



ELISE LOGAN

TWICE AS

High

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Elise Logan

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Blurb

Madeline Crane's life just got interesting. Within the span of a month, she turned her bosses in for money laundering and won the lottery. Now she's having strange erotic dreams about sexy men with wings. But it's just a dream, right?

Wrong. When Julian and Kyle show up, they send Maddy into a tailspin. Suddenly, she's having psychic episodes that afford her glimpses of Julian and Kyle in situations much too personal for comfort. Then the pair reveal they are actually aliens banished from a distant planet, and Maddy has to wonder if she's losing her grip on reality. To make matters worse, someone has put a hit out on her.

Now Maddy has to stay safe, stay sane, and try to figure out where she fits between these two winged warriors.

Chapter One

Some days are just better than others. Madeline Crane stood in the door to the SBC, Inc. conference room wearing khaki slacks, a skinny red tank top and a grin a mile wide. The completely inappropriate outfit was only one reason for her smile.

“What is the meaning of this?” Paul Shelton spluttered his indignation at her interruption. He looked a bit like a weasel in a three-piece suit. She wanted to choke him with his own tie. She’d never particularly liked him, but when she’d discovered the money laundering scheme, he’d jumped to the top of her personal shit list. The other two partners—Baskins and Connors—weren’t exactly on her list of favorites either.

Her grin widened. Weeks of silent, careful planning came down to this weekly partner meeting. She aimed a paper airplane at Shelton’s head. He dodged at the last minute, so it hit the chair back, but watching his eyes go all big and buggy was worth it.

“Kiss my ass, Shelton. I quit.” She checked her watch. “Well, that’s all the time I have for you. I hope you fall into a pit of angry fire ants.”

She turned on her heel and sauntered from the office, leaving the partners cursing behind her while the employees gaped like startled carp. She popped in the ear buds of her iPod and cranked up the volume on Cypress Hill. She stepped onto the elevator and nodded to the federal agents getting off. Oh, yeah. Some days are definitely better than others.

* * * *

Maddy propped her feet on a wooden ottoman. While the laptop booted up, she relaxed in her Adirondack chair, listening to the waves crash into the cliff and sea birds screeching their mournful calls. She’d found this house—this gorgeous, fantastic vacation rental estate—on the internet. Twenty acres of solitude on the coast of Nova Scotia. Hooray for the internet.

She’d hopped a flight to Halifax right after the first deposition. With Bennett Daskowitz, her lawyer, in charge, she had little to do but sign off from a distance. Bennett took care of the details while her new assistant Annie handled the footwork and the vultures that seemed to appear the minute she’d claimed her winnings. She figured the winning lottery ticket constituted a thank you from the universe for turning the nasty nerds in to the feds. Instant karma. A reward for stepping out on a limb and putting her professional reputation and corporate finance career on the line. Which she would have done—had done—without the guarantee of a soft place to land.

The smell of salt tinged the air, and Maddy wondered if the salt water would ruin the laptop. Gosh. She’d just have to buy a new one. The sheer pleasure of knowing she could just buy a new one made her grin like an idiot.

Pulling her gaze from the surprisingly green waters of the Atlantic, Maddy focused on the computer screen. She opened her email—the new one that only Annie, Bennett and the feds knew. Oh, look. Speak of the devil, e-mail from Agent Dawes. Agent Dawes, a tall, thin man with skin the color of chocolate ice cream and eyes you just sank into, was a sharp investigator. He’d been beyond thrilled when Maddy had walked into

his office with a flash drive detailing how her bosses had helped a certain Russian holding company launder millions of dollars. Through his emails she knew that the investigation proceeded apace, but that the partners were fighting tooth and nail. She'd also learned through Babs Regin—Connors' ex—that both Shelton and Baskins were now in the throes of divorce proceedings, and Connors had been denied visitation with his son. That karma was a bitch, wasn't she? Dawes' email reminded her she had the second deposition in two weeks. That would be fun. She wasn't worried about it, since at this point her testimony was gravy: nice but unnecessary in the face of the evidence. Good for her, since that's what made Agent Dawes so sure the Russians weren't going to bother with her.

A few keystrokes forwarded the email to Annie with a note asking for a reminder closer to the time. Had to make sure she was back in town for that, didn't she?

The next email, from Bennett, advised her that—among other things—he had contracted Talon Security for the offices of her new private practice. They would be contacting her to work out details regarding her personal security.

Personal security? Her eyebrows rose. What did that mean? She shot an email back to Bennett asking for clarification. The idea that she might need personal security made her more than a little nervous, even this far away from the proceedings.

Shaking her head, she logged out and checked her bank accounts. Her concern slipped away and she giggled. Giggled, for heaven's sake. But it gave her such a thrill to see the numbers. It was nice not to have to worry about paying student loans or the mortgage. Sure, she'd made good money, but she'd grown up lean and it had made her more careful with her spending than she might have been. In fact, that's what had led her to accounting in the first place. It had been her own hard work and investing know-how that moved her from straight accounting into corporate finance, and now she had the means and the skills to start her own firm. Sighing in satisfaction, she powered down the laptop and powered up the iPod. With Narada echoing in her head, she basked in the clear sunlight, drifting off, letting go of everything.

* * * *

His name was Kyle. She didn't know how she knew his name, but she did. Odd. She thought of Kyle as a name for someone dark, not for this dishwater blond with the body of an MMA fighter. It was her dream, so why was this not-dark hottie named Kyle?

She stopped worrying about it when she saw his eyes. Extraordinary eyes. The intensely blue rim of his iris faded to nearly white at the pupil.

His faced was carved in harsh planes, with prominent cheekbones and an angular jaw. His mouth, though, looked soft, even set into a stern line. He stalked toward her shedding clothes—shirt, belt, pants, shorts.

Oh, my. Okay, so her dreams didn't usually include such a detailed visual of the manly goods, but in this case, she was glad her subconscious had made an exception. Dreamy Kyle's cock was a work of art. Long, thick, and perfectly formed, the bulbous head flushed with color, with a ring of small raised bumps. What the hell? What were those? Whatever. Dream. Not real. The pale skin of his shaft showed the single vein snaking around his girth like a stripe on a candy cane. She wanted to lick it.

She moved her dream-frozen feet forward, stopping with a bare inch of space between her belly and his penis. Damn, he was tall. She had to crane her neck to meet his

eyes. The heat off his body made her aware that her dream self stood naked, too. That was handy.

