knot in her stomach and lump in her throat. Shawna could keep on believing their mother would change. Molly had given up on that a long time ago.

She waited a few more moments to be sure she wouldn't cry before opening the door. She found Julian still in the kitchen. He'd sliced two pieces of pie and set them before the chairs at the island. Concern filled his eyes when he looked at her, but it disappeared when he smiled.

"I thought we'd have our dessert in here. That okay with you?"

"Sure." She slid onto the chair where she'd sat earlier. She wasn't sure she'd be able to eat very much with her stomach churning. Luckily Julian had cut her a small slice of pie. It was thick and creamy with chocolate sauce drizzled over the top. "It looks great."

"My mom's recipe. She throws together some weird concoctions, but they always turn out delicious."

Molly picked up her fork. She clenched it to stop the trembling in her fingers. Everything became wavy before her eyes. Her throat burned. She swallowed several times to ease it, but it didn't help. A tear slipped from her eye to flow down her cheek.

Julian's warm palm squeezed her shoulder. "Is there anything I can do to help?"

His tender voice touched her heart. Another tear slid down her cheek. Julian wiped it off with his thumb.

"Talk to me, Molly. Maybe I can help."

"You can't. No one can." Her voice came out raspy because of the tears clogging her throat. "Damn it," she muttered as she swiped off another tear. "I'm sorry to ruin your evening, Julian."

"You haven't ruined anything."

She pushed her saucer away from her. "I have to go."

Molly made it one step before Julian took her arm and stopped her. "You aren't going anywhere, not while you're so upset."

She kept her gaze lowered, afraid she'd *really* cry if she looked into Julian's eyes.

"You don't have to tell me what's wrong if you'd rather not, but you can't drive now." He leaned down and looked at her face. "I have a lot of DVDs. How about if I pour us another glass of wine and we watch a movie?"

"No more wine." It didn't seem right to have alcohol now when she'd just complained to Shawna about their mother's drinking.

"Coke? 7-Up?"

"Coke will work."

He smiled. "Coke it is. DVDs are in the shelves next to the TV. Pick out whatever you want to watch."

Molly studied Julian's extensive number of DVDs. Keefe had more titles than Molly had ever seen in a person's house. Julian wasn't far behind.

The selection of *Star Trek* movies grabbed her attention. She picked out the fourth one in the series and held it up for Julian to see. "Is this okay with you?"

"Sure."

She inserted the disc into the player, then sat on the couch at the same time Julian did. He handed her a glass of cola with ice and picked up the DVD player remote from

the coffee table. "I always like watching Kirk save the universe." He pointed the remote at the player. "Let me know when you're ready for popcorn."

Molly studied his profile as he surfed through the menu. She'd almost fallen apart on him. A lot of guys would have shooed her out the door at the first sign of tears, yet he'd been kind and understanding.

She'd had lovers, but few of them had been gentlemen. Julian made her feel as if she mattered, that her feelings were truly important.

She could easily lose her heart to him.

Julian looked at her and grinned. "Ready to watch Kirk kick some butt?"

Molly returned his grin. "Absolutely."

Chapter Five

By the time Kirk had figured out how to find the whales and save Earth, Julian lay slouched in the corner of the couch with his arm around Molly. She leaned against his side, her hand resting on his chest. He slowly stroked her back while he breathed in the flowery scent of her hair.

He'd thought she would be too short for him. Holding her close proved how perfectly they fit together.

She'd slipped off her shoes and pulled up her feet to the couch shortly after the movie started. Her toenails were painted a rusty orange color. He imagined nipping the tip of every one of her toes before he worked his way up her body...

Molly laughed, drawing his attention away from her toes and back to her face. She tilted her head on his shoulder and looked at him. "I love that line."

He had no idea which line had been spoken. "What line?"

"Where Scotty says, 'Let's go find George and Gracie.'"

"Oh. Yeah."

She moved her head farther back and her smile faded. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing."

"You said it was okay to watch this movie."

"It was. It is. I like it. I was just...preoccupied."

"With what?"

"Your toenails."

Her mouth opened and closed again before she spoke. "My toenails?"

"I was looking at them."

She straightened one leg and arched her foot. That simple act sent blood rushing to his cock. "Why were you looking at my toenails?"

Even though they'd cuddled for the last ninety minutes, Julian didn't know what would happen for the rest of the night. He wanted Molly. There wasn't a doubt in his mind about that. From the heated looks she'd given him all evening, and the way she'd curled up against him without hesitation, she must feel the same about him. But he wondered if she was ready for him to be completely honest.

He touched her hair, wrapped a thick curl around his finger. "I was thinking about nibbling on your toes."

Her eyes widened a moment, then narrowed as she traced his lips with one fingertip. "You have a thing about nibbling on toes?"

"I have a thing about nibbling on *you*."

"Do you?" The sultry look in her eyes sent a surge of desire to his cock. "You haven't even kissed me."

"Damn. What is wrong with me?"

"Maybe you could remedy your oversight?"

Cradling her jaw in his palm, he tilted up her face another inch. "Yeah. I think I can do that."

Julian covered her lips with his. Satiny soft, with a hint of salt and butter from the popcorn they'd eaten a short while ago. He slid his lips across hers, first one way, then the other. He heard her breath catch, felt her clutch the front of his shirt. He deepened the kiss, using his tongue to trace the seam before venturing inside. He brushed his tongue across hers, a fleeting caress, then kissed each corner of her lips before lifting his mouth from hers.

Her eyes slowly opened. Julian saw heat and longing in the green depths.

"Wow," she whispered. "It was worth the wait."

"I'm glad you think so." He ran his thumb back and forth across her chin. "Maybe we should do it some more."

She nodded. Julian wrapped both arms around her and pulled her closer to his body. Her soft breasts flattened against his chest. He longed to touch them, caress her nipples until they grew hard, suck them. He wanted to drop kisses down her stomach until he reached her mound. He wondered if he'd find red curls there or bare skin.

All the blood in his body flowed to his cock at that thought.

A whimpering moan came from Molly's throat. Still kissing her, Julian rose to one knee and gently pushed her back on the couch. He followed her down, stretching out on top of her between her legs. She wrapped her legs around his hips, which lifted her pussy to touch his rod. Julian arched his hips and pressed harder against her warmth as he drove his tongue into her mouth. She nipped the tip of his tongue, sucked it into her mouth the way she would a cock.

He expected kisses with Molly to be hot. He hadn't expected them to be explosive.

Molly's breathing became more choppy, her kisses more urgent. She tightened her knees at his hips and lifted her pelvis every time Julian pressed his cock between her thighs. His shaft grew thicker, harder, with each moan from Molly's throat.

In danger of coming inside his jeans, Julian ended the kiss. He looked into Molly's eyes, at her flushed cheeks, her pink lips. Her eyes glowed with desire.

"Don't stop," she whispered.

"I won't."

He had to kiss her once more before he rose to his knees. Molly's sweater had crept up while they'd kissed. He could see a three-inch strip of her creamy stomach. Tunneling his hands beneath her sweater, he cradled lace-covered breasts while he dropped kisses on the bare skin.

Her small breasts filled his palms perfectly. He kneaded and squeezed, tickled the hard tips with his fingers.

"Julian," she whispered, her voice ragged.

He lifted his head. "What do you need me to do?"

"Just...that. Touch me. Kiss me."

He released her breasts and tugged her leggings down far enough to expose her navel. "Where do you want to be kissed? Here?" His lips brushed her tummy again. "Here?" He swiped his tongue across her navel. "Here?" Another tug exposed the top of her lacy panties. He kissed the spot where her panties met her skin.

Julian raised his head again to see Molly with her eyes closed, her lips parted. Her breasts rose and fell with her short, rapid breaths. He caught a whiff of her arousal when she shifted her hips. If he told her he wanted to fuck her right now, he didn't doubt that she'd say yes.

He did, desperately. His cock was yelling at him to take her. Yet he didn't want to rush this first time with Molly. Her climb to the heavens should be slow, gentle, until she couldn't hold back her climax any longer and flew apart.

Julian rose to his knees once more. "Lift up." Grasping the waistband of her leggings, he pulled them past her hips. He froze for a moment when he saw her sexy panties. They were cut high up on her hips and low in the front, forming a deep V beneath her navel. The sheer fabric let him clearly see through it. There weren't any red curls.

"Damn," he muttered.

Julian lifted the leg between him and the couch so he could remove her leggings. He tossed them aside, not bothering to see where they landed, and ran his hands up the inside of her smooth legs. He continued up her body until he traveled beneath her sweater again to squeeze her breasts.

"You have an incredible body." The flick of his thumbs across her nipples produced a long moan from Molly. "Your skin is so soft." He leaned down, placed his nose between her thighs and inhaled deeply. "God, you smell good."

"Julian, please touch me."

He placed his thumb on her clit and rubbed it through the fabric. "Like this?"

"No." She took his hand and pushed it inside her panties. "Like this."

All the air left his lungs at the feel of her wet, swollen pussy. His cock surged in his jeans. He didn't think it had ever been as hard as right now. He moved his fingers through her slick folds, back to her anus and up to her clit. Molly jerked each time he brushed that sensitive bundle of nerves.

Julian leaned over her, holding himself up with one hand while he continued to caress her pussy with the other. Molly clutched the cushion beneath her and pumped her hips in time with his stroking. He stared into her eyes, watching her pupils dilate, the irises seeming to turn a deeper green with her rising desire.

He pushed two fingers deep into her channel. Eyes closed, neck arched, she grabbed his wrist and moaned loudly.

"Feel good?" he asked, moving his fingers in a slow, pumping motion.

"Oh yes."

He felt around inside her, searching for her G-spot. Her sharp inhalation indicated he found it. Julian caressed it as he rubbed her clit with his thumb.

"Look at me, Molly. I want to see your eyes when you come."

She opened her eyes again. Julian continued caressing, rubbing. The musk of her pussy became stronger, her cream more generous. She clutched his wrist tighter, dug her fingernails into his flesh. He winced at the discomfort, yet didn't stop touching her. He knew she was close and wanted to push her over the edge.

"That's the way, sweetheart. Come for me."

Her body jerked and shivered beneath him. A light sheen of perspiration formed on her skin. The walls of her pussy milked his fingers, drawing them farther into her body. He left them inside her until the contractions stopped and her body stilled. Once her breathing slowed, he removed his fingers from inside her to rest against her labia.

"You're beautiful, Molly."

She released the death grip on his wrist and softly touched his face. "That was amazing."

"You're amazing."

It pleased him to see a soft blush fill her cheeks before her gaze drifted down his body. She ran her hand down his chest, his stomach, to the bulge behind his fly. She outlined that bulge with one fingertip. "What about you?"

Julian arched his pelvis into her touch. "You don't think we're stopping, do you?"

"I hope not." Molly squeezed his hard rod, drifted beneath his balls to fondle them. "I want to see you."

Removing his hand from her panties, Julian sucked her juices from his fingers before he tugged off his shirt. The small taste of her wasn't nearly enough. Her panties joined his shirt on top of the coffee table. He spread her legs wide and lowered his mouth to her pussy.

She gasped and grabbed his head. "Juliaaaannnn!"

He pulled each smooth fold between his lips, darted his tongue into her channel, flicked it over her clit. He repeated his movements again and again, until Molly's breathing was as choppy as before she'd come.

Slipping his hands beneath her thighs, he pushed up her legs to give him better access to her wet labia. He watched a drop of her cream trickle down to her anus. He swiped it up on the tip of his tongue.

"My God, you taste incredible."

He licked the full length of her slit again, laved the tight rosette of her ass. He knew from experience exactly how much pleasure she could feel from attention to her asshole. He licked the delicate area, fucked it with his tongue.

The more he worked her with his mouth, the tighter she gripped his hair. He ventured forward to suckle her clit, then returned to her anus. She released his hair,

pulled up her sweater and cradled her breasts. She tugged and twisted her nipples through the lace.

Julian loved to watch a woman pleasure herself. Molly continued to touch her breasts as he moved his tongue faster over her intimate flesh. He lapped up every bit of cream that oozed from her channel. Placing his thumb over her clit, he massaged it while fucking her ass with his tongue.

She released a loud keening moan. *"Ohhhhhhhhhhh!"* Her back arched and her body trembled. Julian pushed two fingers inside her and the contractions once again squeezed his fingers. He gently licked her clit until her breathing slowed and she lay still.

Molly didn't think she'd ever come so hard in her life. Her first orgasm had been powerful. This one had been mind-blowing.

She opened her eyes when she felt Julian dropping kisses on her mound. Every third or fourth kiss, he'd swipe his tongue across her clit. It was tender from her orgasms, yet the caress sent little pulses of sensation through her body. He didn't seem to be in any hurry to stop. She could lie here and enjoy Julian's attention for the rest of the night, but that wouldn't be fair to him.

She moved backward far enough so he could no longer touch her with his mouth. His fingers were still nestled inside her. Molly clasped his wrist and withdrew them from her body.

"Now it's your turn."

His eyes flashed with heat, his nostrils flared. "What do you have in mind?"

"Take off the rest of your clothes and I'll show you."

She sat up when he rose from the couch. She'd received only a glimpse of his chest when he removed his shirt. Now she could look her fill. His shoulders were broad, his arms muscular, his stomach flat with a well-defined six-pack. A light sprinkling of dark

hair ran across his chest and down his stomach, flaring out to surround his navel. Hard little nipples peeked from his chest hair.

Her gaze dropped to his hands as he unfastened his belt and jeans. He toed off his shoes first, then pushed his jeans past his hips and down his legs. He wasn't wearing underwear.

Oh God, that is so sexy. "Do you always go commando?"

"Not always."

He straightened after stepping from his clothes. Molly stared at his hard cock. Long and thick with a hint of an upward curve, it would fill her channel completely. Her pussy clenched as if in anticipation of feeling him inside her.

She wrapped one hand around his shaft and cradled his balls with the other. She slid her hand up and down the velvety skin, caressed the firm orbs. Julian hissed in a sharp breath through his teeth.

"Do you like this?" Molly asked, tightening her grip.

"Yeah." His voice came out guttural and rough. He arched his hips, pushing his cock firmer into her hands. "Feels good."

Molly agreed with that. She continued to caress him, moving her hand faster on his rod. Julian began to pump his hips in rhythm with her hands.

Suddenly he stopped moving and grasped the hem of her sweater. "You need to be naked."

Molly had to release him and lift her arms so Julian could remove her sweater. Reaching behind her, he unsnapped her bra and added it to the pile of clothing on the coffee table.

"Oh yeah." He laid his hands over her breasts and squeezed them. "These are beautiful." His thumbs brushed across the tips. They peaked beneath his touch. "So are your nipples."

She took his shaft in her hands again and milked his hard length. She dipped down to his balls, flashed up to the head, then milked him again. Julian continued to knead her breasts, thumb her nipples, keeping her on the edge of another orgasm.

He leaned over and covered her lips with his in a voracious kiss. Molly tilted her head and parted her lips for his tongue. He swept it across her lips, past her teeth, brushed hers with it. She answered kiss for kiss, caress for caress, as she continued to work his cock.

"I'm close, Molly," he whispered against her lips.

Instead of stopping, she gripped him tighter, pumped him faster.

"Baby, I'm gonna come."

"Do it. I want you to."

She'd barely said the words when Julian groaned. His shaft jerked in her hands. Warm semen shot from the slit to splash on her breasts.

A look of regret crossed his face. "Shit," he muttered. "I'm sorry."

"For what?"

"I didn't mean... I should've pulled away from you."

"Julian, I wanted you to come."

"Yeah, but I should've been inside you."

Molly looked down at the cum splattered on her skin. She swiped off a drop and licked it from her finger. "I think it's sexy."

"Yeah, it is." Despite just experiencing a climax, heat flared in his eyes again. He pushed her breasts together and spread his essence with his thumbs. "Very sexy."

She looked at his cock. He wasn't as hard as he'd been a few moments ago, but definitely wasn't soft. "You aren't through for the night, are you?"

He chuckled. "Hardly. That was the appetizer. You get the main course in my bedroom."

"I'm all for main courses. And I am getting hungry again."

"I wouldn't want you to go hungry."

With a gentle tug, he pulled her to her feet. Still holding her hands and gazing into her eyes, he walked backward down the hall to the last door on the right. He released one hand long enough to turn the knob, then took it again and pulled her into the room.

Molly gasped. Fat pillar candles burned all around the room. There was no other light on, but the candlelight let her clearly see the bed covers turned back. Several pillows were propped against the headboard.

"I took the chance that you'd want to spend the night. I lit the candles about an hour ago. I borrowed the extra pillows from the guestroom bed."

A lump formed in her throat. No man had ever done this much for her. Her lovers had been more in the "slam bam, thank you, ma'am" category than the romantic category. "It's beautiful," she whispered.

"So are you."

"Julian, you're very sweet, but I know I'm not beautiful."

He frowned. "Who says you're not?"

"I say I'm not."

His frown faded and he kissed her gently. "Then I'll have to convince you how wrong you are."

Chapter Six

The candlelight turned Molly's creamy skin golden, gave her hair fiery highlights. Julian's heart did a funny flip in his chest as he led her to the bed, something that had never happened to him with a woman.

They'd had amazing, hot sex in the living room. Now he wanted to make love to her.

Sitting on the side of the bed, he drew her between his spread legs. Julian slid his palms down her hips, up her sides, over her breasts. He noticed her catch her breath when he brushed her nipples. He touched her nipples again, rubbing them with his fingertips.

"That's nice," she whispered.

"Yeah." He plucked at them with his thumbs and forefingers until they grew hard. "Really nice."

Julian drew one tip into his mouth. Molly released a long, slow breath and ran her fingers into his hair. He could hear her soft pants mixed in with moans as he suckled one nipple, then the other.

A harder tug made her gasp. "Oh Julian."

Scooting closer to the edge of the bed, he slid his hands to her ass and tugged her right up against him. He kneaded her cheeks while he continued to lick and suck her nipples. One finger slid down her cleft to press against her anus.