Before she could drop in front of him, he cupped her jaw in his big hands, tipping it up. Those oddly pale eyes searched her face for something. Whatever it was, he must have found it, because he lowered his lips to brush hers. In a stroke, his tongue invaded her mouth, taking possession. Startled, she tried to lean back, but his hands held her firmly. She felt the heat, smelled the damp earth smell of his skin. Her breasts flattened against his chest as she sagged into him, the drugging sweetness of his kiss draining her strength.

Eyelids drifting closed, she savored the weakness, glorying in the sensation of his muscled chest against her stabbing nipples. The smooth skin rubbed over her every time she took a breath. She managed to lift her arms and hook her hands over his elbows. She'd never been kissed like this. Slow and consuming.

Oh, she liked this dream.

Another pair of hands settled on her hips, palms hot and hard, long fingers resting along her hipbones. She juddered in shock, eyes flying open, but Kyle's hands held her fast. Heat from another male body covered her back. The hard, insistent shape of a penis nestled in the cleft of her ass.

Julian.

The name came from nowhere, washing away her momentary fear. She closed her eyes and a picture formed in her mind's eye. Shorter and slighter than Kyle, his body still conveyed strength. Hair so dark it seemed to absorb light and chiseled good looks that somehow soothed her. How odd. Like Kyle, though, his eyes carried the intensity of the man: streaked yellow-amber hawk's eyes. Well, if you're going to have an erotic dream, might as well make it a doozy.

Her dream self surrendered, tension sliding from her muscles. She allowed them to support her weight between them. Julian's fingers tightened on her hips and Kyle finally drew his mouth from hers. His thumbs massaged her jaw and her eyelids fluttered open.

"Ours." She almost felt Kyle's smooth baritone on her lips; it rang like a bell in her head.

The scene shifted and she reclined on a bed, the soft, pale comforter billowing up around her. Her initial confusion at the change of position dissipated in the dreamy haze of pleasure. Each man took a breast, fingertips so light she barely felt the graze of their roughened skin. Her skin flashed hot, becoming hypersensitive. She strained for the slightest sensation. Without warning, Julian pinched her nipple. The juxtaposition of the feather-light touches with the near-pain of that pinch arched her back, drew a cry from her throat. Kyle fell on her, licking and biting her neck as if he would imprint the taste and texture of her skin on his tongue while Julian continued tormenting her nipple, leaning down to suck it into his hot mouth.

Maddy's hips bucked, and her arms moved to find some way to caress the men. She needed to touch them, feel them, know them. On one side, her hand hooked in Julian's hair, the dark strands sliding through her fingers until she took hold. On the other side, her fingernails dug into Kyle's shoulder, drawing a growl from him. The sound buzzed along her nerve endings, stoking the fire building between her legs. She felt herself becoming wetter, softer, hotter.

Julian slid a hand along her belly, toying with her navel. His big finger traced the

edge, dipped in, slid out. Her pussy quivered in answer—she wanted his fingers lower. Just a little lower.

One of Kyle's hands cupped the back of her neck while the other continued to play with her breast, his mouth moving down over her collarbone toward her nipple. When he latched on, her system went haywire. Heat, sparks, light, all tempered with a dreamy acceptance.

Julian sucked one nipple, Kyle the other. It was too much and not enough. Kyle licked over her hardened bud, while Julian worked her other nipple with teeth and fierce suction. The combined effect detonated deep inside, shaking nerves she hadn't known she possessed, undermining the foundations of walls she'd taken years to build.

"Madeline," Kyle growled against her.

Kyle's hand moved down her ribs, slid over her hip to tease the tender skin along the ridge of bone. Maddy twisted, gasping. She'd never realized her sensitivity there. Kyle exploited her vulnerability, his lips following along behind his hand, dropping little nibbling kisses, sucking the soft skin against his teeth, then soothing with the hot velvet of his tongue. Julian's mouth savaged the nipple Kyle had abandoned. His chest pushed into the side of her breast and she lifted her head to sink her teeth into his shoulder. His body jerked over her and his low rumble vibrated against her nipple.

Maddy released his shoulder. Her head fell back under the weight of sensations. Aching, tender nipples. Sensitized skin. Throbbing, needing, wanting. Her head spun with sensual gluttony.

Julian's fingers brushed over the hair at the junction of her thighs. Maddy spread her legs, inviting him to play in softer, slicker flesh. His head lifted from her breast and shifted to catch her lips. It was the first time Julian's lips had touched hers, and the kiss electrified her. His tongue swept into her mouth, demanding and receiving the full measure of her response. At the same time, his fingers parted her labia, sliding easily along her slit.

Kyle grunted, one hand going to her leg, pulling it further out while Julian slid one long finger into her, swirling along her inner walls. Maddy shrieked her shocked pleasure into his mouth.

"Move your hand, Julian. I want in her right now."

Julian smiled. Freeing his finger from the clinging walls of her pussy, he lifted it to his mouth and sucked.

Maddy's eyes rounded watching him savor her essence. Entranced by Julian's actions, she didn't realize Kyle had abandoned her hipbone and moved between her spread thighs. His legs brushed her soft inner thighs and her attention shifted to him. Grasping the base of his cock, he settled the head against her opening.

Julian dropped to kiss her again. His tongue slid easily into her mouth at the same moment Kyle pushed his cock into her wet sheath. Her heart stalled at the sensation of Kyle working to get the broad head of his cock lodged inside her. She squirmed at the all-too-real sting. Was this really a dream? She could feel every bump, every ridge, including bumps she'd never known on other men. Wow, a dream guy whose penis reminded her of her favorite nubby sex toy! Her imagination made her proud. Her hands moved to push at Julian's shoulders, wanting to see, but he refused to budge. His mouth ate at hers while Kyle pushed incrementally further into her pussy.

Kyle hissed out a curse. "You are so tight, Madeline."

One of Julian's hands moved to touch the place where Kyle's body merged into hers. The feel of his hand there, pressed intimately against her flesh and Kyle's, made her shiver. A brilliant image popped up behind her eyes—Julian and Kyle wrapped together in a lovers' embrace, lips working over each other's cocks—a fantasy within a dream. The intensity of the visual added to her arousal, flooding her with cream that saturated Kyle's cock and seeped out.

Kyle made a pained sound in his throat. He sank deep, his hips pressed into hers. Julian moved his hand, allowing Kyle to sink that extra fraction into her. His fingers slid up to play with her throbbing clit. At his first touch, she arched, forcing Kyle's cock even further into her body. The feel of him filling her so completely, stretching her wide while Julian flicked her clit, sent her over the edge. Her hips bucked and her legs wrapped around Kyle, briefly dislodging Julian's hand. She gripped Julian's head and poured her scream down his throat.

The rippling walls of her vagina seemed to sever Kyle's control. He began thrusting into her with deep, heavy shoves. The head of his cock bumped her cervix, reverberating through her pelvis and reinforcing the aftershocks of her orgasm. Each hard push flattened Julian's hand between them, pressing his finger into the throbbing bundle of nerves. In total shock, Maddy realized she quivered on the edge of another climax.

Kyle sped his thrusts, his hips slapping into hers with a harsh, wet rhythm.

Julian finally released her lips, and Maddy sucked in deep, fast breaths. Air left in a hiss when Julian's lips closed over her nipple. The deep, slow tugs were almost tidal, and the contrast between the pull at her breast and the slamming force in her pussy spiked through her. The orgasm caught her in a demanding grasp, shaking her legs and flinging her body into a taut arch. Her pleasure escaped in a long scream of completion that nearly drowned out Kyle's hoarse shout as he held himself deep within her, pumping out his own orgasm.

Maddy collapsed against the bed, completely wrung out.

Kyle pulled out of her body and flung himself down next to her, one golden arm coming up to cover his eyes.

Julian took swift advantage, moving to position himself where Kyle had just been. Maddy made a weak gesture with one hand, meaning to indicate that she was too wiped out for another round right now, despite the blatant unfairness of leaving Julian in that state.

Julian either didn't catch her meaning or chose to ignore it. He grasped her hips, angling them up to take him. Kyle shifted to throw an arm over her waist, pinning her across the middle while Julian maneuvered her.

The head of his cock pushed into her and Maddy's eyes popped wide in shock. Holy crap. He was thicker than Kyle.

She tried to sit up, but Kyle's arm prevented it. Even in her dream state, she began to panic.

"Shhh," Julian crooned, his head dropping forward, sweat sliding down his temples. "I won't hurt you. Kyle opened you up for me, honey. It'll be good, I promise."

Relentlessly, Julian forged into her sensitized vagina. A combination of her own moisture and Kyle's slicked Julian's way, allowing him to slowly merge his body with hers. It wasn't easy, and Maddy bit her lip to hold back a cry of real discomfort as Julian's massive cock seated deep in her pussy.

Julian stilled, allowing her body to adjust to his size. Gradually, the tension abated and her breathing began to steady. She could handle this. It was just a dream. Dreams couldn't really hurt her. And he wedged so tightly inside her that every pulse of her vaginal walls transmitted back to her. If it felt this good with him unmoving inside her, how good would it feel when he began thrusting?

She found out. Julian withdrew carefully, moving back until only the broad head of his cock lodged inside her. Then he pressed back into her. A startled sound of pleasure erupted from Maddy's throat when Julian's massive cock hit places inside her she hadn't known existed. Steady, even thrusts spread the moisture along her walls, making each entry easier than the last, until Julian slid smoothly in her body.

A satisfied hum echoed in her ear, and she looked away from Julian's straining face to find Kyle watching Julian. A look of possessive hunger covered his face, but she didn't know for whom he meant that look.

Julian surged into her, harder, faster. He raced headlong toward orgasm, but she wasn't close to ready for another. Instead, she concentrated on the luxurious feel of his cock massaging her internal tissues, the pleasure lighting a warm glow in her sated body.

Kyle laid his head on her breast while Julian thrust urgently into Maddy's pussy. His fingers played lightly with her waist. The contrast between Kyle's soft, dreamy caress and Julian's harsh rush toward orgasm shivered through her.

Julian stiffened and pulled Maddy's hips tight against his own. On a hoarse groan, he fell forward, releasing her hips to catch himself on the bed. He narrowly missed smashing his head into Kyle's as his eyes glazed over.

Julian's orgasm rolled through him and into her. Maddy could feel each pulse of his release.

She began to drift in the dream, enjoying the shattered aftermath.

Then things got weird. Julian began to grow wings. Big ones. Not little fairy wings, but huge wings like some modern-day Icarus. Frowning, she noted that these feathers were the deep, rich brown of a golden eagle.

Feathers touched her arms. This set was pale blue, almost white. The color of Kyle's eyes. Weird. Only then did she realize that Kyle, too, had sprouted wings. Nubs she could handle—like being ribbed for her pleasure, right? But wings ... what the fuck...

Chapter Two

She catapulted into wakefulness, adrenaline pumping. Jackknifing up, her eyes scanned frantically. She yanked the ear buds out of her ears to listen. What the hell?

After assuring herself that there didn't seem to be any immediate danger, she collapsed back against the chair to calm her galloping heart. Her breathing steadied and her heart slowed. She noticed that her pussy still throbbed and her nipples felt raw against her shirt. Curiously, she lifted the neckline and peered down at her breasts.

Her eyes rounded. Holy crap, that was too weird!

She scrambled off the chair, grabbed her laptop and ran into the house. The laptop and iPod bounced on the sofa where she dropped them. She peeled off her clothes and raced up the stairs. The slickness along the insides of her thighs made her conscious of every step. In the master bathroom, she stopped in front of the mirror.

No, it wasn't a mistake. Her mirror image showed all the physical signs of having engaged in the dream. Her dark hair was in disarray, her hazel eyes feverishly bright. Her nipples were dark and swollen, the sensitive skin of her breasts pink and slightly raw. The curve of her left hip sported a small bruise, and her pussy was awash. Hand trembling, she reached between her thighs.

Oh, God. Her flesh was swollen and wet. She winced when her fingers slid into her inexplicably sore body. Her whole body shook with wracking shudders as she swiped her fingers inside herself.

Near panic, she pulled her fingers from her pussy to inspect them. Her knees loosened and she sagged against the vanity. Thank God. Nothing but her own cream. No sticky white intermingled with her own juice, no musky-sweet smell of semen mixed with her own scent.

Drawing in measured breaths, Maddy forced herself to calm down. It had just been a dream. A very erotic dream in which she had clearly had real orgasms. No reason to go off the deep end.

A few moments of slow breathing restored Maddy's perspective. Her wheezing laugh echoed in the bathroom. Had she really just run up here in a blind panic thinking she'd had actual, real sex with two men while she slept and dreamed of hot sex? She shook her head at her own idiocy. What she needed was a cold shower.

* * * *

Once again sitting at the cliff edge, Maddy sipped a glass of wine while she watched the water darken. Okay, clearly she needed to get laid. That dream had been entirely too real. Even the weird wing thing. First, she couldn't remember ever dreaming a ménage before. She'd fantasized about them, sure, but she hadn't had an actual dream. Second, the penis nubs were weird. She'd heard of people getting implants to mimic sex toys, but ... well, maybe she spent too much time on the internet. Then there was the wing thing. Big wings, like angels or X-men, but in pretty colors. That was just—well, whatever it was, it was not usual. The closest she'd ever come to incorporating feathers in sex included a feather duster and French maid uniform. Somehow, she didn't think that

counted.