"Mmmmmm." She parted her legs and pushed her ass back. The movement let his finger slip inside her. He tugged even harder on one nipple while he moved his finger in and out of her ass. "That feels so good."

He jerked when she wrapped one hand around his cock. As much as he loved her touch, he wouldn't let her bring him to a climax that way again. This time he wanted to be inside her when he came.

"No, not like that." He grasped her wrist and pulled her hand away from him.

"I like touching you."

"You can touch me all you want, later. But right now..." He pulled her forward as he reclined, then flipped them so she lay on her back with him leaning over her. "I have other things in mind."

Her lips curved up in a saucy grin. "I'm all for other things."

Those sexy lips deserved a kiss. Julian gave her one, and another, and another. Molly's hands glided down his back to his butt. She dug her fingernails into his flesh. Julian moaned. He caressed her breast, her stomach, her mound. She spread her legs, giving him room to explore her wet pussy. The lips were swollen, her clit hard and peeking out from its hood.

"You need to come again," he said before kissing her deeply. "Do you want my tongue?"

"I want your cock."

He liked that she didn't hesitate to tell him what she needed. He kissed her again before sitting up to open the nightstand drawer. He quickly located a condom packet and tore it open.

Before he could slide the condom over his shaft, Molly sat up and took it from him. "Let me do that."

Julian leaned back on his hands and arched his hips, which made his cock stand straight up from his body. Molly placed the condom on the crown. She slowly, slowly pushed it down, caressing him along the way. Julian gritted his teeth at the pleasure. Once it was in place, she bent over and placed a kiss on the head.

Unable to wait another second to be inside her, Julian rolled Molly to her back again and parted her legs. Gripping her ass, he lifted her as he slid his cock into her pussy.

"My God," he muttered. She was so tight, so wet, so hot. He pulled almost all the way out of her channel and glided back in. Molly wrapped her arms around his neck and lifted her hips to meet every thrust.

"That's the way." Julian pulled out, glided back in again. "Move with me."

She grasped his head and kissed him...long, deep, moving her tongue in his mouth the way he moved his cock in her pussy. She met each thrust of his hips, each pistoning drive he made. Julian buried his face where her neck met her shoulder and breathed in the flowery scent of her skin, her hair. The sound of their flesh slapping together and their heavy breathing filled the room.

"Come for me." He bit her neck, licked the same spot. "I want to feel you come."

"I...can't. I need...more."

"What do you need?"

"I need... *God!* Faster. Move faster."

"Come here." Julian held her tightly and rolled to his back. He helped her to sit up, her legs straddling his hips. "Ride me."

She sat up, which pushed his cock even farther inside her. He held her hips as she began to move. Her eyes slid closed, her back arched. Those beautiful breasts quivered with her every motion. Julian continued to hold one hip, but cupped a breast with the other. He caressed and kneaded, tugged on the nipple.

She became frantic with her movements, digging her fingernails into his stomach while she bounced on top of him. Curls around her face dampened with her sweat. Every time she shifted, the scent of her pussy filled his nose.

"Yes!" Molly threw back her head. "Oh yes. Now. *Now!* Ohhhhhhhh!"

Julian gripped her hips and pushed his rod as far inside Molly as he could. The walls of her pussy contracted around his cock. Every part of his body tightened before

the pleasure rushed up and down his spine and into his shaft. It pulsed with every breath, every heartbeat.

He released an *oomph* when Molly fell on top of his chest. He managed to wrap his arms around her, but that's the best he could do until some of the blood flowed back to its regular place in his body.

"I think I'm dead," she whispered next to his ear.

"I'll second that."

"I hope it's okay if I just lie here 'cause there's no way I can move."

"You're perfect right where you are."

He heard her sigh softly and kissed the top of her head. She felt so perfect in his arms, as if she was made specifically for him.

His heart did that funny flip again.

"You know what I want right now?" she asked.

"You gotta give me a little more recuperation time."

Molly giggled. "Not that." She propped her hands on his chest and rested her chin on them. "My piece of pie. I never ate it."

"No, you gobbled up half the bowl of popcorn instead."

She grinned. "I have a healthy appetite."

Julian slid his hands down her back to her ass. "You certainly do," he said, low and husky.

"I don't think we're talking about the same thing."

He liked the teasing gleam in her eyes. "You have a healthy appetite for food. I got that."

"Then why are your hands on my butt?"

"Are they?" he asked, trying to sound innocent as he rubbed her soft cheeks.

She cradled his jaw in her hands and kissed him soundly. "I want my pie."

"All right, all right. Geez, what a pest. Do you want it in here or at the island?"

"Here. I like to eat in bed."

"You like me to wait on you."

Her grin widened. "That too."

Julian chuckled. The more time he spent with Molly, the more he liked her. She wasn't afraid to be herself around him. He'd gone out with women who barely picked at their food, as if he'd think them pigs if they finished a salad. He liked that Molly had matched him bite for bite. "Get off me and I'll get your pie."

He held the base of the condom while she lifted herself off his soft cock. He already missed her warmth wrapped around him.

He gave her a quick kiss. "Be right back."

Molly lay on the bed with a soft sigh. She stared at Julian's gorgeous butt as he walked into his bathroom. His Italian heritage gave him that wonderful olive skin that made him look as if he always had a tan.

He came out of the bathroom and returned to the bed. Placing his hands on either side of her, he leaned down for a soft kiss. "You want coffee with your pie?"

"Just water."

"Okay." He kissed her again, longer this time. "Don't cover up."

"I won't."

Once he left the bedroom, Molly stretched her arms over her head. Her breath caught at the nice ache between her thighs. Sex with Julian had been amazing. It had been so hot when he'd come on her breasts. A guy had never done that with her. She'd wanted Julian to climax that way so she could see his cock jerk, watch his cum splatter on her skin.

Her pussy clenched with the memory.

She fluffed one of the pillows and moved her head to a more comfortable position. He hadn't officially asked her to spend the night with him, but she'd told him she wasn't in any hurry to leave. She didn't have to be at work until one tomorrow afternoon. That gave her plenty of time in the morning to make love, have breakfast, shower and make love again before she had to go home to get ready.

She might walk funny in Nordstrom tomorrow, but it would be worth it.

"Why are you grinning?" Julian asked. He walked toward the bed with two saucers in one hand and a glass of water in the other.

"Am I grinning?"

"Just like a woman who has been thoroughly loved."

"I have definitely been thoroughly loved." She laughed at his smug smile. "Don't let the compliment go to your head."

"No beating on my chest, I promise." He set the glass on the nightstand and held out one of the saucers to her. "There's more pie if you want another piece."

Molly stuffed a pillow behind her back and leaned against the headboard. She took her first bite of the creamy concoction and moaned from pleasure.

"Oh God, that's better than sex."

Julian scowled at her. "I beg your pardon."

Molly giggled. "Okay, it's better than *most* sex."

"I'll accept that." He took a bite of his pie. "Yeah, it turned out really good this time. I had trouble with the recipe the last time I made it."

His comment made Molly wonder how many women he'd cooked for. A lot, probably. She had no right to ask about former lovers, yet the question still popped out of her mouth. "Do you usually cook for your girlfriends?"

"There haven't been that many girlfriends, Molly." He blew out a breath while he set his empty saucer on the nightstand. "I've dated and I've cared deeply about a couple of women, even lived with one of them for three months. Things didn't work out."

Turning toward her, he rested one arm on an upraised knee. "My parents are still very much in love after thirty-five years of marriage. I know what's supposed to happen between a man and a woman, the kind of deep feelings there has to be to make a marriage work. I won't settle for anything less."

"Your parents sound wonderful," she said, barely above a whisper.

"They are."

The last bite of pie stared back at Molly. She and Shawna had both longed for parents who loved them, who would be there for them no matter what. Instead they had a father who died when Molly was eight and a mother who turned to bourbon in her grief. It didn't matter that she had two daughters to rear. Lydia Ross had preferred drinking over making sure her daughters had something to eat or clean clothes to wear.

There was no way she could get that bite past the lump in her throat. She set the saucer on the nightstand.

"Would you like to talk about why you were so upset after you talked to your sister?"

She didn't answer his question because she wasn't sure what to say. She'd love to talk to Julian about her parents. He was so kind, so understanding. But this was the first time they'd been together. She didn't want to cry on his shoulder and make him sorry he'd invited her here. Or even worse, decide he never wanted to see her again.

He cradled her chin and turned her face toward his. "I'd like to help if I can."

Concern filled his eyes, along with compassion. Molly opened her mouth, ready to spill everything. At the last second, she closed it and shook her head. "I'd rather talk about happy stuff."

"Okay," he said after a moment's hesitation. He touched her hair, curled a tendril around his finger. "Do you work tomorrow?"

She nodded. "My shift starts at one."

"When do you get off?"

"Nine thirty."

"That's kind of late to have dinner." His thumb brushed the sensitive skin beneath her ear. Molly shivered and her nipples pebbled. "Maybe you could come over after work for wine or coffee."

"Yeah, I could probably do that."

He continued that mesmerizing caress beneath her ear. "You told me earlier you aren't in a hurry to leave. Is that still true?"

Molly nodded.

"Will you spend the night with me?"

"I'd like that."

Dropping his gaze to her breasts, he touched one firm nipple with his other thumb. "Are you cold?"

Cold? He had to be kidding. One little touch from him and Molly felt as if she was on fire. She shook her head.

"Just wondered, since your nipples are hard."

He looked back at her face. Molly's clit began to throb when she saw the desire in his eyes. She glanced at his cock to see it was stiff and ready to fill her again.

"My nipples aren't the only thing that's hard."

He replaced the thumb beneath her ear with his lips. "Is that okay with you?"

She shivered again at the feel of his warm breath against her skin. "Yes," she whispered.

He softly kneaded her breast as he nipped and sucked up and down her neck. Molly's eyes rolled back and she drew in a shaky breath. Heat rushed through her body, her heart stuttered in her chest. She tunneled her fingers into his hair and pulled up his head so she could kiss him.

He gentled the kiss when she would have devoured his mouth. He held her nape, his other hand still caressing her breast. Light, nipping kisses mixed with tender

touches. Molly wrapped her arms around his waist and simply *absorbed* the pleasure running up and down her spine.

She went willingly when he lowered her to the bed. He broke their kiss only long enough to don a condom. He kissed her again as he slipped between her legs. One thrust buried his cock deep inside her.

He continued to kiss her lips, her cheek, her neck, while he moved inside her. Molly slid her hands over his back and butt and met every one of his slow thrusts. When she tried to move faster, he looked at her and shook his head.

"No. Nice and slow this time. I want to feel your body tremble when you come."

Interlocking their fingers, he held her hands next to her head. Molly could do nothing but obey him. She stared into his eyes, accepted the easy pumping of his cock into her pussy, the glide of his damp skin against hers. He moved in a way that brushed her clit with each plunge into her wet channel.

The orgasm didn't gallop through her this time, but enveloped her in warmth and pleasure. She continued to stare into Julian's eyes when she felt his body tighten, heard the low raspy groan in his throat. Once he stilled, he kissed her so sweetly that tears sprang to her eyes.

"You have quite an effect on me," he said after their kiss. "I haven't come three times in one night in a long time."

"Me either." She playfully scratched his ass. "I liked it."

Julian chuckled and kissed the tip of her nose. "I think you might be a naughty lady."

"Is that bad?"

"No way. I love naughty ladies."

He kissed the tip of her nose again, then her lips. "Are you ready to get some sleep?"

"Definitely."

“Okay.” He slowly pulled out of her body. “I’ll be right back.”

Molly rolled to the middle of the bed while he went into his bathroom. What an incredible evening. Good food, great sex, amazing guy. Amazing, sexy, wonderful guy, who wanted her to spend the night and see her again tomorrow evening.

If this was a dream, she hoped she never woke up.

Julian came back and traveled through the room, blowing out candles. Once the last candle had been extinguished, he walked to the bed. “Do you have a preference which side you sleep on?”

“My left.”

“Me too. Scoot over.”

She did and he climbed in beside her. He pulled up the covers, then tugged her into his arms, her back to his chest. She felt his lips touch the top of her head.

“Goodnight,” he whispered.

With a soft sigh, Molly closed her eyes.

Chapter Seven

Molly drained the last of her latte and went back to work on her laptop. She was in the middle of a pivotal scene regarding her killer and hoped to finish it before Marci and Twyla arrived.

Warm lips on the side of her neck sent a shiver through her body. She looked over her shoulder to see Julian grinning at her.

"Good morning," he said, his voice husky.

"Good morning."

He rounded the table and sat in the chair opposite her. "I see you're already hard at work on your book."

"I am." Molly had arrived at Jennie's Java the moment the door opened this morning. She'd put on earphones to drown out Shawna's music and written past midnight last night because the words had been flying out of her fingers. She had to be at work by nine thirty and wanted as much time as possible this morning to write.

Great sex had really inspired her.

He snatched a piece of her muffin and popped it in his mouth. "How's it going?"

"Incredible. I can't type fast enough."

"Do you want me to leave you alone?"

"You won't be here long anyway."

Heat rushed to her cheeks when she realized her words could be misunderstood to mean she didn't want him here. "That didn't come out right."

She felt better when she saw the humor in his eyes. "I know. And you're right. I start my new job at eight. I have enough time to grab a coffee and muffin to go." He motioned toward her ceramic cup. "Do you want a refill?"

"I'd better not. I'll be bouncing off the walls if I drink any more."

She wrote another half page before Julian joined her again. He sipped his coffee, looking at her over the rim. "I missed you last night."

His words sent warmth from her head all the way to her toes. She'd spent Saturday night with him too, but had gone home early Sunday morning because his family planned to visit. "I missed you too. Did you have a nice time with your family?"

"Yeah, it was great. Of course, Jill wanted to rearrange all the furniture since I didn't do it right."

Molly laughed. She hoped she had the chance to meet Jill someday. She sounded like a character.

"Mom cooked enough food for ten people. I have lots of leftovers." His eyes narrowed in that "I want you" look she already recognized. Her heartbeat quickened. "Want to come over for dinner?"

She nodded. "What time?"

"I get off at five, but I might work later since it's my first day. How about seven?"

"I'll be there."

Wrapping his half-eaten muffin in a napkin, he grabbed his coffee cup and stood. "I'm outta here. Don't want to be late my first day on a new job."

"Good luck."

"Thanks." He leaned over and kissed her softly. "See you later."

Molly propped her elbow on the table, rested her chin on her fist and watched Julian walk out the door. She sighed. She still had trouble believing her good luck in meeting Julian. He was perfect. Absolutely perfect.

She worked until three today. That would give her time to run some errands before she went to Julian's apartment. She thought about making another trip to Lavender Lace. She liked the way Julian's eyes had turned hot when she'd taken off her clothes Saturday night and exposed her teal lingerie. She'd bought two sets of matching bras

and boyshorts plus the olive camisole on her first trip to Lavender Lace. Maybe she should surprise him tonight with a different sexy bra and panties set.

As soon as the plan formed in her head, Molly knew it wouldn't work. Lavender Lace was closed on Monday. No problem. She had Tuesday off. She'd go then and take her time shopping for the perfect lingerie to make Julian's eyes bug out.

Marci came in the door, followed by Twyla. Her friends would pump her about Julian. She saved her work and closed her laptop, knowing there'd be no more writing this morning.

Marci slipped into the chair Julian had vacated while Twyla went to the counter. "Well?"

"Well what?" Molly asked, even though she knew exactly what Marci wanted to know.

"How was your date with Julian?"

"Don't you want to get your coffee?"

"Twyla's getting it for both of us."

"It wouldn't be right to say anything until Twyla gets here."

Marci huffed out a breath. "You're cruel, do you know that?"

Molly grinned. "Yeah."

Twyla came to the table with two large ceramic mugs of coffee. "Don't you say one word until I come back," she said sternly to Molly.

"I won't."

Twyla looked at Marci. "The muffin of the day is cream cheese apricot. Is that okay?"

Marci glanced at the crumbs on Molly's saucer. "Is it good?"

"Scrumptious."

"I'll go with that. Hurry! I want to hear about Molly's date."

"Hey, Twyla, get three," Molly said. "We can share the third one."

Molly wondered if Twyla broke a speed record in buying three muffins. She pulled her chair up to the table and leaned forward on her folded arms. "What happened? And don't leave out *any* detail."

She couldn't resist teasing her friends a little longer. "You should try the muffin. It really is scrumptious."

Marci drummed her fingertips on the table. "You are five seconds away from being seriously hurt."

Molly laughed. She loved to tease her friends. "Okay, okay. I don't want to be seriously hurt. The evening was beyond incredible. Julian lives in a wonderful apartment on the fifth floor with a view of Puget Sound and the Olympics. He made this delicious chicken dish with a lemon sage sauce for dinner. His mother is Italian and he got the recipe from her."

"So he's a good cook?" Marci asked.

"Oh yes. He even made dessert, a ricotta chocolate pie that was so creamy, it melted on my tongue."

Twyla and Marci groaned.

"After dinner, we watched *Star Trek 4* and ate popcorn. Then..." She looked at each lady and fanned her face. "Oh. My. God."

Twyla grinned. "I guess that means the sex was good."

"A-ma-zing." She ticked off the times with her fingers. "Three times Friday night, twice Saturday morning, twice Saturday night, once Sunday morning. There would've been more Sunday but I went home 'cause his parents, sister and two nephews came to see him."

"Eight times and you can still walk?" Marci asked with a grin.

"I soaked in the bathtub for a loooooonnnnnng time last night."

Molly laughed along with her friends. Marci and Twyla had shared information about their blossoming relationships with Keefe and Daniel. Molly liked that she could finally share something too.

"I guess I made it sound like all we did was fuck the entire weekend."

"Nothing wrong with that," Twyla said, grinning.

"True, but we did so many other things. He took me to Pike Place Market Saturday afternoon. I haven't been there in years. We spent hours walking around. We bought this incredible crusty bread and clam chowder for lunch that was so delicious, it should be illegal. Then we went to see the new Johnny Depp movie."

"Was it good?" Marci asked.