Rolling the wine glass between her palms, she pondered her options. She wasn't really much for clubs—too hard to talk, too much cigarette smoke, and too much fake tan. On the other hand, where the devil did she expect to meet guys? She'd never really thought about it, because it had never been an issue. Lovers had always just kind of ... shown up. She'd never had to find one. Or two.

Okay, where had that come from?

Well, obviously from the dream, but she wouldn't really want a ménage. Would she?

Oh, hell yes.

But wanting and having were two different things. The dynamics of managing a ménage beyond a single sexual encounter seemed insane. Who slept where? Who slept with whom? Was there a schedule? How did the roles pan out?

Maddy shook her head at herself. Why worry about the logistics when the likelihood of her finding a single lover in this remote part of Nova Scotia was limited, let alone a pair willing to explore a ménage. Too bad she hadn't thought to bring her vibrator with her. The nubby one.

She stood with a sigh. Fully dark now, the lights from the house cast a warm yellow glow into the night. Her nerves from earlier returned, and she walked toward the welcoming light, her sandal-clad feet quiet on the scrubby grass. The ocean breeze soughed through the evergreens, the night creatures tuned up for their evening concert, and gravel crunched under tires in the drive.

Tires. In the drive? The nerves blossomed into fear.

She sprinted toward the house, dirt spraying under her sandals. She slammed the door closed behind her, locking it, just before she saw the headlights come around the curve of the driveway, throwing crazy shadows on the trees.

She set the wineglass down on the counter and hurried through to the kitchen. Flipping the lock on that door, she peered through the window. Whoever it was pulled up on the other side of her rental car, the hulking shadow of an SUV or big truck dwarfing the little car.

Grabbing the cordless phone, she moved away from the doors and into the main part of the house.

Maybe some primitive feminine reaction to being alone and far from aid had kicked in, but her heart now lodged in her throat. Then again, maybe she should have thought of—how had Bennett put it?—personal security before now. Suddenly, she wasn't so confident in Agent Dawes' assurances of her safety.

The doorbell rang.

Gripping the phone tightly, she dialed 911 and left her finger on the send button. Paranoid? Maybe. Hell, was it even still 911 in Canada?

Squaring her shoulders, Maddy walked into the front room. The porch light didn't so much reveal her visitors as create hazy, intimidating shapes. But there were definitely two of them. And they were big. Her finger twitched on the send button on the phone.

"Who is it?"

"Talon Security, Ms. Crane. Bennett Daskowitz should have mentioned us?"

Her brows snapped together. She knew that voice on some deep, visceral level. How did she know that voice? Very Alan Rickman. Like a tuning fork, something in her pelvis vibrated at the pitch. And what were they doing here? She'd asked for a security system

at her new practice, not for a visit.

“Identification?”

She thought she heard a low cough from the other side of the door before two IDs were pressed against the glass. She reached forward to flip the lock as she read the cards. The phone slid from her hand, crashing onto the hardwood floor.

Kyle Reinhart. Julian Cross.

Her body flashed heat before her vision grayed at the edges. The last thing she heard before she hit the ground was vicious cursing.

Chapter Three

Deep voices were familiar, but not.

“Dammit, we should have eased her into it.”

“How? We don’t have much time, and you know what the visions mean.”

Visions? Dream. Oh, shit.

“I don’t know, Kyle, but I don’t think scaring her to death is a great first impression.” Heavy sarcasm weighted the deep, sexy voice.

“We don’t have a choice, Julian. She needs to decide, and she can’t do it without information.”

A heavy sigh. “What decision can she make? We can’t afford for her to make the wrong decision.”

What decision? Cotton wool filled her head and this conversation confused her.

“What decision?” Her voice sounded rusty, like she hadn’t used it in days. She forced her eyes open a fraction.

One large male body dropped down in front of her. Where was she? Damn, her head hurt. Oh, she was on the sofa.

“Hey, honey. We didn’t mean to scare you.”

The Alan Rickman voice belonged to Julian. Wow. He was beautiful, like a dark angel. And those eyes.

Maddy licked her lips, trying desperately to put things together. “Wasn’t scared. More like shocked.”

“Shocked?”

“Who the hell expects a wet dream to show up on the door step?”

Fuck. Her internal censors weren’t online yet. Julian made a strangled sound and she clamped her lips together. A growl erupted from Kyle’s direction.

Julian cleared his throat. “I see. Can you sit up?”

Maddy forced her eyes all the way open, meeting his gaze. Oh, yeah. Those were some very powerful peepers. “I think so. For God’s sake, don’t touch me.”

Nope. Internal censor definitely on vacation.

Another growling noise from Kyle had her slowly turning her head to look at him.

Like Julian, he wore khaki slacks and a polo shirt under a sports jacket. Big and powerful, his body tensed. His face drew into fierce planes, the predator inside clear on his features. Maddy blinked, pushing herself to sitting. Crap, that animalistic demeanor shot straight to her pussy, clenching her muscles and releasing a wash of cream. She turned back to Julian, but that didn’t help.

Julian’s nostrils flared and Maddy had the distinct impression he could smell her arousal.

Both men stared at her, their eyes moving over her greedily.

“Are you okay?” Kyle’s voice was gruff, rougher than Julian’s but just as deep.

Maddy shook herself before swallowing hard. “I-I think so.”

Great. Now she was stuttering. Then it suddenly hit her. The men from her dream were in the house. Men she had never before met but with whom she had experienced the most monumental orgasms of her life. Strangers who had, at least in the dream, poured

their seed into her aching pussy. Oh. My. God.

Something on her face must have given away her panic, because Julian started to reach for her.

“I said don’t touch me,” Maddy said sharply. This was bad enough without adding touch to the situation. Her mind spun, trying to find some toehold in reality. She wasn’t psychic, so what the hell was this?

Julian lifted his hands, palms out, and Kyle moved up next to him. Though they weren’t touching her, they effectively caged her.

“You have to be confused,” Kyle said, his voice gentling a bit.

Maddy threw him a look. “Ya think?”

Julian cracked a smile, white teeth flashing like a damned toothpaste commercial.

“Ah, honey, I like you.”

Kyle gave him an exasperated look. “You gave us a bad moment when you passed out.”

“Not my fave, either,” Maddy pointed out. She shook her head, trying to order her thoughts. That just made her head hurt worse. Dammit, she needed to think.

They definitely acted like they knew her. Odd, even with the dream earlier. That dream had been sex, straight up, no intellectual or emotional sharing, just physical connection. So even assuming they shared the dream with her—and how weird was that?—it didn’t explain their solicitous manner.