Molly nodded. "Very. Julian and I both enjoyed it. After that we went to The Chowder House for dinner. I swear I had an orgasm while eating the salmon."

"I felt the same way when Keefe and I went there two weeks ago."

"But do you know what was the most amazing thing about the whole weekend?"

Marci and Twyla shook their heads.

"We talked. I mean, we really *talked*, about growing up and our jobs and our hobbies and our dreams. I learned the first night at his apartment that we both love *Star Trek* movies. We have so much in common, it's almost scary. He wants to parachute out of an airplane, just like I do. How cool is that?"

"He sounds perfect," Marci said, smiling gently.

"I haven't even seen him yet," Twyla said with a pout. She turned to Marci. "At least you've *seen* him. You know what he looks like."

"He's very cute."

"That isn't good enough. I need to meet him. We should all get together for dinner. What are you two doing over Thanksgiving weekend?"

"Thanksgiving is out for me. Keefe and I are going to Oregon to visit my sister. We'll be back late Saturday. What are you doing for Thanksgiving, Molly?"

She thought of her mother's invitation to visit over the holiday. Shawna had brought up the subject again this weekend. Molly's answer had been the same—a very firm no. Her stomach always tightened at the idea of being in the same room with Lydia Ross. Molly simply couldn't do it. "I'll probably spend it watching the football games. I work Friday, Saturday and Sunday."

"What about Shawna?" Marci asked. "Won't she be with you Thursday?"

"No. She's going to Everett to see our mother."

Silence, for about ten seconds before Twyla spoke again. "You aren't spending the holiday with your mother?"

Molly shook her head. "And before you ask any more questions, I'll tell you I don't want to talk about it. End of discussion."

She'd only known Marci and Twyla for two months, but they'd grown close in a short time. She could tell they both wanted to pump her for more information about her mother. That subject was off-limits, even to her closest friends.

"If you change your mind and want to talk—" Marci began.

"I won't."

"If you do," Marci said, a bit stronger, "know that we're here for you."

Afraid she would burst into tears at any moment, Molly changed the subject. "Anyone gonna eat that last half a muffin?"

"Go for it," Twyla said. "I've had enough."

"Me too." Marci glanced at her watch. "I'd better go or I'll be late for my VP meeting." She stood and slung her purse strap over her shoulder. "Remember what I said. Call me anytime you want to talk."

"That goes for me too," Twyla said as she also stood. She picked up her and Marci's mugs from the table. "Let's talk tomorrow about all of us getting together. Okay?"

"Okay."

Once her friends had left, Molly gathered up her things to leave. She thought of Twyla's idea about the three couples getting together. It sounded like fun, but not yet. It was too early in her relationship with Julian to ask him to spend time with her friends. She hadn't even invited him to her apartment, a fact that Shawna had brought up several times over the weekend when she bugged Molly about meeting Julian.

She was sure he'd spend Thursday with his family. Friday started the official Christmas shopping season, which meant lots of working hours for her. She wanted to spend as much time with Julian as possible over the next three days since she didn't know when she'd be able to be with him again.

That meant a trip to Lavender Lace was a must. She could buy a nice set of lingerie today at Nordstrom for tonight, but she'd go to Ashlyn's store tomorrow. Shawna told her Ashlyn received a shipment every Tuesday morning. Molly could hardly wait to check out all the new goodies.

* * * * *

Llyr placed his hand over his hard cock and squeezed it through his jeans. He didn't know how much more of this he could take before he attacked.

Ashlyn received a shipment at her store every Tuesday morning. This week, she had arranged for it to be delivered on Monday because of the Thanksgiving holiday Thursday. She wanted to have all the new items available to sell as soon as she opened her store Tuesday, instead of stocking throughout the day as usual.

A new shipment always meant a fashion show. Llyr loved watching Ashlyn model her frilly things for him, but there came a point when looking simply wasn't enough. He needed to touch, to suck, to fuck.

She came around the corner wearing her fourth outfit this morning—a bright red demi bra and a tiny red thong. "What do you think of this?"

He'd show her exactly what he thought of her outfit in about five seconds. He surged to his feet and stalked toward her. With a wave of his hand, a thick pallet appeared on the floor.

"Llyr, what—"

She shrieked when he scooped her up in his arms. "Ye've teased me long enough, lass. Now 'tis time to spread those pretty thighs fer me."

He lowered her to the pallet and followed her down to lie between her legs. He filled his hands with her breasts as he kissed her.

Holding the soft mounds through satin and lace wasn't good enough. A mere thought and clothes disappeared. He kissed her deeply, thoroughly, loving the little sounds of pleasure that escaped from her throat as he plucked her bare nipples. He knew how much she enjoyed it when he played with those rosy tips.

He swept his tongue across her lips in a final caress before he lifted his mouth from hers. An impish smile tilted up her lips.

"I thought the red would get to you."

Llyr didn't know whether to kiss her again or spank her for teasing him. "Were ye waitin' fer me to attack ye?"

"Of course."

"Ye little vixen. I should spank ye."

Her eyes widened in shock...shock Llyr knew was phony. "You wouldn't dare!"

"Ah, lass, ye should never tempt me."

A moment later, Llyr sat on a padded chair with Ashlyn draped facedown over his lap. He gave one round buttock a sharp slap.

"Llyr! Stop it!"

She laid her arm across her bottom. Llyr wrapped one hand around the fingers of both her hands. He needed only a simple thought to summon his powers, but Ashlyn

needed her hands. He tightened his grip when she wiggled. "Ye aren't goin' anywhere so ye might as well be still."

"I can get away from you with a snap of my fingers!"

"But ye can't snap yer fingers, love, since I'm holdin' them."

He gave her cheek another smack, a bit harder than the first one. Ashlyn continued to wiggle, bumping his cock and balls with every move. He spanked her again, then rubbed the flesh that was rapidly turning pink.

"Llyr, let go of me."

Her voice sounded more breathless than it had, less outraged. He slipped his fingers between her thighs for a quick pass over her labia before he spanked her again. He gave her a series of several smacks, slid his hand between her thighs again. Warm cream coated his fingers.

"I think ye like the spankin'."

"I think you're a bully."

"Yer drippin' pussy says otherwise. Ye wouldna be this wet if ye didna like it."

Lovers for five centuries, there was little he and Ashlyn hadn't done together. He didn't spank her often, but he enjoyed it when he did. So did Ashlyn. Her parted legs proved that.

Gathering her cream on his fingers, he spread it over her anus. She whimpered. Llyr dipped to her pussy for more of her essence. He pushed the tip of his forefinger into her ass.

"Llyr."

Her voice sounded strangled, hoarse. "Ye like it when I play with yer asshole, don't ye, darlin'?" He pushed his finger farther inside her. "Don't ye?"

"Yes."

Even though her pussy was wet, Llyr needed more moisture for what he wanted to do. A small bottle of lubricant appeared in the air above Ashlyn's anus. Using his mind,

Llyr tilted it so a drop would fall every second. He slid the silky liquid around the sensitive area.

"Llyr, please let go of my hands."

"Ye wouldna be tryin' to get away from me, would ye?"

"No. I promise. But I'm a little uncomfortable."

"I'm sorry, darlin'. I donna want ye uncomfortable."

He quickly turned his chair into a couch so Ashlyn could stretch out her arms and legs. "Better?"

"Yes." She looked at him over her shoulder. "Thank you."

He leaned over and kissed her. "Save the thanks fer when I make ye come."

Her beautiful blue eyes flashed with heat. She folded her arms on the couch, rested her forehead on them and arched her butt higher.

"That's the way, love," he whispered. "Lift that beautiful ass."

She spread her legs wider. Llyr rubbed her anus faster, firmer. He pushed his finger all the way inside her, withdrew it, then rubbed her again.

Soft whimpers and moans came from deep in her throat. Ashlyn raised her hips higher. He heard the catch in her breathing, felt her skin turning warmer and damp with sweat. The lube continued to fall drop by drop. Llyr spread it liberally between her thighs so his fingers moved easily over her flesh. He brushed her clit, then returned to her anus.

"Ye like this, don't you, love?"

"Yesssssss."

"Ye should see how open yer little asshole is. 'Tis beggin' for me cock."

Ashlyn's body jerked. Llyr pushed two fingers in her ass and her anus contracted around his fingers. She cried out and her body jerked again.

Llyr knew he should give Ashlyn more time to recover from her orgasm, but he felt as if his rod was going to burst any moment. He helped her to sit up so she straddled his lap, her back to his chest. Holding his shaft, he guided it into her ass.

She threw back her head and groaned long and loud. Llyr held her hips while he pumped into her. So tight, so incredibly tight and hot. He wanted Ashlyn to come again, but he didn't know how long he'd last.

"Llyr! Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh."

He shoved his rod deep inside her and her anus pulsed around it. Her second climax pushed him into his own. His balls tightened, his cock pumped his essence into her body.

Llyr tugged Ashlyn back to rest against his chest. He palmed her breasts while tiny pulses of pleasure shot through his cock and balls. Ashlyn's heart pounded beneath his palm, proof that her body still flowed with the same pleasure as his.

"I think you need to spank me more often if I'm going to come that hard."

"And fuck yer ass?" he growled before nipping her earlobe.

"That too."

"Be happy to, me love. Shouldna take me very long to be ready fer another round."

A god recuperated much quicker than a mortal man. Llyr would be hard again in moments. He stroked Ashlyn's breasts, rolled her nipples to keep the desire flowing through her body.

She shifted and thrust her breasts into his palms. "You are a wicked man, Llyr."

"That doesna sound like a complaint, love." Tightening his hold on her breasts, he kneaded them as he began to slowly pump into her ass again.

He froze when he heard the voice in his head. Ashlyn looked at him over her shoulder. "What's wrong?"

"Our king has summoned me. I must go."

She frowned. "Now? Right now? In the middle of lovemaking?"

"Aye. There are problems in the North Sea."

He helped her to stand, grabbing her arms when she stumbled. "Are ye all right?"

"My legs are weak."

It pleased him that after so long together, he could still affect her so strongly. "A bath with some of yer pretty-smellin' oil will make ye feel better."

"I'd feel better with one of your massages."

"When I come back."

He lifted a hand. The couch disappeared and his clothes reappeared. Ashlyn looked down at her nude body. She frowned at him. "You get clothes and I don't?"

"Aye." Llyr grinned. "I wanted another look at yer body before I go."

Tears suddenly filled her eyes. She crossed her arms over her stomach. "I'll miss you."

"And I'll miss ye, love."

Cradling her face in his hands, he kissed her long and deeply. "I'll be back, Ashlyn. I'll always come back to ye. I promise."

Chapter Eight

Julian gave the marinara sauce on the stove a quick stir. "You worry too much, Jill," he said into the telephone.

"Don't get me wrong. I think it's wonderful that you've started dating someone you care about. It just seems as if you're spending a lot of time with someone you only met last week."

Jill was two years older than Julian and took her protective big sister role very seriously. Julian knew she loved him and only wanted what was best for him, but sometimes her protectiveness could be smothering. "I can't get to know her if I don't spend time with her. And you're a fine one to talk. You knew Cal all of two months before you married him."

"I knew he was the one. Ten years and two sons later, he's still the one."

He could hear the love and yearning in her voice. A career Army man, Cal was currently in the Middle East. Jill had known from the start that there would be times they'd be apart. Knowing didn't make it any easier for his sister. "You miss him."

"Like crazy. But we're not talking about me. If you're serious about Molly, then you should bring her to Mom and Dad's for Thanksgiving."

Julian would like to introduce Molly to his family, but he wondered if it might be too soon. "Not yet. We're still getting to know each other."

"And exactly how are you getting to know her?"

The teasing in her voice made him chuckle. "That's none of your business."

"My husband's been gone for three months. I gotta get my jollies somewhere."

"Read one of those smutty books you like so much."

"Don't pick on my romances, bro."

A gentle knock on the door announced Molly's arrival. "She's here, sis. Gotta go."

"Hey," Jill said, her voice gentler, "you know I love you and want you to be happy, right?"

"Yeah, I know. I love you too."

He laid his cell on the island and headed for the door. Molly stood on the other side, wearing dark jeans and a sweater almost the same color as the sexy bluish-green lingerie she'd worn Saturday.

She smiled. "Hi."

Taking her hand, he pulled her through the doorway and directly into his arms. "Hi back." He covered her lips with his in a long, deep kiss. She sighed softly, wrapped her arms around his neck and returned his kiss.

When Julian lifted his head, he was pleased to see her eyes luminous with desire. He whisked his thumb across her cheek. "That was nice."

"Yes, it was."

"Think we should do it again?"

"I think we should do it a *lot*."

Julian smiled. "I do like the way you think."

He kissed her again, sliding his tongue along the seam of her lips before venturing inside her mouth. Molly's lips parted, her tongue touched the tip of his. He tilted his head and deepened the kiss, his tongue sliding in and out of her mouth the way his cock would soon slide in and out of her pussy.

Julian hadn't planned to put lovemaking before dinner. His hormones had other ideas. Scooping Molly up in his arms, he carried her down the hall to his bedroom.

He'd turned on one lamp when he'd come home from work. It filled the room with soft light. Julian placed Molly in the middle of his bed and stretched out beside her. He ran his fingers through her hair, caressed her cheek with his thumb. "I didn't plan to jump you the moment you stepped into my apartment."

"I'm not complaining, am I?"

Julian chuckled. "No." He caressed her cheek again, passed his thumb across her lips before he kissed her. She tasted of mint and woman...an intoxicating combination. Julian slid his hand down her back, across her butt, then beneath her sweater to cradle her breast. Her nipple pebbled beneath his stroking fingers.

"I need to be inside you," he whispered.

"I need that too."

Rising to his knees, he pulled Molly into a sitting position. He tugged off her sweater and tossed it to the end of the bed. She wore another lacy bra, this time in a dark ivory. He ran his fingertips over the top of the soft mounds.

"God, I love your breasts."

"They're too small."

"No. They're perfect."

To prove his point, Julian unfastened the front hook and opened his mouth over one rosy tip. Molly arched her back and released a loud moan. The sound of pleasure encouraged him to suck harder. He stopped only long enough for Molly to jerk off his polo shirt before returning to her firm nipple.

He groaned when Molly clasped his cock through his pants. "You. Naked. Now."

Not wanting to argue with a lady, Julian gave Molly one more thorough kiss, then stood and shucked off his pants, briefs and socks. He straightened to see Molly wiggling out of her pants. The sight of her skimpy bikini panties made his shaft jerk. She wore the sexiest lingerie he'd ever seen.

He grabbed a condom packet from the nightstand drawer and tore it open. After he'd sheathed himself, he joined Molly on the bed in time to help her slide her panties down her legs. He tossed them to the end of the bed with her sweater.

Her rapid breathing and the glistening flesh between her thighs told Julian she was as eager as he to become one. Hooking her knees over his arms, he glided his cock into her wet pussy.

“Oh yessssssss.” Molly arched her neck and closed her eyes. “You feel so good.”

An understatement if he’d ever heard one. Being inside Molly had to be heaven on earth. He began to move, thrusting all the way to his balls and pulling back until only the head remained buried in her sheath.

“Play with your breasts.”

Those beautiful green eyes flared. She cupped the small mounds and pushed them together. Her thumbs flicked the nipples.

“That’s the way.” Julian moved faster, thrust harder. “Tug on your nipples. Oh yeah, like that. Looks so good.”

Molly kneaded her breasts, twisted the tips. Her eyes slid closed, her lips parted. The obvious pleasure on her face urged Julian to thrust even harder. He released one of her legs so he could rub her swollen clit. Molly’s breathing hitched. She released her breasts and clutched his shoulders. That bite of her fingernails sent desire surging through his body. Sweat broke out on his forehead, his heart pounded in his ears. He didn’t want to come until Molly did, but he didn’t know how to stop it.

His climax crested when Molly threw back her head and keened. Her pussy squeezed his cock, milking it as his orgasm rushed up and down his spine, down his legs and back up to his balls. With a loud groan, he lay on top of her, bracing himself on his elbows.

Her warm breath coasted over his neck and shoulder. Her heart beat rapidly against his chest. Sex had been fast and furious, but apparently Molly had needed it that way as much as he. Long, slow lovemaking sessions were wonderful, but sometimes plain ol’ fucking worked.

Like now.

Julian kissed his way down Molly's chest until he could lick her nipple. It pebbled beneath his tongue. "Mmm, you have delicious nipples. Have I told you how much I love your breasts?"

"Even though they're small? Don't most men like big breasts?"

"Big, small or anywhere in between. Men like breasts. Period." He drew a circle around her areola. "You aren't happy with your size?"

Molly shrugged. "I've always wished they were bigger."

"Why? Do you think bigger breasts would make you sexier? You're one of the sexiest women I've ever met. That has nothing to do with the size of your breasts."

A blush filled her cheeks as she smiled. "Thank you."

"Just telling the truth." He slid his hand down to her pussy. "But I'll be happy to prove how sexy you are, if you'd like."

She drew in a sharp breath when he began to massage her clit. "Yes, I'd like that very much."

* * * * *

Molly's stomach gurgled. She'd been hungry when she arrived at Julian's apartment. Now, after two intense lovemaking sessions, she was famished.

"Your stomach is growling in my ear," Julian said, his voice muffled. He lay with his cheek on Molly's tummy.

"That's because you jumped me instead of feeding me."

He lifted his head, his eyebrows raised in a gesture that said he didn't believe what she'd said. "I don't remember hearing any complaints. In fact, you made it a point to tell me you weren't complaining about the jumping."

"I wasn't then. I am now. I'm hungry."

He chuckled, then kissed her tummy. "Okay, I'll feed you." He rose to his knees and helped her to a sitting position. "We need to build our strength back up for later."

"Should I expect a round three?"

Cradling her cheeks in his hands, he gave her a hard, smacking kiss. "Absolutely."

Her legs too weak to support her yet, Molly fell back on the bed after he disappeared into his bathroom. She'd had more orgasms with Julian these past few days than in the entire year. She felt so comfortable with him, so free, that it was easy to let go and simply experience everything happening in her body.

She could quickly become addicted to Julian.

He came out of the bathroom. "Hey, you're still naked."

"You say that as if it's a bad thing."

"No way." Sitting on the bed next to her hip, he braced his hands on either side of her and grinned wickedly. "I'd keep you naked all the time you're here, but you might get cold."

"My feet definitely would."

"Yeah, I noticed that. What's with the cold feet?"

"Just part of my charm."

"I guess I can live with that, since you're warm in so many other places." He drew over her smooth mound with one fingertip. "Have you always shaved your pussy?"

"Only for about a year. That's the result of a bet between my sister and me. We got pretty plastered one night and Shawna bet me that I wouldn't shave. I proved her wrong."

"You certainly did. What did you win?"

"She had to pay for a manicure, pedicure and massage. Really pissed her off. She wanted to win the bet so I'd have to pay for all that."

Julian chuckled. "And you kept shaving after the bet?"

"Yeah. I like it this way."

"Me too." He leaned over and dropped a soft kiss on her mound. "So when do I get to meet Shawna?"

"She's asked me a couple of times when she's going to meet you. Maybe you could come for dinner over the weekend?"

"I can do that. It's time to find out if you can cook."

"I can't do Italian like you but my corned beef and cabbage is magnificent."

He chuckled again while he continued the slow caress on her mound. "I'd like you to meet my family too."

Meeting family seemed like something a guy and gal did only when they became an official couple. Molly knew she was falling in love with Julian, even though she had no intention of telling him yet. They hadn't known each other two weeks. It was much too soon to think about anything beyond learning all about each other.

He slipped his thumb between her legs and brushed her clit. "Will you be with your family on Thanksgiving?"

The automatic negative response sprang to Molly's lips, but she didn't say it. Instead she focused on his stroking. "Are you starting round three?"

Julian shook his head. "I'm just touching you while we talk."

If she could get him focused on sex, he'd forget all about her family and Thanksgiving. "Starting round three works for me."

He moved his hand from her mound and laid it on her thigh. "Why don't you want to talk about your family?"

She saw nothing but compassion and a gentle curiosity in his eyes. Getting to know each other's families was part of learning about each other. Yet Molly was afraid if she told Julian about her parents, that compassion would change to pity. She didn't want pity from anyone.

"Are your parents still alive?" he asked, his voice soft and soothing.

Molly pushed herself to a sitting position and leaned against the headboard. Apparently he wasn't going to give up. "My father was killed in a car accident when I was eight. My mother lives in Everett."

"Are you close to her?"

Molly shook her head. "No." She drew her knees to her chest and wrapped her arms around them. "Mom started drinking when Daddy died. It was her way of getting through the grief. It was more important to her to have a bottle of bourbon than take care of her daughters, who were hurting just as much as she was."

"She's an alcoholic?"

"That's what Shawna says. I don't know if she's an alcoholic or just a drunk."

"If she's been drinking heavily for the last eighteen years, she definitely has a problem. She needs professional help."

"She hasn't been open to that suggestion." Chuckling without humor, Molly pushed her hair back from her face. "The last time I mentioned her getting help, she rewarded my suggestion with a hard slap."

His eyes widened in shock. "She hit you?"

"Yeah. Before that, we had shouting matches. Loud ones, but there was never anything physical. The slap proved to me she has no desire to get help or be a mother. I haven't seen her in almost a year. That's fine with me."

Her voice broke on the last word. Molly quickly blinked to fight back the tears that were trying to form in her eyes. She would *not* cry over her mother, and especially not in front of Julian.

"If it was fine with you," he said, caressing her cheek, "you wouldn't be trying so hard not to cry."

The man was entirely too smart. Molly lifted her chin, determined to show Julian that she was a grown woman who didn't have to run to her mommy for coddling. "I don't need her."

"You're a strong, independent woman, Molly, but we all need our mothers. No matter what happens, that's a bond that can never be broken. Cracked maybe, but not broken."

The damn tears flooded her eyes again. "Can we not talk about this anymore?"

"Sure." Still caressing her cheek, he kissed her tenderly. "Are you ready to eat?"

Molly nodded. Doing something normal like eating would help get her mind off her mother and back on Julian.

"How would you like to try my mom's cannelloni with marinara sauce and tiramisu for dessert? All homemade, of course."

In answer to his question, her stomach growled loudly. Julian laughed. "I'll take that as a yes."

"I'm easy."

He bobbled his eyebrows. "Easy is very good."

Just like that, he made her feel like laughing again. "I mean about food."

"Oh. Darn."

His little boy grin earned him a kiss. "Any chance you have a robe I can borrow so I don't have to get dressed again?"

"Yeah, I can manage that."

He crossed the room to his closet and returned with a navy blue terry cloth robe. One look at the threadbare garment and Molly knew it had hung in Julian's closet for years. "You obviously haven't shopped for a robe in a long time."

"Don't pick on my robe." Julian slipped on his pants. "It's old, but comfortable."

Molly tied the belt around her waist and slid her hands into the pockets. Her left hand didn't stop. She wiggled her fingers at him from the bottom of the pocket. "I take it you don't do a lot of mending."

"Be nice to me or I won't lend you any socks for your cold feet."

"If that's the case, then this is the most comfortable robe I've ever worn."

He tilted up her chin and dropped a soft kiss on her lips. "That's better."

Molly donned the socks Julian gave her while he pulled his polo over his head. He held her hand and led her to the kitchen. She chose the stool at the center island that had become her spot. "Can I help?"

"Not this time. Everything is done. I just have to pop a couple of things in the microwave." He removed a glass baking dish from the refrigerator. Molly got a glimpse of the cannelloni before Julian placed the dish in the microwave. "Want a glass of wine?"

"Yes, please."

Julian had removed the cork from a bottle of Chardonnay when there was a knock on the front door. "Are you expecting someone?" Molly asked.

"No. It might be Ellen from down the hall. She borrows things."

This was the first Molly had heard of someone named Ellen. "What kind of things does she borrow?"

"Flour, sugar, stuff like that. She bakes a lot." He laid the corkscrew on the island. "Be right back."

Molly grabbed his arm as he walked past her. "Should I be jealous?"

A gleam of humor lit Julian's eyes. "I think I might like that."

Before Molly could form a sharp reply, he kissed her. "Ellen is old enough to be my grandmother." He gave her breast a quick squeeze. "But I do think I like you being jealous."

Molly swatted at his butt, but he was too quick for her to connect with his flesh. She turned on her stool and faced the front door so she could see this grandmotherly neighbor of Julian's.

A gray-haired older woman didn't stand on the other side of the door. Instead a buff, blond-haired hunk stood there. He smiled at Julian. "Hey, man."

Julian seemed to freeze in place. Several seconds passed before he said one word.

"Lane."

Chapter Nine

It seemed to Molly that Julian took much longer than necessary to step back and invite the blond into the apartment. At the other man's friendly greeting, Molly had assumed he and Julian were good friends. Julian wasn't acting that way. He almost seemed... dismayed to have the man here.

"Lane, this is Molly Ross. Molly, Lane Edison."

"Hi, Molly," Lane said with a smile. "It's nice to meet you."

"Hi," she said, also smiling. She would swear the temperature in the room had shot up twenty degrees with two gorgeous hunks so close to her. She had to fight the urge to fan her face.

"Lane is in the Navy." Julian turned from Molly to the blond. "Are you on leave?"

"Until January 2nd."

"You still a lieutenant?"

"No, I'm a lieutenant commander now."

"That's great. Congratulations on the promotion."

Molly decided now was a good time to slip from the room to dress so the two friends could talk. She slid off her stool. "If you guys will excuse me, I'll be right back."

"Hey, Molly, I'm sorry," Lane said. "I didn't mean to butt in on your and Julian's evening."

"No, it's fine. You two haven't seen each other in a while. You must have a lot to catch up on. Trust me, I won't stay quiet for long. I'll get in my say over dinner." She looked at Julian. "Lane is staying for dinner, right?"

Julian blinked, as if the idea had never crossed his mind. "Yeah. Sure. Of course."

Not exactly an enthusiastic response. But perhaps Julian was as disappointed as she that their evening together had been changed. Still, she wouldn't be selfish. She'd have Julian all to herself once they went to bed.

"I expect everything to be on the table when I get back," she said to Julian.

He grinned and saluted her. "Yes, ma'am!"

Lane chuckled as he watched the fiery redhead disappear down the hall. "She's cute." He turned back to Julian. "I see you still have that ratty robe."

"Yeah." All evidence of humor faded from Julian's face. "You want a glass of wine or a beer?"

"Whatever you and Molly are having."

Silently, Julian took another wineglass from the cabinet. Lane could feel the tension flowing off his friend. Julian had asked the right questions and made the appropriate responses about Lane's time in the Navy, but Lane could tell his friend was simply making idle conversation. Maybe he should've called first instead of just dropping in, but he'd been afraid Julian would refuse to see him. Their friendship before he left for Europe had morphed into something different, something neither of them had foreseen.

It had been the most intense, satisfying time in Lane's life.

Julian splashed Chardonnay into three glasses. "How did you find me?"

Lane thought that a dumb question, considering both of them were in computer security and knew how to find out practically anything. Yet he hadn't gone into any personal files. He'd found Julian the honest way. "I went to see your parents. Your mom gave me your address and phone number."

With a nod, Julian handed one glass to Lane. He took a long sip of the cold liquid. "Good."

"Molly brought it."

"She has good taste." He couldn't help but notice how Julian avoided looking directly into his eyes. "So are you two serious?"

Julian sipped his wine before answering. "We haven't known each other long, but I'm hoping it'll turn into something serious."

"You're ready for the white picket fence and the two-point-five kids?"

Now Julian looked at Lane. "Yeah, I am."

Which leaves me completely out of the picture. Lane took another long sip of his wine. Maybe that was a good thing, since Lane was confused about what he wanted in a relationship. He'd grown up thinking he'd marry and have kids someday. Getting involved with Julian had changed his beliefs, his desires...everything he'd always thought a relationship should be.

Everything he'd always thought about himself.

"If you'll set the table," Julian said, taking plates out of the cupboard, "I'll get dinner finished."

"Sure." He almost said he wouldn't stay for dinner since he hadn't been officially invited, but changed his mind. Maybe if he stayed, he'd have the chance to talk to Julian without worrying about Molly walking in on them any moment.

Hoping to ease the tension a bit, Lane tried joking with Julian. "I hope this is your mom's cooking and not yours."

"Hey, I'm a great cook."

Lane placed the plates on the table and went back into the kitchen for silverware. "Since when?"

"I've had a lot of practice in the year you've been gone."

"I can vouch for that," Molly said, walking into the kitchen. "He made this incredible chicken dish the first time I came to dinner. It was delicious."

Lane's gaze quickly passed over Molly. He approved of the way her sweater and jeans fit her slim body. "He used to burn a lot of food," he said to her.

"I had a shitty stove that didn't work right."

Lane winked at Molly. "Always an excuse."

She grinned at him. Lane thought her adorable, and completely different from the women Julian had dated in the past. She had incredible red hair, sparkling green eyes and a scattering of freckles across her nose and cheeks. He wouldn't describe her as drop-dead gorgeous, but very pretty.

The tickle of awareness led to an image in his mind of the one time he and Julian had shared a woman. He'd dated Claire several times when he'd invited her and Julian to dinner at his apartment so his best friend could meet his new girlfriend. He hadn't planned for the evening to end up with the three of them in bed. A little too much wine, a little too many sexual innuendoes, and clothes began to come off.

Claire had been wild, wanting to fuck both of them again and again and again. Lane doubted if his cock had ever been as hard in his life. He'd come so many times, he'd lost count. He'd been so into fucking Claire that he hadn't paid attention to the many times he'd touched Julian, their slick bodies sliding together. It didn't seem to bother his friend if his hand passed over a hard dick or tight balls while positioning Claire for deeper penetration.

Then the next morning, after Claire left...

"Lane, you want a refill?"

Julian's question brought Lane back to the present. He looked at Julian to see him holding up the bottle of Chardonnay. "Yeah. Thanks."

Lane waited a moment until both Julian and Molly were occupied, then discreetly adjusted his hardening rod to a more comfortable position. He had to forget about what happened between Julian and him the next morning—and the four months after that—or he'd embarrass himself with a raging hard-on.

After Molly and Julian had chosen their chairs at the table, Lane took the one on Julian's left. He lifted his wineglass. "To old friends," he said, looking at Julian before switching his attention to Molly. "And to new ones."

Julian gathered up the dessert saucers and carried them to the sink. Molly and Lane continued their conversation as he went back to the table for the rest of the dirty dishes. The three of them had talked and laughed all through dinner and dessert. Once he'd gotten over the shock of seeing Lane again, he'd forced himself to relax and try to act normal. He and Lane had been best friends before the *ménage* with Claire changed everything in their relationship.

He'd always wondered if things would have progressed as they had if not for that time with Claire.

A warm hand between his shoulder blades made him turn his head. Molly stood next to him, a perplexed look on her face. "Are you okay?"

"Sure. Why?"

"You were staring out the window, a thousand miles away."

"Was I?"

"He's probably waiting for me to leave so he can be alone with his girl." Lane grinned and stood. "I can take a hint, Forrest."

"Hey, man, I didn't say —"

"You didn't have to. It's okay. I should be heading to Olympia anyway. I told my mom I'd be back before midnight."

Lane brought his coffee mug into the kitchen and set it on the cabinet next to the sink. Julian suddenly realized that even with all the talking they'd done over dinner, he had no idea where Lane would be stationed now. "You headed back to Europe after your leave?"

"Nope. I'll be in Bremerton."

Which was where he'd been stationed before he went to Europe. Once again, Lane would be close to Julian.

He wasn't sure how he felt about that.

"I gave up my apartment when I went to Europe," Lane said. "My new one won't be ready until the tenth. I'm staying with my mom until then."

Molly smiled. "I'm sure she loves that."

"Yes and no. She's been dating a guy lately and my presence is cramping her style."

Julian chuckled. Lane's mother had been divorced for a long time. He was glad to hear she'd met someone who might be special to her.

"Thanks for dinner." Lane drew Julian into a back-slapping hug, then faced Molly. "Nice to meet you, Molly."

"You too."

"I'll call you," Lane said to Julian.

Julian nodded. He watched Lane walk to the door and leave. Part of the energy in the room left with him.

"He's nice," Molly said as she set more dishes on the cabinet.

"Yeah. We've been friends for a long time."

"Hmmm."

Julian paused while placing a plate in the dishwasher and looked at Molly over his shoulder. "What's that mean?"

"What's what mean?"

"That 'hmmm'."

Molly shrugged. "It didn't seem as if you missed him or anything. I mean, you said you've been friends for a long time and he was gone for a year. I expected more..." She stopped.

Julian straightened and faced her. "More what?"

"I don't know. Teasing. Making fun of each other. Stuff guys do."

She was way too observant. And right. Normally Julian would do exactly what Molly said with a friend he hadn't seen in a year. There would be playful punches to

the arm, maybe a friendly slap to the head. Other than the one brief hug when Lane left, Julian had been careful not to touch his friend.

Touching him would bring back all those memories of fucking him.

Unsure of how to respond to Molly's comment, Julian returned to loading the dishwasher. Instead of trying to figure out how to respond, he decided to change the subject. "Do you work tomorrow?"

"From one to closing."

"Wednesday?"

"The same."

"I get off at noon Wednesday. I thought I'd head to Bremerton then." He closed the dishwasher door, set the timer and faced Molly again. "Come with me."

Her eyes widened in surprise. "What?"

"I want you to meet my family and I want them to meet you. I'll wait until you get off work Wednesday and pick you up. We can head for Bremerton then, or wait until Thursday morning if that would be better for you."

"Wait a minute." She held up a hand, palm toward him. "I can't meet your family."

"Why not?"

"Well...because."

While Julian knew that was a perfect reason to a woman, it didn't work for him. "Because why?"

"Julian, we only met a week ago."

"What does that have to do with spending Thanksgiving with my family?"

She twisted her hands together and bit her bottom lip. "I don't want anyone to think I'm...pushy."

There was no way anyone could ever think Molly pushy. He took her hands, lifted them to his mouth and kissed each palm. "I know we only met a week ago, but I care for you. A lot. I know you don't have any plans for Thanksgiving and I don't want you

to be alone." He allowed a grin to turn up the corners of his mouth. "And if you think my mom's cannelloni is good, wait until you taste her turkey and dressing."

His teasing earned him the chuckle he'd hoped to get from her. He kissed her palms again. "So? Will you go with me?"

Her smile lit up the entire room. "Yes."

Chapter Ten

Julian collapsed another cardboard box and stacked it next to the front door with the others. Only two more boxes and he'd finally have everything unpacked.

Since Molly had to work today and he didn't have to be back at work until Monday, Julian decided this would be a good day to get the rest of his stuff organized. Normally he would've stayed over at his parents' house, but he and Molly had come home last night on the nine o'clock ferry since she had to be at Nordstrom early this morning.

He chuckled when he thought about how his mother had hovered over Molly. She'd been wonderful, doing everything she could to make Molly feel welcome and wanted. A prior warning to his parents and Jill about Molly's uncomfortable relationship with her mother meant they all avoided talking about Molly's past, focusing on Julian instead. He wouldn't have been surprised if his mother had gotten out the family scrapbooks she faithfully updated. That would've been really embarrassing.

Molly had glowed all day with the attention from everyone in his family. It made Julian feel good to know he'd given her something that brought her such joy.

Without Molly to occupy his time, tackling the household stuff seemed like the smart thing to do. Not exactly fun, but smart. Once those last two boxes were unpacked, he'd have a clean guestroom. Jill could stay overnight with him if she wanted to take a break from her sons.

Or Lane could spend the night with him.

Julian pushed that thought from his mind as quickly as it had formed. Lane would not be staying over for any reason...not in his guestroom, and especially not in his bed. He wanted Lane as a friend, but nothing more.

His cell phone rang. Julian unclipped it from his belt, assuming it would be Molly. She'd said she'd try to call him on her break. An unfamiliar number stared back at him when he looked at the display. The 360 area code proved it was someone in western Washington calling, but he had no idea who.