She looked back and forth between them. Kyle seemed the dominant personality, but Julian wasn’t weak. Instead, she had the impression that they had been a team for a very long time. Her brows came together. She suddenly wondered if they were lovers. Nothing overt indicated that kind of relationship, but she thought they might be.

Julian was magnificent on his knees, bent over the metal frame of their camp cot, his arms stretched out. Kyle crowded behind him, cock throbbing faster than his heart. Buried in Julian’s ass, his teeth gripped the nape of his neck. The flat boniness of Julian’s back plate pressed against his chest and abdomen, but sensation centered in Kyle’s throbbing, straining erection. Tension gathered at the base of his spine, swelling at the root of his cock. He pulled back, the slick, hot walls dragging along his length. One more thrust, buried to the hilt, and the tension released, Kyle’s back bowing. His orgasm shot from him in long, pulsing streamers.

Maddy jerked back to reality, back into her own skin. What the hell was that? These visions just got weirder and weirder. First the penis nubs, now back plates. Slumping back into the couch, she let her head fall back. They’d painted the ceiling a soothing taupe, she noted. Who bothered to paint the ceiling? She heaved out a breath, trying to steady herself.

Regardless of how ridiculous it seemed, these men were here. That meant that something beyond her understanding was definitely at work, and she hated not understanding. She could deal with nearly anything, but she had to understand the situation first.

“Okay. I’m a problem solver. Let me just gather my info here and lay it out. If I can do that, maybe I can deal with this weirdness.”

The fact that they didn’t question her about her meaning gave her a big clue that she was not alone in having some bizarre prescient sexual experience. Lifting her head, she studied them. She found their reactions to her statement informative. Kyle frowned, his

eyes becoming shuttered as he drew into himself. Julian, on the other hand, leaned forward, his head cocked to one side and a slight smile lingering on his lips. It irritated her that neither of them seemed bothered by this insane situation.

“You both work for Talon Security, correct?” Both men nodded. “Okay. Why the hell are you here? I asked for physical security at the offices, not a visit.”

Julian cleared his throat. “Ah, well, Talon came into some information that leads us to believe that you are in personal danger. We discussed the situation with Mr. Daskowitz. He said he would notify you.”

Maddy considered the email from Bennett. Skepticism lent an edge to her tone. “He only indicated that Talon would be contacting me regarding personal security, not that you would be showing up on the doorstep.”

Julian glanced at Kyle before answering, cementing Maddy’s opinion that Kyle was the leader. “We didn’t tell him we would be coming up here immediately. We wanted to see you personally.”

Skepticism ballooned into full-blown suspicion. “Oh, really? Why is that?”

“We don’t have time to dance around this, Julian,” Kyle said tersely. He met her gaze straight on, those intense eyes seething with some combination of emotions she couldn’t quite decipher.

“Then you tell me what’s going on, Kyle.”

He froze when she said his name, his eyes dropping briefly closed before he seemed to recover himself. He rolled his shoulders and looked over her shoulder. “We have reason to believe that someone took out a contract on you.”

Maddy stared at him. It took a moment for the words to sink in, another moment for the synapses to fire and process the words. Still, what he said didn’t make sense. “Me?”

“Yes.”

“But—” She broke off as she considered. “No, that can’t be right. The FBI assured me that the Russians weren’t out much, in the scheme of things, and since I couldn’t finger any of them directly, I wasn’t a threat to the bigger organization. Since the feds have all the information, whether I testify or not is irrelevant from their standpoint.”

“True. But we don’t necessarily think it’s the Russians.”

Maddy blinked. Then she stared at Kyle again. “You think one of the nasty nerds wants me dead?”

Julian made a sound that could have been a muffled laugh, or maybe a snort. “You call them the nasty nerds?”

She raised a brow. “Well, yeah. What else would I call them?”

Julian just shook his head. “In answer to your question, yes. We think one of the partners contracted the hit.”

“In which case, shouldn’t I be talking to the FBI?”

The smile on Julian’s face died. He looked over at Kyle, whose grim countenance gave away nothing.

“The FBI does not believe you are in any danger, Maddy. I don’t believe they will take it seriously until at least one attempt on your life has been made. We can’t afford to take that risk. Julian and I won’t take that risk with you.”

Kyle’s austere assessment sent a chill up Maddy’s spine. Suddenly restless, she stood. A level look and Kyle stepped back to give her some room. She began to pace, wishing for her iPod and some thinking music. The idea that someone actually wanted

her dead was so foreign she didn't catch the significance of the last statement for a few moments. When she did, she stopped pacing. He meant personally, not professionally.

"We're back to that. It's going to have to wait until we discuss the whole threat-to-my-life problem. I can't deal with insanity until I deal with reality."

Julian's lips twitched again and she pinned him with a glare. His face seemed serious enough, but his eyes still held suppressed amusement.

"Fine, so you think someone is going to try to kill me. First, why would you think that? Just wait," she directed, pointing to Kyle when he opened his mouth to answer. Julian had to turn his head and cough into his hand to cover the laugh, which earned him another glare. "Second, how do we cancel the contract, and third, what do we do in the meantime?"

Kyle's expression made it clear he didn't appreciate her cutting him off. Too bad. He would have to deal because she wasn't about to tiptoe around him no matter how hot he was.

"Before Talon took the contract for your security, we began an in-depth risk assessment. There isn't anything we do that the FBI couldn't do if they had the resources available for every witness or investigation, but they don't. They don't believe the Russians are a threat to you—and our risk assessment team agrees. However, they discounted a vengeance hit by one of the partners, which we did not. The types of people the partners might recruit for a hit are very different from the Russians, so it's not surprising that the FBI hasn't heard any rumblings in their Russian pipeline about you."

Maddy shook her head slightly. "Okay, I understood most of that. Boiled down, the FBI looked at the Russian Mafia for threats and didn't find any. They didn't bother to look at the nasty nerds, but Talon did."

"Basically. When our people started nosing around, one of them found the broker."

"Broker?"

"The client contacts the broker, gives him the name for the hit and the ceiling of what he's willing to pay. The broker puts it out on the market. Fortunately for you, depending on how the broker works, it's usually the low bid that gets the contract. Tends more toward thugs moving into being pros." Kyle shrugged at her look of amazed horror. "You asked."

"Sweet Buddha on a trampoline. The things you learn. Fine, so on to the next part—assuming that there is a contract, how do I go about stopping it?"

Julian winced. "You don't. Over the last two days, we tried to have some of our agents bid the contract, but that didn't pan out. Now they're trying to backtrack to find out who got it. Once they do that, the first thing they do will be to offer to buy out the contract. Sometimes that works, sometimes not. At the same time, if we can follow the trail back to one of the partners, we can get the hit cancelled on that end."