He pressed the button to accept the call. "Hello."

"Hey. It's Lane."

Julian's heart jumped up in his throat before settling in the pit of his stomach. "Hey."

"I thought maybe we could have lunch, if you aren't busy."

Julian looked at the two boxes on the guestroom floor. He could easily say he was busy and they'd have to get together another time. He blew out a breath. That would be stupid. It would be better to see Lane now and settle things between them.

"Lunch sounds good."

"Great." Julian thought he heard relief in Lane's voice "Do you want to meet somewhere? I don't know Seattle that well, but I have GPS in my SUV."

Going to a restaurant would be silly when Julian had so much food from Thanksgiving that his mother had sent home with him. Besides, it would be easier to talk in private. "I have leftovers, unless you got enough turkey and dressing yesterday."

"I'll always take leftovers if it's your mom's cooking. What time?"

"Twelve thirty?"

"I'll be there."

Julian pressed the button to end the call. He and Lane hadn't addressed what had happened between them before Lane went to Europe. Even though he was apprehensive about seeing Lane again, it would be good for them to talk and clear the air once and for all.

* * * * *

Molly propped her feet on the chair to her left. "The recession is officially over."

Shawna popped a potato chip in her mouth. "And you know this how?"

"Every woman in the Metroplex came to Nordstrom this morning. My feet already hurt and I have another four hours to work."

"You need nourishment." She unwrapped a thick chicken salad sandwich and divided it onto two paper plates. "Eat."

"Thanks." Molly took a huge bite and moaned in pleasure. "Mmm, good." She looked at Shawna's plate as she sipped her iced tea. "Where's the pickle?"

"I hate pickles, you know that."

"I don't. You could've gotten one and given it to me."

"Nuh-uh. It would've touched my food." Shawna shivered. "Yuck."

Molly chuckled. She'd never known anyone who hated pickles as much as her sister.

She took another bite of her sandwich and ate a couple of chips before Shawna spoke again. "Are you going to ask me?"

"Ask you what?"

"About Thanksgiving."

Molly had avoided talking to Shawna last night about what had happened with their mother. While she'd loved the time she'd spent with Julian's amazing family, a big part of her had felt guilty because she hadn't gone to Everett with Shawna.

Shawna's eyes glistened with tears. "It was awful, Mol. She was already drunk when I got there. She microwaved a couple of frozen turkey dinners and tossed them on the table. That was lunch. I couldn't eat a bite. I don't think she did either. She was too busy drinking to eat."

Molly laid the rest of her sandwich on the saucer. She couldn't possibly eat another bite now. "What did you do?"

"I left after an hour and went to Aunt Dora's. Mom begged me not to go, but I couldn't stay there and watch her stumble over everything."

Thank God for Aunt Dora. She and Uncle Dewey had always been there for them when things got too horrible at home. Aunt Dora had grieved for the loss of her brother, but she hadn't turned to a bottle. Instead she'd taken care of her two nieces who had lost their mother when they lost their father.

Shawna wiped a tear from her cheek. "I don't think I can go back, Mol. I can't stand to see her like that."

"Did you tell her that?"

She shook her head.

"You should. I've told her how I feel. Maybe if you tell her you won't see her again unless she gets some help with her drinking, that'll be the final straw for her."

"Maybe." Shawna swished her straw through her Coke. "She asked about you, more than once."

"What did you tell her?"

"That you were with friends. She'd nod as if she understood me, then ask me again ten minutes later where you were."

Despite her best efforts, tears tightened Molly's throat. She didn't want to care about her mother. Her heart had other ideas.

"I'm sorry, Mol. I shouldn't have said anything. Let's talk about something else. Tell me about your time with Julian's family. Did you have fun?"

Molly nodded. "It was wonderful. They were so friendly. His mother hugged me when we met." She popped another potato chip in her mouth and chewed. "I'll admit I had this mental picture of Julian's mother. I thought since she's such an incredible cook, she'd be petite and almost as round as tall."

"And she wasn't?"

"Not even close. The woman is stunning. She's about five-seven with an incredible body. She could pass for Sophia Loren's cousin. I would've felt completely dumpy beside her if she hadn't been so friendly."

"Does Julian look like her?"

Molly wiggled her mouth from side to side as she mentally compared Julian to his parents. "He has her eyes and nose. I'd say his smile is his father's. Julian is the same height and build as his dad."

"Am I ever going to meet Julian?"

"Yes. I invited him over for dinner this weekend. I'm thinking of Sunday night since I get off at four and don't have to work Monday."

Shawna propped one elbow on the table and rested her head on her fist. "I'm excited to meet the guy who put such a sparkle in your eyes. You've been so happy since you met Julian."

Thinking about him sent warmth all through Molly's body. "He's the best. It all happened so fast with us, but I think he cares for me as much as I care for him."

"Do you love him?"

"I don't want to use the L word yet and jinx anything. But I do think we're on our way to something very special." Her appetite now back, Molly picked up her sandwich. "I feel as if nothing can possibly go wrong for us."

* * * * *

Julian had told himself it would be good to talk to Lane, get things settled between them. Knowing that didn't keep him from feeling apprehensive when he heard Lane's knock.

He took a deep breath, wiped his hands on his thighs and opened the door.

Lane stood on the other side, dressed in a formfitting brown T-shirt and faded jeans. He smiled. "Hey."

"Hey." Julian opened the door wider and stood aside. "Come in."

Lane walked into the room. Julian's gaze dropped to his friend's ass in the tight jeans. He still had a fine ass...

"So where's the turkey and dressing?" Lane asked as he turned to face Julian.

"In the microwave, ready for me to hit the start button."

"Good." He rubbed his hands together. "Bring on your mom's cooking."

Julian headed for the kitchen. "I have green bean casserole, candied yams and homemade rolls too. And pumpkin pie, of course."

"I love your mother. Think she'd marry me?"

"I think you'd have to fight my dad for her."

"I could do that." Lane slid onto one of the stools at the kitchen island. "I really like your dad and I'd hate to hurt him, but all's fair in love and war."

Julian chuckled. This was the Lane he remembered before Claire had turned their world upside down...funny, teasing, always happy. Both men and women had loved to be around Lane because he was so much fun. He'd had more friends than he could probably count.

"Want a beer?" Julian asked after he started the microwave.

"Yeah."

Julian pulled two bottles from the refrigerator. He wasn't sure where to start the conversation. He couldn't jump into what had happened between them without some kind of lead-in.

"Did Molly go with you yesterday?" Lane asked as he twisted the cap off his beer.

"Yeah. She wasn't going to at first, but I convinced her I really wanted her to meet my family."

"And they loved her."

Julian nodded. "Even my nephews. I'm sure the fact that she helped them put together the puzzle they were working on had nothing to do with it."

Lane looked into Julian's eyes as he took another sip of beer. "What about you? You love her?"

The microwave dinged. Julian removed the dish of turkey and dressing and placed more food inside to be warmed. "I think it's too soon to talk about love."

"It isn't too soon if that's the way you feel."

Julian grabbed plates, silverware and napkins and set them on the island by his friend. "I like her a lot, Lane. She's fun and cute and sexy. It's easy to talk to her. That's important to me. No matter how good the sex is, a couple has to be able to talk to each other."

"Yeah, that's true." Lane rolled the beer bottle between his hands. "You're lucky to find someone you care about."

"I had to move to Seattle to do it." Julian placed the last dish of food on the island, then sat on the other stool next to Lane. "You didn't meet any hot babes in Europe?"

"Oh yeah. Lots of hot babes around." Lane took half of the turkey and dressing and passed the dish to Julian. "But I spent most of my time on the ship. Not a lot of chances to find Ms. Right when you're surrounded by guys."

The question had to be asked. "So you're still searching for Ms. Right?"

"Yeah." Lane looked at him. "I'll be honest with you, Julian. I tried sex with a couple of guys in Europe. After what happened between us... I thought maybe I'd be happier with a guy than a gal. Nope. Didn't work out at all." He chuckled as he spooned yams onto his plate. Julian thought he saw a hint of red creep into Lane's tan cheeks. "*Literally* didn't work at all the second time."

Julian winced. He'd never had a problem getting a hard-on, but he could sympathize with his friend. "Ouch."

"Yeah, that was pretty embarrassing. I decided right then that I'd better stick with girls." He grinned and bobbled his eyebrows. "Never had a problem with them."

Julian laughed. The laughter dissolved the tension inside him. Perhaps he and Lane could fall back into their friendship and push aside what happened between them for those four months.

Lane regaled him with tales of his time onboard ship and in Europe while they finished lunch. By the time they ate their slices of pumpkin pie, Julian was sure things would go back to the way they were between Lane and him before the Claire incident.

Julian gathered up their dishes and carried them to the sink. "Want another beer?"

"I'll get it."

From the corner of his eye, Julian saw Lane rise from the stool. Instead of going to the refrigerator, he came to the sink and leaned against the cabinet next to Julian.

"We talked about all kinds of things over lunch, Julian, except the one thing we *should* talk about."

One simple sentence and the tension once again filled the area around them. Julian continued to rinse the dishes, hoping Lane wouldn't say what Julian feared he might.

Julian's hopes were dashed when Lane asked, "Are we going to talk about what happened between us?"

He turned off the water and faced his friend. "No."

Lane frowned. "Why not?"

"Because it's in the past. It doesn't need to be brought up again."

"Julian, we fucked for four months. I'd never been with a guy before you, and couldn't even get my dick hard with a guy after you. I want to know why I was so turned-on by you." He straightened from the cabinet, his fists clenched at his sides. "I want to know why, right now, I want to kiss you so much I can't think of anything else."

Julian didn't know what to say, especially since he felt the same way. He longed to take his friend in his arms again, kiss those full lips, stroke Lane's ass and cock.

Lane took a step closer. "Tell me what you're thinking."

He couldn't lie, not while staring into those pleading hazel eyes. "I'm thinking," he said, his voice husky, "I want that too."

Chapter Eleven

Lane took another step closer to Julian. He felt as if he were approaching a skittish animal. He could see the heat in Julian's eyes, yet he also saw trepidation. Julian desired him, but he didn't *want* to desire him.

Lane knew how Julian felt. He'd never understood what had happened between his best friend and him, how their friendship had exploded into such passion. For Lane, it had been more than passion. He'd fallen in love with Julian, yet had never told his friend for fear of scaring him away.

Lifting one hand, he ran his fingertip across Julian's cheek. His friend shivered and closed his eyes.

"It's still there, isn't it?" Lane said. "The feelings. The desire. All those things we tried to deny a year ago."

"Yeah, it's still there." Julian's voice sounded rough, raspy. He opened his eyes. "But it can't be. It isn't what I want."

"Isn't it?" Lane stepped closer until their bodies touched. Julian sucked in a sharp breath through his teeth when Lane pressed his cock against Julian's. "You're just as hard as I am. You can't deny that."

"No, I can't."

The short distance between their mouths disappeared when Lane leaned forward. Fire spread through his body at the touch of his lips to Julian's. Groaning deep in his throat, he cradled Julian's face and stroked his tongue along the seam. Julian parted his lips and Lane took immediate advantage, darting his tongue into his friend's warm mouth.

The kiss lasted only seconds before Julian jerked back. "Lane, stop. I *can't*. I'm with Molly now."

Hearing Molly's name was like a glass of cold water thrown in Lane's face. With a heavy sigh, he dropped his hands and stepped back so their bodies no longer touched. "So there's no hope for us? None at all?"

"Lane, I..." He stopped and looked down at the floor. "Shit," he muttered.

"Yeah, that's kinda how I feel." Lane ran his hand over his close-cropped hair. "I need another beer. Want one?"

"Sure."

Lane helped himself to two beers and handed one to Julian. He twisted off the cap and took a long swallow while trying to decide what to say. He understood why Julian had rejected him. That didn't keep it from hurting.

"Lane, what happened between us... It was very intense and a complete surprise. I'd never thought about fucking a guy. I don't know why it happened between us any more than you do."

"But it *did* happen, Julian, and it affected our friendship."

"No, man, we're still friends —"

"Not like we were. Hell, you barely acknowledged me the whole time I was gone. You didn't answer any more than three or four of my emails. I finally gave up writing to you since it was obvious you didn't want to hear from me."

Julian lowered his head again. "I shouldn't have been that way. I'm sorry." He lifted his head and Lane could see the regret in his eyes. "That was wrong of me. You were off serving our country and all I could think about was my own selfish needs. I wanted to be involved with a woman. I wanted to fall in love, get married, start a family. That wasn't going to happen with you."

Lane polished off his beer and set the empty bottle on the cabinet. "Where does this leave us?"

"Can't we go back to the way we were before the evening with Claire?"

Nice and tidy. Sweep four months under the rug and pretend they never happened. That would be the logical thing to do. But Lane couldn't do that. He couldn't close his eyes at night without seeing Julian's naked body. He couldn't fall asleep without remembering the taste of Julian's dick, or the way it had felt thrusting inside him. "I don't think things will ever be exactly the way they were between us before the evening with Claire."

"No, I guess not." Julian set his empty bottle next to Lane's. "I don't know what to do, Lane."

"Yeah, you do. You said you're with Molly now. She's a great gal. I hope I'm lucky enough to meet someone like her."

Julian's cell phone rang. Lane waited for Julian to answer it, but he made no move to do so. After the second ring, Lane said, "See who it is. It might be important."

Julian unclipped it from his belt and looked at the display. "It's Molly."

"Yep, definitely important." Lane forced a smile he didn't feel and gave Julian a playful slap on his upper arm. "Catch ya later."

"Lane, wait."

With a wave over his shoulder, Lane headed for the door. He came here today hoping for a chance to reconnect with his former lover. Since that wasn't a possibility, he had to get out of here before he did something really stupid...like beg for another chance.

Julian pressed the button to accept Molly's call. "Hello."

"Hi. Were you busy?"

He watched Lane walk out the door and close it softly behind him. His stomach clenched with unfulfilled longing and regret. The time with his friend hadn't ended at all the way he'd hoped it would.

"Julian?"

He snapped back to the present when he heard his name. "I'm sorry. Lane came over for lunch and I was telling him goodbye."

"Did you two eat all your mom's leftovers?"

"Guilty."

"Even the pie?"

"Yep."

"Damn it. I was hoping to snatch another piece."

Julian chuckled. Talking to Molly always made him feel good. "If you're extra special nice to me, maybe I'll bake a whole pumpkin pie for you."

"Define 'extra special nice'."

"Use your imagination."

"I'm a writer. I have an *incredible* imagination."

Julian grabbed a Coke from the refrigerator and popped the top. "You tell me you're a writer, but you haven't let me read anything you've written."

"You haven't asked me."

"I haven't? Well, I'm not very smart. I want to read one of your books."

"Maybe."

The little minx liked teasing him. He could hear the smile in her voice. "Do I have to be extra special nice to you to read your book?"

"I think that's a great idea."

Julian wandered into the living room and flopped down on the couch. "What do I have to do besides bake a pumpkin pie?"

"I'll get back to you on that, after I make my list."

"After you make your *list*?" he asked, trying not to laugh. "You plan to make me work, huh?"

"A gal has to take whatever she can get."

Images flashed through his mind of all the ways and positions they'd already made love. What they'd done wasn't a fraction of what he wanted to do with Molly. "Maybe I can give you some ideas for that list tonight."

"That's part of the reason I'm calling." All traces of humor disappeared from her voice. "I had lunch with Shawna and she's really down after her visit with Mom yesterday. She could use some cheering up. I thought maybe I could take her out to dinner and a movie."

Molly's obvious love and concern for her sister added to the reasons why Julian was growing to care so deeply for her. "Sounds like a good idea."

"Thanks for understanding. We're still on for tomorrow night, right?"

"Absolutely."

"And you're still coming over for dinner Sunday, right? We'll pop popcorn and watch a DVD after dinner and you two can get to know each other."

"Sounds great. I'll be there."

Her voice dropped to a husky whisper. "Maybe I'll drag you into my bedroom and have my way with you."

"Promise?"

She giggled. "I promise."

"Hey, since you aren't coming over tonight, I have a lot of free time. Email one of your books to me."

"Maybe."

"You're determined to be difficult, aren't you?"

"Anticipation makes the prize sweeter."

Julian decided right then that he had to do something outrageous with Molly in the bedroom the next time she came over, something that would make her come over and over.

His cock liked that idea a lot.

"I have to go back to work," she said.

"Okay. Call me later."

"I will. Bye."

Julian laid his phone on the end table and took a long swig of his Coke. Since Molly wasn't coming over, he didn't know what to do tonight. The meal he'd planned to prepare for her would be way too much for only him. After the huge lunch he'd eaten with Lane, he wouldn't be hungry for hours anyway.

He heard the beep from his phone that indicated a text message. Julian looked at the display to see the message was from Molly.

Shawna sending 3 chapters of 2nd book. My personal fave. Should be in your email soon. If you like I'll send more. If you hate please pretend you like. Authors are very neurotic.

He chuckled and replied with a simple K. He moved closer to the coffee table, pulled his laptop in front of him and waited for his mail program to load.

There were the usual junk messages along with real messages from Jill, his mom and some friends. Nothing from Shawna. He was about to open and read Jill's message when another popped into his inbox from sross444 with the subject of Molly's Book. He clicked to open it.

Hi Julian,

Molly asked me to forward the first 3 chapters of her book to you. It's a romantic suspense, heavy on the romance and sex. <wink> Seriously, she's a really good writer. I'm amazed when I read her stuff. It's incredible.

Looking forward to finally meeting you Sunday.

Shawna

Julian saved the attachment to his desktop, then leaned back with the computer on his lap. He opened the attachment and began to read. Sweat didn't break out on his upper lip until he got to the sex scene in chapter three.

Sarah closed her eyes when warm lips closed over her left nipple. She sighed softly. Henri always knew what she wanted, what she needed. She ran her fingers through his thick hair and arched her back, trying to get even more of her breast in his mouth.