"What makes you think they'd be willing to cancel?"

Both men looked at her and she shivered in reaction. The absolute blankness of their expressions told her more than she wanted to know. One way or the other, the contract would be revoked.

She turned to stare blindly out the windows toward the sea. Ridiculous, really, to think that one of the nasty nerds had contracted a hit on her. On her!

She turned it over in her head, considering the angles. Baskins was a condescending jerk with a tendency to live beyond his means. Greedy and obnoxious, yes, but she didn't

think he'd try to kill her. Pete Connors' big problem was that he couldn't keep his pants zipped. He'd fooled around on Babs, which had led to the divorce. Since then, he'd had a string of high-maintenance bimbos which he supplemented with women in the office. She was fairly certain he was tapping his assistant Melanie and Cheryl in payroll. Jail would be very difficult for him, but he wasn't a bad guy. In fact, he might not end up with jail time at all, since Baskins and Shelton were the brains behind the money laundering. Pete was just oblivious. Paul Shelton, on the other hand, was a mean bastard. The joy he took in grinding down those around him made her ill and had been one of the biggest reasons she'd begun digging around in the company accounts. His partners had overruled him to hire her, and her unwillingness to kowtow stuck in his craw. He'd been chipping away at her position from day one. He seemed most likely to have both the knowledge and the desire to arrange a professional hit. Though she'd have expected him to go high end—he didn't usually cheap out on things.

"My gut says that if it's one of the partners, Shelton is most likely." She sighed.

"We're checking into it," Julian assured her.

She rolled her shoulders, shrugging off the tension. She wasn't one to dwell on things she couldn't change, so she needed to focus on what she could do about the situation. She turned back to face them. "So what do I do in the interim?"

Julian cleared his throat and again glanced at Kyle. That was getting kind of old, actually. It made her think they were hiding things from her.

"We think it's best if you have a personal security detail. Also, since you made no effort to conceal your plans, this house is not a safe location." Kyle's stony expression softened slightly. "We should leave in the morning. We'll turn in your rental car and go from there."

"Go where?"

A muscle in Kyle's jaw twitched. Ooooh, he really didn't like having to explain himself. Tough cookies.

"There are several options," Kyle said tightly. "We all have satellite phones and you have the computer uplink, so you won't be cut off. We'd rather not return to the US immediately, since we believe that the contractor is more at home in the US, particularly in urban environments."

Startled, Maddy blinked. "Why would you think that?"

Kyle's eyes turned hard. "The way the contract played out implies that the individual may have gang or perhaps drug cartel ties."

"Oh." She studied him. "How can you know that?"

Julian smiled. "Professional secret."

"Fine, keep your secret." Maddy considered her options. She could kick them to the curb and take her chances—they might be wrong about a hit, or she might be able to dodge on her own. But, really, she didn't know anything about hiding from a professional killer. And she got the idea that they weren't going to leave so easily. The second option was to follow along like so much baggage. That didn't appeal because she wanted to be a part of the planning; she worked better if she had information. She did, however, get the idea that Julian and Kyle would prefer this option. There was another option, one that didn't leave her either completely vulnerable or completely out of the loop. She was all for being smart and cautious about this situation, but that didn't mean she had to be excluded.

“Here’s the deal. I’m not comfortable with you being completely in charge.” She held up a hand when both men began to object. “No, hear me out. You can argue with me after.”

Julian shrugged his acceptance, but Kyle’s shuttered look conveyed his dislike of the situation.

“Like I said, I don’t like you being completely in charge, but that doesn’t mean I’m stupid. I know that you are better trained and better equipped to deal with my safety.”

She moved across the room to stand directly in front of them. Both men relaxed at her words. Time for the sneak attack.

“So I’ll cooperate—within limits. I want to know where we are going. I want to have a hand in making decisions. I’ll follow directions to the letter in a dangerous situation, but for the larger picture, you are going to have to go through me. It’s my life, and I will not abdicate responsibility for it. Clear?”

Julian blinked in surprise before an appreciative smile stretched his lips. His easy smiles gave him a boyish charm and made him seem less a threat. Maddy didn’t believe that for a moment. Under that easy-going exterior lurked a predator. Anyone who forgot that did so at his own peril.

Kyle’s nostrils flared in reaction, but he nodded curtly. “I can understand your position. I need to know that you will not question our orders if the situation is dangerous.”

“I won’t. I’m not a fool, Kyle.”

Again, he stilled at the use of his name. She filed that away for consideration. She didn’t think she’d used Julian’s name yet. It would be interesting to see if he had a similar reaction.

“Fine. You need to pack tonight. If you haven’t eaten, we need to eat before we can discuss our next moves.”

Maddy nodded agreement, leading them into the kitchen. “There are guest rooms upstairs. I assume you have luggage in the rental, so feel free to pick a room for the night.”

“I’ll scope it out,” Julian volunteered. Kyle grunted what must have been assent, because Julian moved out of the kitchen and began a thorough inspection of the house, closing drapes as he went.

Kyle walked to the kitchen door and checked the lock before heading to the refrigerator.

“There’s stuff in the pantry, too.”

He threw her a look over his shoulder. “Where are the vegetables?”

“Um, well, there are some frozen ones.”

He closed the refrigerator and pulled open the freezer. He took out two bags of vegetables and two packages of frozen beef. Then he began rummaging through the cupboards, pulling out various bottles and containers until he had them lined up on the counter. A box of boil-in-bag rice joined the pile, accompanied by a disgusted shake of his head.

By the time Julian returned downstairs, Kyle had water on the stove for the rice and hunted through cabinets for a large skillet. Though he’d asked, Maddy had no idea where one might be—she’d been happy with canned soup and frozen dinners. Beyond dishes and the microwave, she wasn’t completely sure where to find anything.

“I’m going to go grab the overnight bag and the gear.”

“Fine. Dinner should be ready in about fifteen minutes.”

Feeling distinctly useless, Maddy wrinkled her nose. “You seem to have this under control. Why don’t I start packing and you can call me when dinner is ready?”

He looked over at her, those curiously pale eyes sending a jolt of awareness through her. She’d been pretty successful tamping down the sexual attraction, pushing the earlier dream into a dark corner of her mind. One searing look brought it all back.

Unsettled, she jerked her thumb over her shoulder. “I’m just going to, um, go.”

She fled. She couldn’t delude herself into thinking it was anything but what it was—a rapid retreat from the potent attraction between them.

When Julian stuck his head into her room a few moments later, she had laid out the clothes for tomorrow and begun the tedious process of trying to make everything fit in the suitcases.

“We’re taking the room next door. Need any help?”

Maddy straightened. The buzz of attraction was there, a low-intensity hum in the background of her mind. There wasn’t the intense pull she felt with Kyle, but there was definitely something. She couldn’t quite put her finger on it, but whatever it was, she liked it. Liked it more than the out-of-control pull Kyle had.

It took her brain a moment to catch up with her hormones. They were taking the room next door. There were two other bedrooms, but they were going to share one. The vision from earlier came back with a vengeance—a vivid image of Kyle bent over Julian, shoving into him.

Maddy cleared her throat, shaking her head to clear the arousal from her mind.

“Sure. I’m just packing up the stuff I’m not going to need before we leave. Those clothes there are what I’ll wear tomorrow. That pile there is the dirty stuff I’ll wash tonight. Everything else gets packed.”

“Any rhyme or reason?”

“Not so much. My main goal is simply to make it fit.”

He smiled at her, a wide grin of shared amusement, before opening a drawer.

As if he had radar, he’d chosen the lingerie drawer. He pulled out a lacy pink bra and held it up. A little digging produced the matching sheer thong.

“You wear this stuff all the time?” His already deep voice lowered and roughened. His eyes darkened from gold to amber and a faint flush colored his cheekbones.

They stared at each other across the bed, awareness blooming into a larger, more dangerous arousal. Maddy’s nipples tingled, and the heat she’d been trying to keep at bay threatened to flare to life.

“I think this is a bad idea.”

Julian dropped the bra and panties back into the drawer. “You know we’re going to have to deal with it eventually.”

“I really don’t want to think about it. I have enough to worry about just now without calling my sanity into question.”

“You aren’t crazy, Maddy. It’s just the way—”

“Not right now, Julian.”

His eyes widened fractionally and his mouth slackened when she said his name. The dying color in his cheekbones flared to life.

What the hell? That was so weird. Weird, but interesting.

She tucked a shirt into the case in front of her before grabbing the laundry basket and heading for the door. She noticed it took Julian a moment to follow her. His reaction to his name was even stronger than Kyle's, and that definitely merited more thought.

Chapter Four

Dinner was quiet, the three of them eating Kyle's impromptu stir fry in silence. Oddly, Maddy didn't feel the need to fill the silence. It wasn't the uncomfortable, awkward silence of tension, but rather the accepting calm of companionship. She couldn't remember ever before sharing a meal without wanting to break the silence and, given the unusual circumstances tonight, it surprised her.

Julian gathered the dishes and Kyle motioned for Maddy to follow him into the den at the back of the house. He'd been busy. Or someone had, because she couldn't figure out how he could have done this and cooked dinner, too.

Maps and papers covered the low table in front of the sofa. Highlighters and pens littered the surface and Maddy could see handwritten notes on some of the pages. A fat black three-ring binder sat to one side.

"What's all this?"

"Planning. You wanted to be involved, this is how we plan. So have a seat. I'll bring you up to speed and then we can discuss what we'll be doing."

She noticed he didn't say that she'd help decide what they'd be doing. No, Kyle still aimed to dictate the terms. Whether Maddy went along with that would depend entirely on the terms.

"Catch me up, then."

"There are a few places where you are more likely to attract attention." He pointed at a map of the northeast corridor. "If I were trying to find you, the first thing I'd do is check credit card and passport activity, and you can bet that will be what the contractor does."

"Ah. So one of the reasons I need to turn in the rental car is because it's on my credit card."

"Yes, and since it's rented to you, it would be easy to track the vehicle."

"Gotcha. Well, I don't have a particular problem staying in Canada, but if the, um, contractor, has tracked me this far already, or will shortly, then we can't stay anywhere near here."

He smiled slightly, softening his harsh features. Maddy got the feeling he was pleased she wasn't a moron. It made her wonder briefly what kind of bone-headed clients they'd been protecting.

"Exactly. You also need to stop using your credit card."

She thought for a moment. "I have some cash, but not enough to go without credit cards for long. I can do a cash wire transfer, but it won't be available for a couple of days since the banks are already closed. Plus, it'll be obvious when I take it out, anyway."

"That's unnecessary at this point. We brought cash with us."

Julian sauntered in, crossing to sit on the couch. "So where are we going?"

"We have two big choices. The first choice is to bite the bullet and cross back into the States and hide there. The second is to stay north of the border and hide here. My preference is Canada—I think carrying out the contract will be more difficult here, so that will give Cam and the others more time to work on canceling the hit. Internally, you won't need to show your passport, so we can keep you under wraps."

“Cam?”

“Our boss,” Julian supplied. “I vote for staying north, too.”

“I already told Kyle I’m fine with that, so I don’t see an issue. I do have another question—how likely do you think it is that whoever it is knows I have personal security?”

Kyle frowned slightly, a tiny crease appearing between his sandy brows. “The only people who know are you and about half a dozen of our people. Even Daskowitz only knows we’re suggesting it, not that we’ve already moved on it. It isn’t on our books anywhere, so I can’t see how anyone would know.”

“Okay. Let’s do this. I’m going to authorize Bennett to draft out a large retainer payment to you for the offices. That should give Talon enough to offset immediate expenses.”

“You don’t need to do that,” Julian protested.

“I work better if I know I have the bases covered. So where would we be going?”

“I’m not sure yet. I’d originally thought that losing ourselves in Ontario or Quebec City would be the best option, but I think it will make it harder on the contractor if we head away from cities. Unfortunately, I don’t think you’d be particularly happy with extended tent camping.”

“No, I wouldn’t be. I don’t sleep well in sleeping bags, and I need showers.” She paused, resting a finger against her lips. She reached for one of the highlighters. Thinking was always easier with a pen in hand. “Can we rent an RV? We could then camp anywhere and still have beds.”

Kyle looked at her. “That’s a good idea. Why don’t you go get your computer and find out while Julian and I decide where to go.”

With a quick smile, she went to grab her laptop from the living room where she’d unceremoniously dumped it earlier. She didn’t want to think about what had precipitated that action. She had begun to delude herself into forgetting that part of the situation.

Booting up, she walked back to the den. It took a while for the satellite uplink to find a connection, so she sat in the big recliner, sinking into the leather. Comfy, but not exactly conducive to typing.

“Julian suggested that we might do better with a fifth wheel and a truck. More flexible. I agree, so look for places with fifth wheels available.”

“What’s a fifth wheel?”

“The RV you tow behind you on a hitch.”

“Oh. Okay, I can do that.”