A gentle lick on her right nipple made her open her eyes again. Jonathan smiled down at her.

"I can't let Henri have all the fun, can I?"

"No, of course not." She palmed her breast, lifting it closer to his mouth. "Suck me."

"Holy shit," Julian breathed. Molly was writing about a *ménage à trois*? How the hell did she know about that?

His cock jerked as he continued to read.

Sarah sighed again. Such wonderful lovers. Perfect lovers. So giving, so caring. So incredibly sexy.

A hard tug of Henri's mouth and Sarah arched her back again. She stretched her arms over her head and spread her legs, leaving her body completely open for whatever they wanted to do to her.

A hand drifted down her stomach. She didn't know whose hand touched her. It didn't matter. All that mattered was the pleasure flowing through her body.

One finger brushed her clit. Another dipped inside her pussy. Both men continued the attention to her nipples...licking, sucking, tugging. Her body grew hotter, the pleasure more intense. The feelings were so strong, it was impossible to keep her eyes open. They drifted closed when the first ripples of orgasm snaked through her womb.

"Jesus." Julian shifted on the couch and tugged on his fly, trying to give his hard rod more room. He'd never imagined his Molly could write so hot.

Several moments passed before Sarah had the strength to open her eyes. Henri and Jonathan were on their knees on either side of her, their hard cocks standing straight up. She wrapped her hands around them and began a slow milking motion.

"You know what I want," she whispered.

They leaned over her body until Henri's lips touched Jonathan's.

Julian hit the page down key, but nothing happened. He'd reached the end of the chapter.

"Molly, no! You can't leave me hanging there."

He closed the document and reopened it. The chapter still ended at the same spot.

"Well, shit."

Julian closed the laptop and set it on the coffee table. *So what does this mean? Does Molly have a fantasy about being with two guys at the same time...two guys who also have sex with each other? Or is it simply her imagination?*

It would be hot to watch another man touch Molly. Especially if that man was Lane.

Julian knew a writer used imagination in his or her books. He doubted if a mystery writer killed someone for research, or a paranormal writer had a heart-to-heart conversation with a vampire. Still, he couldn't help but wonder if some of Molly's own sexual fantasies were woven into her books. Maybe she wanted to be with two men at once. Maybe she wanted to watch two men kiss, touch, fuck.

There was only one way to know for sure — ask her.

First, he had to talk to Lane. Picking up his cell phone again, he scrolled through the numbers and pressed the call button.

Lane answered with a soft, "Hey."

“Hey. Listen, I’m sorry for the way things went today —”

“It’s okay. You’re with Molly. I accept that.”

He cared deeply for Molly. Part of that caring included pleasing her however he could. If she wanted to be with two men at once, he and Lane could arrange that.

The selfish part of him hoped she wanted a *ménage* because he longed to be with Lane again.

“Are you at your mom’s?”

“No, I’m still in Seattle. My mom’s fellow was coming over and I wanted to give her time with him.”

“Will you come back to my apartment? I have something I want you to see.”

“Yeah. I can be back there in about twenty minutes.”

“See you then.”

Julian ended the call. He blew out a long breath. He’d ask Lane to read the scene and find out what his friend thought of it. Then, if Lane agreed with him, he’d approach Molly about making one of her fantasies come true.

Chapter Twelve

Julian finished unpacking the last box, giving Lane time to read the chapters Julian had printed out from Molly's book. Lane had been surprised at Julian's request to read the chapters, but had agreed and settled onto the couch, manuscript pages in hand.

"Julian."

He carried the collapsed box into the living room and placed it next to the front door with the other boxes. Lane still sat on the couch, the pages on his lap. He looked up and smiled at Julian.

"Man, this is great. Molly's a fantastic writer. Where's the rest of it?"

"That's all she sent." He slipped his hands into the back pockets of his jeans. "What do you think of the sex scene?"

Instead of answering with words, Lane moved the pages from his lap. His hard cock pressed against his fly.

"Yeah, that's what I thought of it too." He rounded the coffee table and sat on the other end of the couch. "I don't know if that scene is strictly her imagination or based on fantasy."

"You think she wants to be with two guys?"

Julian shrugged. "I don't know, but I'm going to ask her. If she says yes, what do you think about being the second guy?"

Slowly, Lane straightened the pages and laid them on the coffee table. He remained leaning forward, his hands dangling between his knees. "Let me make sure I understand what you're asking me," he said, his gaze focused on the manuscript pages. "You told me there can't be anything between us again, yet you'll change your mind if Molly wants to fuck two guys at the same time."

Julian had never told his friend how he felt about him because he knew they'd have no future together. He had always been happy with women. More than anything, he'd wanted to meet the woman he could share his life with, one who would love him as much as he loved her. Their relationship was still new, but he thought he'd found that woman in Molly. He cared deeply for her.

That didn't mean he didn't also care for this man...and always would.

"I want you in my life, Lane. No matter what happens with Molly, I'll always care for you. If Molly decides she wants to be with both of us at once, I'll be very happy with her decision."

Lane held his gaze for several moments before he spoke again. "What if she doesn't want to go through with it?"

"I think she will." He gestured to the pages on the coffee table. "Molly loves sex. I think what she wrote is her fantasy, not just her imagination."

Lane leaned back on the couch. "You'll really be okay with Molly having sex with me?"

"I think it'll be hot."

Groaning, Lane shifted on the couch. "Hell, man, I'm getting another hard-on."

Julian grinned. "I guess that means you wouldn't mind having sex with Molly."

"Hell no. She's a fox. I'd like to kiss every freckle on her body."

"She's coming over tomorrow for dinner and to spend the night. That would be a good time for me to talk to her."

"That would be a good time to go for the whole deal."

Lane was right. There was no reason for them to wait if Molly agreed to the *ménage*. "I think I should talk to her first before you come into the picture."

Lane rubbed his upper lip. "There's a seafood restaurant about two miles from here."

"The Chowder House."

"Yeah, that's the one. I'll have a drink in the bar. You talk to Molly, then call and tell me what she's decided. If she wants the *ménage*, I'll come over. If not, I'll go home."

"And you're okay with that?"

Lane nodded. "Yeah, I am. I told you on the phone earlier that I accept you're with Molly. I meant that. I'd prefer it to be different, but I understand why it can't be."

"Maybe it can. Maybe I can have both of you."

Lane's eyes flared with heat. "I'd like that," he said, his voice low.

Julian swallowed as his cock swelled. That selfish part of him rose up again, hoping Molly would say yes. Then he could have the two people in his life he cared about the most.

* * * * *

Molly ran her hands down her long skirt to be sure it flowed the way it should. Since she'd worked overtime yesterday, her supervisor had let her leave an hour early today. She'd hurried back to her apartment, showered and put on the multi-hued skirt and tomato red, long-sleeved blouse. Julian had told her he liked her in red.

He'd find even more red beneath her clothes. Getting off early meant she had time to dash by Lavender Lace and pick up a bra and thong set in almost the same shade as her blouse. She'd never worn a thong, but decided to try one after Julian's comment about loving her ass. If he loved it, it should be on display for him to see.

A delicious thrill shot through her body at that thought.

She straightened her shoulders and knocked on his door.

Mere seconds passed before the door opened. A slow, sexy grin spread over Julian's face as his gaze passed over her. "You look amazing."

Heat crept into her cheeks. She'd been as intimate with this man as a woman could be, yet she still blushed at his praise. "Thank you."

He held out one hand to her. "Come in."

She stepped over the threshold. Julian took her coat that she'd draped over her arm and tossed it on the back of the recliner. Her tote bag landed on the seat. With one tug, she was in his arms.

His kiss was slow, thorough, his tongue snaking across her lips and tickling the corners of her mouth. Molly felt as if every bone in her body dissolved. Rising on tiptoes, she wrapped her arms around Julian's neck and returned his passionate kisses.

Certain he would sweep her off her feet and carry her to his bed, it surprised her when he led her to the couch instead. Two glasses of red wine sat on the coffee table. He sat on the couch and tugged her down beside him. After handing her one of the glasses, he leaned back and pulled her into the circle of his arm.

"How was your day?" he asked before sipping his wine.

A disappointed sigh escaped her lips. She had so been hoping for the carry-her-down-the-hall routine. "Okay. Busy. I'm glad I have the next two days off."

"Me too." He nuzzled his nose against her temple. "It's nice that we have the same day off."

That thrill shot through her body again, followed by goose bumps rising on her skin. "Any idea how we could spend it?"

"I'll bet I can think of something."

Molly tilted her head on his shoulder to give him room to nip her neck. "Maybe we should continue this conversation in your bedroom."

"Sex before dinner?"

"Works for me."

His low chuckle sounded wicked. "I love how easy you are. But..." He took another sip of his wine. "We have something to talk about first."

"We do?"

"Yeah. I want to talk about your book."

"Oh." A completely different type of feeling flowed through her now – trepidation. Julian had hated her chapters. She knew it. That's why he hadn't said anything to her last night when she'd called after she and Shawna got home. He wanted to tell her in person, after a glass of wine, to soften the blow.

God, it hurt that he didn't like her writing.

"It's good, Molly. Really, really good."

She hadn't heard him correctly. He hadn't said her writing was good. She'd been so sure he wouldn't like it. Clutching her wineglass with both hands, she turned toward him and lifted her knees to the couch. "Are you serious? You liked it?"

The skin around his eyes crinkled with his smile. "I'm serious. I liked it. I think you're extremely talented."

"I told you authors are neurotic. Don't say you liked it if you didn't."

"I promise you, I liked it." He touched her hair, ran his fingers through the strands. "I do have a complaint."

She knew it was too good to be true. She braced herself for the criticism. "What?"

"That was a hell of a place to end the chapter."

Molly grinned. "A cliffhanger makes a reader want to turn the page and keep reading."

"I certainly did." He slid his hand beneath her hair and caressed her neck. "How do you know so much about a *ménage à trois*?"

"Research."

"What kind of research?"

"Reading other books, mostly. I've certainly never been involved in one."

"Would you like to?"

She almost responded with a firm "no", but stopped before she spoke. Julian's eyes had turned all smoky...the way they looked when he was becoming aroused. He

continued to caress her neck, slowly moving his thumb over the pulse point. She had no doubt he could feel her pulse galloping. "Why are you asking?"

"Because I want to know. Did you write that scene completely from your imagination or do you have a fantasy to be with two guys?"

Heat crept into her cheeks again and spread throughout her body. Her clit began a gentle throbbing. "I've...thought about it."

"What if I could make it happen?"

"Make it...happen?"

Julian nodded.

"You mean...you and me and...some guy?"

"Not just some guy. Lane."

"Lane?" He couldn't be serious. She barely knew Lane. Sure, he was a hunk, but she couldn't possibly have sex with him. "I couldn't have sex with Lane."

"Why not?"

"Well...because."

"You'll have to be more specific than that."

"Julian, I barely know Lane. I can't fall into bed with a guy I don't even know."

"He isn't attractive to you?"

"Well...yeah. He's handsome and has a great body, but I..." She stopped long enough to take a sip of wine. She pictured Lane in her mind. Oh yes, he had a really great body. More husky than Julian, about an inch taller, with those gorgeous hazel eyes, he exuded sex appeal. She'd thought that the moment she'd met him. If she wasn't involved with Julian, she would definitely be interested in dating Lane.

"You what?"

"I'm involved with *you*. I don't need anyone else."

"Need and want are two different things. If you want to be with two men, I'll make it happen for you."

Molly thought of the chapters she'd sent him, the ones that ended with her two male characters kissing. Surely Julian didn't mean he and Lane...

"You wouldn't... What I sent you... There was..."

Julian's eyebrows drew together in obvious confusion. "Maybe if you finished a sentence, I'd understand what you're trying to say."

She took another sip of wine. "The end of chapter three was the start of a scene between the two men."

"I know."

"You wouldn't...do anything with Lane." The thought was so ludicrous, Molly released a nervous laugh. "You aren't gay."

"No, I'm not." He drained his wineglass and set it on the end table. When he turned back to her, his eyes were serious. Molly swallowed. She didn't think she'd like whatever he was about to say.

"Sixteen months ago, Lane met a gal named Claire. She was blonde, beautiful and built. I hung with them a couple of times before Lane invited me to have dinner with him and her. My girlfriend and I had broken up a week earlier and I was feeling pretty down. Lane was determined to cheer me up. He opened two bottles of wine and we all proceeded to get drunk."

He leaned forward and clasped his hands together. "We kidded with each other and kept drinking and..." He blew out a breath. "Claire openly flirted with both of us. One thing led to another and we all ended up in bed."

Molly said nothing, sensing Julian had more to tell her.

"There were times when Lane and I...touched. It wasn't a big deal. When three people are having sex, it's almost impossible not to touch. The longer we were together, the more that touching affected me. I began to move into positions so Lane would have to touch me. He did the same thing."

He glanced at her, but quickly looked away again. "I heard Claire and Lane arguing the next morning. A few seconds after the front door shut, Lane came back in the bedroom. He was still naked."

Molly set her wineglass on the coffee table before she spilled the ruby liquid on her skirt. She clasped her trembling hands tightly together in her lap. Part of her wanted to scream at Julian to stop, that she didn't want to hear any more. Part of her knew she had to listen to every word.

"He stood at the side of the bed. I watched his cock get hard while he stared at me. Mine was already half hard from a typical morning erection." Julian cleared his throat. "He tugged the covers off me and took me in his mouth..."

"That's enough." Molly didn't need any more details. She'd heard enough to know Julian and Lane had started an affair...an affair that ended only because Lane had shipped out to Europe. Now that Lane had returned, Julian wanted his old lover back.

Once again, she'd tasted love only to have it snatched away from her.

Julian leaned back. Molly could feel him looking at her, but she refused to return his gaze. She was trying very hard not to burst into tears and looking at Julian would destroy that determination. She rose, walked to the recliner and gathered up her tote bag and coat.

"What are you doing?" he asked, an edge of panic in his voice.

"I'm leaving."

He was at her side before she made it three steps. Taking her arm, he turned her to face him. She kept her gaze focused in the center of his chest until he slipped one hand beneath her chin and lifted her face.

"Don't go."

His eyes were full of anguish and pleading. Molly almost softened, until she remembered that she'd been a temporary fill-in until his former lover returned. "You don't want me. You want Lane, and you're willing to use me in a *ménage* to have him."

"I'm not using you, Molly. I care about you."

"Not enough to completely forget Lane." Her voice broke on the last word. The tears would start flowing any moment.

"Sit down with me. Let's talk this out."

Unsure what she should do, she made no move toward the couch. Julian dropped a tender kiss on her lips. "Please?"

She relented, although she wasn't sure why. Julian took her hand and led her back to the couch. She sat while he went into the kitchen and brought back the bottle of wine. After splashing more into each of their glasses, he sat beside her.

"What happened with Lane was a complete surprise. I'd never been with a guy, never *thought* about being with a guy. It just...happened between us after the *ménage* with Claire." Julian swirled the wine in his glass. "Lane kissed me yesterday."

Molly winced. Now she knew how a dagger to the heart must feel.

"I pulled away from him, Molly. I told him I couldn't go back, that I'm with you now."

"Is that what you want?"

"Yes. More than anything, I want to be with you."

"But you still have feelings for Lane?"

He stared down into the ruby liquid in his glass, then took a long sip. "Yes," he said, gazing into her eyes. "I won't lie to you. I still have feelings for Lane. But my feelings for you are stronger. *You're* the one I want to be with, Molly."

She believed him. She could see the depth of emotion in his eyes. The band around her heart loosened. It disappeared when he kissed her.

He drew her into the circle of his arm again. Molly relaxed against Julian's side and sipped her wine. She'd almost walked out and lost the man she loved because she'd jumped to the wrong conclusion about him and Lane.

Julian and Lane, lovers. Molly wasn't repulsed by the idea of them together. In fact, she thought it was hot to imagine two men having sex. That's why she'd written the scene in her book, after reading a lot of books that included male/male sex. She'd always gotten turned-on when reading the scenes to the point where she had to take care of herself. Her pussy had never been so wet as after she'd read a male/male scene.

She pictured Julian and Lane together. Julian with his olive skin and Lane with his dark tan. Julian's long dark hair compared to Lane's short blond. Brown eyes to hazel. They would be a striking combination together...all those nice muscles and bare skin writhing together on Julian's blue sheets.

Molly shifted on the couch as her clit began to throb again. She could feel her pussy moistening, her nipples tingling. Her breathing deepened as she imagined Lane taking Julian's cock in his mouth, all the way to the balls.

God, she wanted to see that. After they both made her come.

"You okay?"

Heat rushed through her body. Molly gulped her wine. "Sure."

He kissed the top of her head. "I'll start dinner after I call Lane."

"Call Lane?"

"Yeah. He's in the bar at The Chowder House. I told him I'd call him after I talked to you about the *ménage*. Since that isn't happening, he can go home."

He reached for his cell phone on the coffee table. Before he scrolled to Lane's number, Molly laid her hand over his. "Wait."

Julian looked at her, but said nothing.

"What if... What if I changed my mind?"

He still said nothing, but his eyes narrowed slightly.

"What if I want to try the *ménage*? What if I want to watch you and Lane together?"

He leaned closer until she could see the smoky desire in his eyes. "Then I'd better call Lane and tell him to get here as fast as he can."

Chapter Thirteen

Molly sat on the couch, her damp palms clasped in her lap, her knees tightly together, when Julian answered the door to Lane's knock ten minutes later. Desire ran so hotly through her veins, she wondered if Julian could smell it from across the room.

She'd never expected to have one of her sexual fantasies come true, and especially not with two such handsome men.

Lane walked into the apartment. His gaze immediately zeroed in on her. He smiled as he walked toward her.

"Hi, Molly."

She swallowed to ease the dryness in her throat. "Hi."

Instead of sitting beside her on the couch, he sat on the coffee table in front of her. Their knees were no more than two inches apart.

"What do you want to drink, Lane?" Julian asked.

"Whatever you and Molly are having," he said, looking at her.

This close, she could see the gold specks in Lane's hazel eyes, along with the long, dark blond eyelashes. His lips were full and well-shaped, his nose straight, his cheekbones high. Put all those items together and they created an incredibly attractive man who could have any woman he wanted.

"Why are you doing this?"

Lane laid his hands on her knees. The warmth of his palms seeped through her skirt. "Because I read your chapters and want to fulfill your fantasy. You mean a lot to Julian and he's my friend. If I can help him please you, that's what I want too."

"And you want to be with Julian again."

Julian returned to the living room with a glass of wine for Lane. "Yeah," he said, looking at Julian as he accepted the wineglass, "I want to be with him again."

"I appreciate your honesty."

"There's no reason to lie to you." Lane took a drink of wine and set the glass on the table beside him. "Did Julian tell you about our...relationship?"

"A little."

"Do you have questions?"

She looked from Lane to Julian and back again. "Julian started to tell me about the morning after your night with Claire. I want to know about that."

"Okay."

Julian sat close to Molly and slipped his arm around her shoulders. She could feel him playing with her hair, yet she focused her attention on Lane's mouth as he spoke.

"I'd been dating Claire for about a month when Julian came over for dinner." He glanced at the other man. "Julian and his girlfriend had recently broken up and I figured it was my duty as his best friend to get him drunk."

Julian chuckled as he nuzzled behind her ear. "He did a damn good job of it too."

"Were you sloshed?"

"And then some."

Molly returned her attention to Lane when he slipped his hands beneath her skirt. He went no higher than her knees, but his touch on her skin quickened her breathing.

"Claire was a flirt and loved attention. When Julian went to the bathroom, I told her she should kiss him. Her eyes lit up like fireworks. One kiss led to another, and soon clothes started coming off."

Julian tugged her closer. She leaned against him, her back to his chest. His hand slipped down and released the first button on her blouse. Lane watched Julian's hand for a moment before continuing.

"The three of us spent a wild night together. I doubt if there was a position we didn't try."

Julian nipped the side of her neck while his fingers danced over the flesh spilling out of her bra.

Lane continued to watch Julian's fingers. He slid his hands beneath Molly's knees and pulled them far enough apart so he could slip his knees between hers.

The second button on her blouse came loose.

"Claire and I had a fight the next morning." Lane's warm hands caressed the backs of her knees, down her shins and up to the top of her thighs, still beneath her skirt. Molly's heart began a stuttering tattoo in her chest. "I don't remember what it was about. She left in a huff and I went back in the bedroom with Julian."

Julian unfastened the third button and pulled her blouse open. He groaned softly. "Damn, you're wearing a red bra."

"I bought it today." Her voice came out sounding soft and breathless. She gasped when Julian cradled her breasts.

Lane's hands crawled higher up her thighs. "Are you wearing panties to match?"

She nodded. "A thong."

"A *thong*?" Julian asked, the surprise evident in his question. He squeezed her breasts as he buried his face against her neck. "God, I have to see your ass in that."

Molly didn't respond. Her voice ceased to work when Lane's fingers brushed her pussy through the thong. He moved to the edge of the coffee table, using his knees to push her legs farther apart, and ran his thumbs back and forth over her clit.

Pleasure rippled through her body. She sat there, on the verge of a climax and they all still wore their clothes.

"Do you want to know what I did then?" Lane asked.

Molly didn't care, not as long as he kept caressing her clit and Julian kept tugging on her nipples. Without her realizing it, Julian had unhooked the front closure of her bra. "Wh-what did you do?"

"I sucked his cock."

The orgasm exploded in her pussy and spread through her body so quickly, she didn't have any time to prepare for it. She threw her head back to Julian's shoulder and dug her fingernails into his thigh. Her hips bucked with each pulsation deep inside her.

Several moments passed before she realized Lane no longer touched her. She opened her eyes to see him tug off his T-shirt and toss it aside. His tan chest was bare, the only hair a line flowing down from his navel to the waistband of his low-slung jeans.

She wanted to follow that line with her tongue.

Julian rolled her nipples between his thumbs and fingers. "I think it's time to go in the bedroom."

Molly nodded, although she wasn't sure if her legs were strong enough yet for her to walk. If she stumbled, she had two strong men to help her.

Lane pulled her to her feet. He took one hand, Julian took the other, and they led her down the hall to the bedroom.

Julian had lit candles again. The flames cast a golden glow around the room. The covers had been pulled to the end of the bed, exposing dark sheets. Four fat pillows were propped against the headboard. The room had been prepared for seduction.

Desire began to build low in her belly again.

"I'll get the wine," Lane said.

Once he left the room, Julian cradled Molly's face in his hands and kissed her. His hands tightened on her face for a moment. She could tell he was trying hard to regain his control. He tilted his head and kissed her again, then nipped the pounding pulse in her neck.

"Slip off your shoes and turn around."

She did as he asked. He reached around her and finished unfastening the rest of her buttons. Blouse and bra slid down her arms at the same time. A gentle tug at her waist proved Julian unsnapped her skirt. The zipper sounded loud in the quiet room.

"I have to see your ass in your red thong." He pushed the skirt past her hips. Gravity took over and it fell to the floor.

"Fuck," he whispered. He bit the spot between her neck and shoulder as he gripped both butt cheeks. "You have an amazing ass."

"I'll second that," Lane said.

Molly turned her head to watch Lane set one glass and a full bottle of merlot on the nightstand. He looked at her, his gaze focused on her mound. "Red is definitely your color."

He stepped close to her. Molly had but a moment to stare into his hazel eyes before he kissed her.

Wow.

Julian's kisses almost set her hair on fire, they were so hot. Lane's kisses weren't far behind. He cupped her breasts as he kissed her again, his thumbs brushing over the hard tips.

"Nice," he murmured against her mouth.

She wasn't sure if Lane referred to her kisses or her breasts. She didn't care. With his cock pressed against her belly and Julian's against her ass, she was surrounded by testosterone.

Delicious.

Molly moved away from the men and sat on the edge of the bed. Leaning back, she rested her weight on her hands. She knew the position pushed her breasts forward. The way both guys' gazes snapped to her chest proved that.

"You're both way overdressed."

"Hey, I took off my shirt," Lane said.

"I want *everything* off." She switched her attention to Julian. "You too."

"Bossy little thing, isn't she?" Lane asked, unbuckling his belt.

Julian chuckled. "And then some."

She liked that they were both aroused, yet could still tease. Her own arousal had dimmed slightly when she pulled away from them. She had no doubt it would flare to life again with a simple kiss or touch.

Or a look at their nude bodies.

Wow.

Due to his Italian heritage, Julian's skin carried the same tone all over his body. Lane's skin was tan except for a small strip of lighter skin across his groin. Whatever swimsuit he wore must be tiny. Both their cocks were hard, with pre-cum forming at the slits.

She wiggled her forefingers in the "come here" motion. They stepped closer until she could wrap her hands around their shafts. She'd fantasized about being with two men at the same time, but had never imagined it would ever come true. She wasn't sure what to do first.

She spread their essence over the crowns with her thumbs. Julian's cock was a bit longer than Lane's, Lane's a bit thicker than Julian's. She had no complaints about the size of either one.

"If *we're* naked," Julian said, "*you* should be too."

"In a minute. I'm playing."

"That works both ways." Lane took her wrist and drew her hand away from him. "Why don't you lie down and let us play too?"

Molly scooted to the middle of the bed and lay on her back. Lane rounded the foot while Julian climbed on the bed on his knees. He clasped the band of her thong. "Lift your hips."

Julian slid the thong down her legs and tossed it to the floor. Using his thumbs, he spread her labia wide open. "Look how wet she is."

"Oh yeah." Lane touched her clit with his thumb. Molly hissed in a sharp breath at the pleasure that shot through her womb. "All pink and swollen too."

The two men continued to touch and stare at her pussy. Molly whimpered. The desire she'd felt in the living room before her orgasm wasn't a quarter of what she felt now. She shifted on the bed, arched her pelvis higher. She needed to be fucked *now*.

"Please. One of you. Inside me."

"Not yet." Julian dropped a kiss on her mound. "We have things we want to do first."

Her fantasy should mean her rules. She was about to tell them exactly that when Julian swiped his tongue across her clit. She gasped and lifted her hips to get closer to his mouth. "More."

Two fingers slid into her channel as Julian licked her again. She couldn't see past Julian's head to know whose hand touched her. It didn't matter. She only cared about the sensations flooding her from her pussy to her head, down to her feet and back to her core.

Lane leaned over and kissed the side of her neck, her collarbone, the top of her breast. She grabbed his head and guided his mouth to her nipple. He latched on to it and suckled.

Heat raced to her toes. Each pull of his mouth sent another zing of pleasure up and down her legs. The stimulation from his lips, plus Julian's attention to her clit, had another orgasm quickly building.

The intense feeling faded a bit when Julian stopped licking her. She almost complained, then he started tonguing her other nipple.

"Ohgodohgodohgod!" Molly closed her eyes and arched her back. Having both nipples suckled at the same time was one of the most intense things she'd ever

experienced. She'd never come from only nipple stimulation, but she wouldn't doubt that it could happen to her...in about ten seconds.

Someone touched her clit. The other man pushed two fingers inside her again. The fingers wiggled over her G-spot, shooting pleasure through her limbs once more.

Spreading her legs wider, Molly drew in a sharp breath and released it as the climax washed over her.

Both men continued to caress her body, slowly bringing her back so she could think clearly again. She opened her eyes to see them on their knees, their hands moving over her breasts, belly, mound, legs, before making the return journey up her body. After the third pass, she touched the back of their hands. They stilled and looked at her.

"That was amazing."

Julian lifted her hand and kissed her palm. "You say that as if you're through."

She glanced at their hard cocks. "Well, not *through*, since you two haven't come yet. But I'm well satisfied."

Lane chuckled, a sexy, wicked sound. "Don't get too comfortable, Molly. Julian and I aren't anywhere near finished with you."

"I've come twice."

"Twice isn't your limit," Julian said. "We both know that."

"What about you and Lane?"

"Don't worry about us. We plan to thoroughly enjoy ourselves."

With that comment, Julian leaned over Molly's body and kissed Lane.

Chapter Fourteen

Julian had already told Lane that he wanted them to act out Molly's chapter, so when Julian kissed him, it didn't surprise Lane. In fact, he'd looked forward to it ever since he and Julian had discussed having the *ménage* with Molly. Some of the most incredible sex of his life had occurred with his best friend.

Groaning softly, Lane parted his lips and accepted the thrust of Julian's tongue. He continued to caress Molly's skin, as he and Julian had planned, yet he focused on his friend's kiss and how it made him feel.

Hot.

Eager.

Ready for anything.

He jerked when a small, warm hand wrapped around his cock. From the growl that came from Julian's throat, Lane assumed Molly had taken his friend's cock in her other hand. He and Julian had already decided that whatever Molly wanted, Molly got. If she wanted to get them off with her hands, that worked for him.

Even though he longed to slide his shaft deep into Julian's mouth.

Julian ended the kiss with a swipe of his tongue across Lane's mouth. Lane struggled to open his eyes and look at his friend. Julian's eyes blazed with desire, his lips were parted, his breath came in soft pants. Lane couldn't resist the urge to taste him again. He held Julian's head and kissed him, pouring out all his hunger and love.

Molly continued to caress his shaft. A larger, rougher hand cradled his balls and began a gentle massage.

"Ohmygod, that's so hot," Molly whispered.

Lane buried his face against Julian's neck. "I'm not gonna last, man."

Julian squeezed Lane's tight sac. "You don't have to. Let it happen."

No sooner had Julian uttered the words than the orgasm snaked up and down Lane's spine and exploded out the end of his cock. He trembled and moaned, his hips thrusting as Molly kept milking him. Cum shot onto her lower belly, white streams against her creamy skin.

Lane hadn't wanted to come that quickly, but it felt so good.

Julian gave him another long, searing kiss, then leaned over and licked Lane's cum from Molly's stomach.

She whimpered. "I've never seen anything so sexy."

Lane scooped up the last drop and held his finger to Molly's lips. She drew it deep into her mouth and sucked it.

"Julian, I think we have a very horny lady here who needs to be fucked."

"I think you're right." Julian spread Molly's legs and moved between them. "No condoms tonight, Molly. You're on birth control and we're all clean. I don't want anything separating us."

Nodding, she lifted her hips off the bed. "Nothing separating us."

He entered her with one long slide. Lane lifted Molly's leg so he could watch Julian's cock gliding in and out of her pussy. Her juices soon completely coated his hard flesh.

It looked too good to ignore.

Lane gazed up into Julian's face. "I want to taste her."

Julian pulled out, despite Molly's huff of protest. That huff turned into a long moan when Lane started licking up and down her labia. She tasted of musk and woman and a hint of Julian.

That hint wasn't nearly enough. Lane needed more. He drew Julian's cock into his mouth, all the way to the balls.

After several moments of sucking Julian, Lane returned to Molly's clit. Back and forth, back and forth, he tasted Molly and then savored her flavor on his friend's rod.

"I want to taste your cum," Lane said, running his tongue along the underside of Julian's cock. "But I want to lick it from Molly's pussy."

Julian leaned over, rested his hands on either side of Molly and started thrusting hard and fast. Lane pulled Molly's nipple into his mouth...laving, nibbling, sucking. He laid his hand over her other breast and felt her heart pounding.

"Oh yes!" Molly closed her eyes, arched that pretty long neck. "Yes, *yes*, YES!"

"She's coming," Julian said, his voice breathless. "Her pussy is squeezing my dick. *Damn!*"

Julian's body shook as he threw his head back and released a sound halfway between a groan and a growl. The sight of his friend so lost in his climax sent blood surging back into Lane's cock.

The moment Julian moved to Molly's side, Lane took his place and lay between her thighs. Sliding his hands beneath her butt, he lowered his mouth to her pussy. He knew her clit would be tender after her orgasm, so moved his tongue slowly over her wet flesh, enjoying her taste mixed with Julian's.

He felt the mattress shift when Julian moved closer. A wet finger circled his asshole. Lane squeezed his eyes shut at the intense pleasure. The ragged sounds Molly made proved her desire was climbing again. He wanted to concentrate on her, take her to the heavens once more. That wasn't easy to do when he longed to spread his legs and take Julian deep inside his ass.

Julian's touch disappeared. The mattress shifted again, but Lane heard nothing.

Unsure where Julian had gone, Lane returned to feasting on Molly. He pushed her legs up and fucked her with his tongue. He dragged it over her anus, her clit, returned to her channel. She tasted so good and was so responsive. He'd been with women who climaxed easily and those who couldn't get to the peak no matter what he did. He liked

that Molly felt free enough with him to let go and experience everything her body would.

He pushed one finger in her pussy and one in her ass, pumping them while he continued to lick her clit. She trembled and released a loud, keening moan. Her body clamped onto his fingers and drew them farther inside her. Lane kept gently licking her until her body stilled.

"You guys...are trying to...kill me."

"Hell of a way to go." Lane nipped the inside of each thigh. "Don't you think?"

"Think? Who can think with scrambled brains?"

Lane chuckled. He understood why Julian loved this woman. Not only was she sexy as sin, but cute as hell.

The bed dipped behind him. Warm fingers slick with lube touched his anus. Lane drew in a sharp breath.

"What's wrong?" Molly asked.

"Not a thing." He lowered his forehead to her thigh and arched his back to raise his hips higher.

Lane lifted his head again when he heard Molly's sharp gasp. He saw the question in her eyes quickly turn to lust. "What is he doing?" she whispered to Lane.

"Rubbing my asshole."

"Do you like it?"

"Oh yeah."

Julian's fingers disappeared, but were soon replaced by the tip of his cock. Lane tightened for a second at the unfamiliar pressure. It had been over a year since his friend had been inside him. He drew in a breath and released it slowly.

"That's the way," Julian whispered. "Relax and take me."

"I want to watch."

Molly scrambled away from Lane. He glanced over his shoulder to see her on her knees, her eyes wide as she stared at his ass. She looked at him, then back to where the two men would soon be joined.

The head slipped inside him. Lane spread his legs wider. He gritted his teeth, hoping he wouldn't come yet. He'd waited a year to be with Julian and didn't want it to end too soon.

Another inch slipped inside him. Then another, and another, until Julian's balls brushed against his own.

"Fuck," he muttered.

"Exactly that." Julian gripped his hips and began an easy thrusting. "God, your ass is tight."

Lane couldn't respond, not with the pleasure so intense it stole his ability to talk. His cock swelled, his balls tightened. He gripped his shaft and pumped it, but soon realized he didn't want to come by his own hand. He wanted to be inside Molly.

Glancing over his shoulder again, he saw her watching Julian fuck him. Her lips were parted, her eyelids half closed. Her pretty nipples pouted as if begging for someone to suck them.

Lane reached toward her with one hand. "C'mere, Molly."

Julian pulled out of him while Lane helped Molly return to her spot beneath him. She hooked her hands beneath her knees and pulled her legs wide apart. Lane couldn't resist swiping his tongue across that creamy pink flesh before he slid his cock inside her. He didn't have long to wait until Julian once again filled his ass.

"My God," Lane mumbled when Julian began to move. Even with all the wild positions he and Julian had found themselves in with Claire, Lane had never experienced fucking and being fucked at the same time.

Incredible.

It took a bit of fumbling, but Lane soon established a rhythm with Molly and Julian. When Lane pulled back from Molly, Julian's cock slid forward into his ass. He pushed forward into Molly until only Julian's head remained inside him, then repeated the movement.

Sweat dripped off Lane's nose and formed in the small of his back. Molly's heart thumped against his chest, keeping time with his rapid heartbeat. She released her legs and wrapped them around his waist, her arms around his shoulders.

"Harder, Lane." Molly's soft breath on his neck made him shiver, despite the heat in his body. "Fuck me harder."

Lane pounded into Molly, Julian pounded into him. Molly came first, her internal walls clasp his shaft. Julian gripped Lane's hips tighter and released a loud moan. The pulsing of Julian's cock deep inside him pushed Lane over the edge. Pleasure engulfed his body, running through his arms and legs and out the head of his cock.

He wasn't sure how much time passed when Julian slowly withdrew from his ass and collapsed on the bed beside them. Lane lifted up to his elbows, but that was all the movement he could manage. He glanced at Julian to see him lying on his back, one arm over his eyes, his chest rising and falling rapidly. Lane knew exactly how Julian felt. He doubted he'd be able to breathe normally again anytime soon.

Lane gazed down at Molly's face. She looked so pretty in the candlelight...her eyes soft, her skin golden, her hair a burnished copper. Something seemed to squeeze his heart, an emotion he'd never felt for anyone but Julian.

I can't feel anything for Molly. This ménage was for her, to fulfill her fantasy. I can't let myself hope that it could lead to something permanent with her and Julian.

She reached up and circled his lips with the pad of her finger. "A gal could get spoiled by all this attention."

Lane nipped her fingertip. "Spoiling can be fun."

Julian rolled toward them and opened his eyes. His smile was lazy and a little wicked. He ran his hand down Lane's back and over one cheek. "Spoiling can be *very* fun."

That simple touch made Lane's breath catch. Before his desire flared back to life, he withdrew from Molly's body and curled up on the other side of her from Julian. "I don't know about you two, but I'm spoiled out for the night. I'll be asleep in two minutes."

Molly covered a yawn with her hand. "I'll be asleep in a minute."

"Thirty seconds here," Julian said. "As soon as I blow out the candles."

Julian slid beneath the covers, reached across Molly and took Lane's hand. He entwined their fingers and rested their hands on top of Molly's stomach. "Goodnight," he whispered.

"Goodnight." Lane closed his eyes and sighed softly, feeling completely at peace for the first time in a year.

* * * * *

Molly stuffed her hands in the pockets of Julian's ratty robe and watched the coffee drip into the glass carafe. If she was lucky, she could drink the entire pot before either of the guys got out of bed.

She laughed to herself. She never thought she'd use the phrase "either of the guys". Writing the *ménage* scene in her book had been fun. That's all it was supposed to be—fun. She'd never planned to have one in real life.

Oh my, but it had been incredible.

She took three coffee mugs from the cabinet in preparation for Julian and Lane joining her. As soon as the last drop fell in the carafe, she poured a mug full for herself and took a cautious sip. She needed the caffeine this morning. Five hours of sleep wasn't nearly enough for her brain to function.

Strong arms wrapped around her waist. "Good morning," Julian said, his voice still husky from sleep.

"Good morning. I made coffee."

"I smelled it. I could kiss you for making it."

"I was hoping to drink the whole pot by myself."

"Silly woman."

He kissed the side of her neck, then released her and picked up the carafe. Molly watched him pour, admiring his bare back and broad shoulders. He wore nothing but a pair of black sweatpants that molded to his butt.

It had to be against the law somewhere in the world for a man to be so sexy.

Julian leaned against the cabinet and sipped his coffee. His brown eyes studied her over the rim, as if searching for the answer to a question before he asked it. "You okay?"

"Sure. Shouldn't I be okay?"

"Things got a little...wild last night. Do you regret any of it?"

"No."

Julian took another sip and set his mug on the counter. "What do you think about it happening again?"

"With Lane?"

He nodded.

"Yes, I'd like it to happen again. It was wild and hot and intense. Watching you and Lane together was very exciting."

"I think I hear a 'but' after that comment."

Molly set down her mug too and slipped her hands in the pockets again. She had to know exactly where she stood with Julian. "Do you love Lane?"

His eyes widened. She'd obviously surprised him with her question. He lowered his head, blew out a breath and looked back at her. "We've been best friends for six years. I want him to be part of my life."

"You didn't answer my question. Yes or no, Julian. Do you love Lane?"

He made her wait several seconds before he said, "Yes."

Molly didn't know a broken heart could hurt so much. Everything inside her seemed to crumble and fall to the pit of her stomach. She'd never imagined a night of wild sex would lead to her losing Julian. She swallowed hard and blinked several times to fight back the tears. "At least you're honest. Thank you for that."

Julian stepped up to her, pulled her hands from the robe pockets and held them tightly. "But I love you more, Molly."

Hearing those words from Julian made holding back the tears impossible. "You love me?"

"More than I thought I could ever love a woman."

Molly wrapped her arms around his neck and hugged him tightly. "I love you too."

He kissed her slowly, tenderly, with so much love her tears flowed even faster.

"Oops. Sorry."

Molly turned to see Lane standing a few feet behind them. He wore his jeans, zipped but not snapped. She had no doubt about her feelings for Julian, yet the sight of Lane's tanned skin caused her heart to stutter in her chest.

"No problem," Julian said. "Want some coffee?"

"Yeah." Lane answered Julian's question, but with his concerned gaze on Molly. "Are you all right?"

"Yes." She swiped at the tears on her cheeks. "They're happy tears."

Julian handed a full mug to Lane. "Molly and I were talking about last night."

Molly noticed the apprehension creep into Lane's eyes. "Is there a problem?"

"No. We were discussing a repeat."

"Do you want a repeat, Molly?" Lane asked, looking directly at her.

She glanced from one man to the other. She loved Julian, but she also had feelings for Lane...feelings that could grow over time if given the chance. A *ménage* was fun to

write about and exciting to read about in books. In real life, Molly had no idea if such a thing would work.

Two lovers all the time. How thoroughly wicked.

“I don’t think one repeat will be enough. I think we’ll have to repeat last night several times to make sure we’re...satisfied with the arrangement.”

The two men grinned at each other, then Julian dropped a smacking kiss on her lips. “There’s no doubt you’ll be satisfied. Lane and I will make sure of that.”

Chapter Fifteen

Three Weeks Later

Molly chewed on the end of her pen as she read her list again. She was going to the store first thing in the morning and she didn't want to forget anything. Waiting until Christmas Eve to do her grocery shopping was probably stupid, but she'd worked five days straight and hadn't had the chance to go before now.

"I found the crystal cake plate," Shawna said, sitting at the kitchen table across from Molly.

"Oh good. Thanks."

"What else do you need?"

"That's all. I have all the other dishes. Do you have what *you* need to make that appetizer thingy?"

Shawna chuckled. "Yes, I have everything to make my appetizer thingy."

"Good. Okay, let's see." She counted off items on her fingers as she said them. "Marci is in charge of the turkey and dressing. Twyla is doing the candied yams, the broccoli casserole, the corn and some other veggie. You're doing the salad and appetizer. I'm in charge of the rolls, pumpkin pie and chocolate cheesecake. Am I forgetting anything?"

"Wine?"

"Lane is bringing that. He wanted to contribute something to the meal."

Shawna shook her head. "You know it's totally unfair. I can't even get a date and you're sleeping with two guys."

Molly grinned. "Some girls have all the luck."

"That's for sure." Shawna propped her elbow on the table and rested her cheek against her fist. "I'm glad you're happy, sis. That's what matters."

"I am. Deliriously happy."

Three weeks ago, being with two men at the same time was simply a fantasy, something she wrote about in her book. Now she lived it. She and Julian only saw Lane on the weekends since he was stationed in Bremerton, but they quickly made up for the time apart as soon as he walked in Julian's front door.

She and Julian had discussed her moving in with him, but she'd decided to wait. Their relationship was still so new, and she didn't want to leave Shawna in a financial bind with having to pay for everything by herself. For now, Molly was happy to spend a couple of weeknights with Julian, then go over Friday evening and come back to her and Shawna's apartment Sunday evening.

"Lane is really hot," Shawna said. "How about lending him to me? I'll give him back. Just let me use him a little. You'll still have Julian."

"No."

"Fine. Be that way. I'll start dinner if I can't get you to give up Lane."

"Maybe he has a friend."

"Would you ask him? Please?"

Molly laughed at the begging tone of her sister's voice. "Yes, I'll ask him."

Grinning, Shawna stood. "Pasta salad okay with you?"

"Sure."

Molly went back to her list. She'd read halfway through it again when the doorbell rang. "Are you expecting someone?"

"No." Shawna set a pan of water on the stove and turned on a burner. "Maybe it's Julian."

"He's working late tonight finishing up a project."

"I know a great way to find out who it is. Open the door."

Molly stuck out her tongue while Shawna grinned again. Slipping her list in her sweater pocket so she wouldn't lose it, Molly rose and walked to the door.

Her mother stood on the other side.

Lydia Ross gave her a tentative smile. "Hello, Molly."

Molly was so shocked to see her mother, she froze in place. As the shock slowly wore off, she gripped the edge of the door and frame to block her mother's entrance. "What are you doing here?"

"May I come in?"

She'd driven thirty miles from Everett to get here. The least Molly could do was let her enter. She opened the door wider and stood aside.

After she closed the door, she turned and looked at her mother. Lydia's long red hair was pulled back in a neat ponytail. Mascara darkened her eyelashes, coral lipstick colored her lips. Lines and creases were much too prevalent on her face for a woman in her late forties. Years of drinking and smoking had aged her at least ten years.

Her mother's green T-shirt and jeans appeared clean and fresh, unlike the wrinkled clothing she usually wore. She almost looked like a new woman.

Lydia clasped her hands together in front of her. "Is Shawna here?"

"She's in the kitchen."

"Could we...go in there with her? Maybe have a cup of coffee or tea?"

Coffee or tea? Her mother had never asked for that. Bourbon was her drink of choice. If that wasn't available, she'd never been picky as long as it contained alcohol.

"Uh, sure. I can make a pot of coffee."

"Thank you, honey."

Molly led the way to the kitchen. Shawna turned her head from inside the refrigerator, a smile on her face. "Hey, do you want ham—" She stopped. The smile disappeared from her face. "Mom?"

"Hi, baby."

Shawna straightened and shut the refrigerator door. "Why are you here?"

"I need to talk to you and Molly."

Molly met Shawna's confused gaze. She gave a slight shrug to indicate she didn't know anything, then motioned to the table. "Sit down, Mom. I'll start the coffee."

Shawna returned to gathering the ingredients for the pasta salad. Molly stole glances at their mother while she prepared the coffee. Lydia sat with her head lowered, her fingers clasped tightly together on top of the table. Molly wondered how long it would be before coffee wouldn't be enough and Lydia asked for something stronger to drink. As soon as that question left her mouth, Molly would tell her to leave and never come back.

"Do you still take sugar in your coffee, Mom?"

She answered without raising her head. "Yes, please."

Locating the sugar bowl in the cabinet, Molly set it on the table close to her mother, along with a spoon. She returned to the table with two mugs of coffee. Shawna turned off the burner beneath the boiling pasta, poured coffee for herself and joined them at the table.

Lydia raised the mug to her lips and took a sip. Molly noticed her mother's hands trembled, but not as bad as usual. "What do you need to talk to us about, Mom?"

She replaced the mug on the table and held it between her palms. Molly saw her mother's throat work as she swallowed before she lifted her gaze. Tears swam in her eyes. "I miss my girls."

Molly's throat tightened. *Don't feel sorry for her. She'll hurt you again, just like always.* "Mom, I told you the last time I saw you —"

"I joined A.A. two weeks ago."

That statement stopped Molly cold. She and Shawna had tried for years to get their mother to seek help for her drinking. "What?"

"I know you gave up on me a long time ago, Molly. I don't blame you for that, especially after I hit..." She stopped and took a breath. "Ever since Thanksgiving, Shawna won't take my phone calls either. Dora and Dewey have stopped coming over

or calling. I'm completely alone." Tears ran down her cheeks and dripped on the wooden table. "I don't want to be alone."

Molly looked at her sister to see Shawna crying too. She managed to hold back, but it wasn't easy.

Lydia wiped the tears from her cheeks. "You've both told me for a long time to get help, but I didn't listen. I didn't think I had a problem, that I could quit drinking whenever I wanted to." Her eyes flooded again. "I had a car accident two weeks ago. I don't even remember getting in my car and driving. I ran head-on into a tree."

Shawna gasped. "Are you all right?"

"Yes. Just some sore muscles from the air bag. I was lucky. But that tree could've been a child on a bike. If I'd hurt anyone..." She stopped and cleared her throat. "When I got home, I called A.A. I have a very nice sponsor. His name is Ted and he's divorced. He said I made it through the hardest part when I stood in front of all those people and admitted I have a problem."

Holding back her tears was no longer possible. They streamed down Molly's cheeks as her heart opened up and let the love for her mother pour out.

Lydia held out one hand to each of her daughters. "Will you help me? Let me be your mother again. Let me show you I can be a mother you'll be proud of."

Molly slipped her hand into her mother's. Shawna did the same.

* * * * *

Ashlyn folded the last pair of black panties and arranged them neatly with the other pairs in the Black section. It had been a very busy day, much busier than she'd expected for Christmas Eve. At least forty percent of her clientele today had been men, looking for that last-minute Christmas gift for their wives or girlfriends.

She liked the hectic pace. It kept her from missing Llyr.

Ashlyn released a heavy sigh. Nothing kept her from missing Llyr. She couldn't have fallen in love with a god who worked close to her. No, she had to give her heart to a god who worked in the North Sea and left her at the snap of their king's fingers.

That wasn't fair and Ashlyn knew it. She'd met with their queen last week about this latest assignment. The queen could have decided Ashlyn would do more good for women in another location instead of running Lavender Lace. If that's what happened, Ashlyn would have no choice but to obey. But the queen had been very pleased with Ashlyn's progress and granted her more time in Seattle. That meant Ashlyn could help even more women boost their self-confidence with items of silk, lace and satin.

A final look around satisfied Ashlyn that the store looked perfect for when she would reopen Saturday morning. She would be closed tomorrow, but not alone. Marci, Twyla, Molly and Shawna had insisted she join them for a special Christmas get-together at Marci's house. When she'd protested that surely they would want to spend the holiday with their families, Twyla had informed her all the women had made arrangements to have a Christmas celebration on Saturday with their families. Tomorrow would be for friends.

She would meet the men who were so important to her special friends...men who all loved the sexy lingerie the women bought at her store. Ashlyn smiled. She loved making people happy.

A flick of the light switch and the main lights went off. She made her way to her office at the back of the store to get her purse and coat. As she drew her keys from her coat pocket, she heard the buzzer that announced someone had come in the front door.

That couldn't be possible. Ashlyn knew for sure she had locked the door.

She laid her purse back on her desk and her coat on a chair. The thought to call the police flitted in and out of her mind. She doubted if a burglar would come in the front door. Besides, a snap of her fingers and he'd be completely bound and tied before the police could even get here.

The lights came on in the store. Surely a burglar wouldn't turn on the lights. Unsure what she'd find, Ashlyn stepped through the doorway. She gasped. Llyr leaned on the counter next to the cash register.

He straightened when he saw her. "Good evenin'. I wonder if ye could help me pick out somethin' for me lady."

She drank in the sight of him, from his tousled hair, past his deep purple sweater and black jeans, to his black boots, then back to his face. Her palms itched with the desire to touch every inch of him, her pussy moistened in readiness for his possession.

"Tomorrow's Christmas and I want to get her somethin' special."

Apparently he was in the mood to play with her. Okay, she'd go along...for a short while before she attacked him. "Do you have something particular in mind?"

"I like her in red. Do ye have somethin' frilly in red?"

"Were you thinking of a bra and panties set, or perhaps a negligee?"

His lids narrowed as he stepped closer to her. She could see the fire in his incredible blue eyes. Play time must be over. "To be honest, I prefer her bare skin over anythin' ye have in yer store."

He touched her chin with one fingertip, dragged it down into the V-neck of her sweater. His gaze followed his finger. "Her skin is nice and creamy and soft. I love touchin' it, kissin' it." He looked into her eyes. "I love her more than I can say."

She rose on her tiptoes as he lowered his head. Their lips met in a sweet kiss that soon turned hungry. Llyr wrapped his arms tightly around her and lifted her off the floor. Ashlyn encircled his waist with her legs, his neck with her arms, and returned kiss for kiss.

Llyr finally ended the kiss moments later. Breathless, she rested her forehead against his. "I've missed you."

"I've missed ye too, me love." He pulled back and looked into her eyes. His were no longer hungry but sparkling with happiness. "I have somethin' to tell ye."

"What?"

"I think we should go somewhere fer a nice dinner first, then back to yer house and get naked."

"Llyr, we aren't eating or doing anything naked until you tell me!"

"Yer so impatient, lass." He set her back on her feet and clasped her hands. "Ye know I've worked in the North Sea fer centuries."

"Yes, I know that."

"I spoke with our king about relocating to Puget Sound."

Ashlyn couldn't breathe for her heart had jumped into her throat. If their king approved and Llyr relocated to Puget Sound, he'd be with her almost all the time. "What did he say?"

"He asked why, of course. I told him the truth, that I love ye and want to be closer to ye. He said he would consider me request. He summoned me two days later and agreed. Kylan will move to the North Sea and I'll move here."

It was more than she could have hoped for or imagined to happen. Llyr would still have to be gone at times, she knew that, but then he would come home to her. Tears filled her eyes.

He cradled her face in his hands. "Ah lass, no cryin'."

"I always cry when I'm happy."

"So ye like me news?"

"Of course I do."

"Then we need to celebrate. I'm starvin'. I want to take ye to a really nice restaurant fer dinner, then make love to ye fer the rest of the night. What do ye think?"

She thought she'd never been happier than at this moment. "I think that would be perfect."

The End

About the Author

Lynn LaFleur was born and raised in a small town in Texas close to the Dallas/Fort Worth area. Writing has been in her blood since she was eight years old and wrote her first “story” for an English assignment.

As well as writing at every possible moment, Lynn enjoys reading, scrapbooking, photography and learning new things on the computer. She’s a software junky and loves to try out new programs, especially anything to do with graphics.

After living on the West Coast for 21 years, Lynn now lives 17 miles from her hometown in Texas. She’s a romantic at heart and can’t imagine ever writing anything but romances. A full-time writer, she spends her days creating stories of people who find their happily ever after, sometimes with the help of an alien or psychic or vampire.

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

Tell Us What You Think

We appreciate hearing reader opinions about our books. You can email us at Comments@EllorasCave.com.

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