While she put Google through its paces, she listened to Julian and Kyle discuss possible routes and destinations. Julian favored staying closer to civilization and in Canada that meant closer to the US border. Kyle leaned toward more remote outposts on the grounds that fewer people meant fewer threats. Julian argued that maintaining supplies for a lengthy stay would become difficult.

“Excuse me, but exactly how long do you expect me to hide out in the wilds—or not so wilds—of Canada?”

They’d been so caught up that her interruption startled them.

“Unless we can head off the contract, I’d say a few weeks. That will give Cam and the rest of the crew time to secure the offices and your house in Richmond.”

Maddy sighed at Kyle’s answer. “I can’t do that. I have a deposition in two weeks. I

have to be in Richmond for that.”

Kyle frowned but didn't look up. “Fine. We'll figure something out.”

“We have another problem.”

Both men swiveled their eyes to her, the intense concentration disconcerting her for a moment.

“What kind of problem?” Julian's quiet question seemed at odds with the tension in his face.

“No one rents fifth wheels. At least no one I've found. There are a couple of RV dealerships in Halifax, which is where I concentrated since we need to go there to turn in my rental. They sell fifth wheels, but don't seem to rent them. I could buy one, but then we'd have to title it and do all that mumbo jumbo. I don't know how well that would work in Canada, with me being a US citizen and all. Not to mention, you know, paper trail.”

Kyle pinched the bridge of his nose. “I don't want to give up the flexibility of that. I'd rather have a safe house and a car than a full-sized RV.”

“Too bad my new house isn't finished yet. It's only a couple of weeks until the deposition. We could just hole up until then and figure out something longer term afterward.”

Kyle lifted his head and pinned her with that pale stare. She met his gaze, eyes wide, for long moments. Heat began to work up through her body, sensitizing her skin so that she thought she felt the brush of her clothes. “Do you really think you could stay inside for two weeks?”

She considered that. “No, probably not. I'd go stir crazy.”

“I'm sure you would.” He paused for a moment, brows drawn together. She couldn't begin to explain why she found that so damned sexy. “I have an idea, though. Let me call Cam.”

He left the room abruptly, leaving her blinking in confused arousal at Julian. “What was that about? No way the house is ready yet. And he's right, I wouldn't stay inside.”

Julian smiled a little. “He does that sometimes. An idea someone has will spark something for him and he just runs with it.”

She eyed him. His even, handsome features and that boyish tilt to his smile seemed harmless, but she'd seen underneath the gloss a couple of times now. She knew better than to trust the pretty exterior. “How long have you been together?”

His head jerked around to face her, an echo of shock in his golden eyes. His reaction reinforced her impression that they were a couple.

He licked his lips before answering. “We've known each other since childhood.”

Interesting. He didn't directly answer the question. She considered pursuing it, but decided to let it drop. It seemed too much like prying where it wasn't her business. Or what she didn't want to be her business.

She opened her mouth to ask him another question. The vision blindsided her.

Julian huddled in the corner. Drowning in fear, he didn't want to see who stood in the doorway, but he had to look. He peered cautiously over his knees. The boy in the doorway was older, maybe ten. His blond hair caught the light from the hallway, which bleached the feathers of his wings to nearly white. His eyes should have been shadowed, but the pale blue seemed to pierce the gloom. The other boy kindled something inside him, lighting a small flame of hope.

Julian lifted his head fully, not bothering to wipe the tears from his face.

“I’m Kylan,” the boy said slowly, his voice even and soothing, reassuring. “Don’t be afraid. You’re mine now, Jevulian, and I take care of my own.”

Maddy sank back into the recliner. What the hell? What the hell was that? Blinking rapidly, she tried to clear her thoughts. Either she was going insane or there was something going on—something beyond her understanding. She wasn’t going to be able to put off explanations for much longer.

She glanced at Julian. His eyes were huge, his pupils wildly dilated as he stared at her. Suddenly scared she knew exactly why he looked so stunned, she ducked her head. If he had shared that little episode, she so didn’t want to know about it right now.

Fortunately for her sanity, Kyle returned.

“I talked to Cam. He’ll meet us in Halifax with a jet tomorrow afternoon.” He paused, looking back and forth between Maddy and Julian. “Okay, what happened?”

Scrambling upright in the chair, Maddy pushed a hand through her hair. “Nothing. Nothing happened.” She winced. She sounded like a teenager caught necking.

Kyle turned to Julian, eyebrows raised.

Julian shook his head slightly. “Just another connection.” Frowning, he rubbed his temples.

Kyle’s mouth softened. “We’ll work it out.”

With a weary smile, Julian pushed himself to standing. “I’m going to do the perimeter check and lock down.”

Kyle nodded, watching Julian walk out of the room. He turned to Maddy, his expression softer than she’d seen on him before. “I know this is difficult for you, but you have to trust us. We want what’s best for you.”

A spark of irritation flamed to life. “Do you know how condescending that sounds? I’m a grown woman, well aware of my own strengths and weaknesses. I know I don’t have the skills to deal with a hired killer. I don’t know you well enough to trust you, but I do trust Bennett, and he chose your firm, so I have to believe you know what you’re doing. As far as that situation goes, I believe you will do your job. You don’t get anything beyond that.”

Kyle’s jaw hardened. “You know there is more than that between us. You can run, little one, but not for long.”

She drew a deep breath, prepared to blast him, but he cut her off.

“Go upstairs and pack. You don’t want to get into this tonight and neither do I. Let it rest or you will get more than you bargained for.”

Her sense of self-preservation overrode her ego and she swallowed her retort. He was right. She didn’t want to deal with any of this, and certainly not tonight. She glared at him before sliding out of the recliner and brushing past him on her way upstairs.

* * * *

Julian stirred restlessly. The light play of calloused fingertips along his hip penetrated his consciousness. His cock stirred and he shifted his legs. Swimming slowly out of sleep, Julian focused on the fingers that traced over his lower abdomen, dipped to brush the root of his cock. Fingers circled the base, testing the filling hardness there. Julian hummed in pleasure.

Kyle spooned against his back, his rigid cock pressed into the groove of his ass.

Kyle's lips rested at the nape of Julian's neck, his hot breath a caress.

"I'm awake," he murmured.

Kyle's low chuckle vibrated against his skin. "I certainly hope so."

Julian stretched, rubbing his ass against Kyle's cock, before flipping to his back.

Kyle's hips surged against him, bringing a small spurt of satisfaction.

"She's got you worked up, doesn't she," Julian teased, raising one hand to sift through Kyle's hair.

"And you aren't?"

"You know I am. She responds more to you, though."

Kyle's fingers flattened against the plane of Julian's lower belly. "Does that bother you?"

"Not really. She responds to me, it's there. Just stronger with you."

Kyle resumed his feathering caresses. He propped his head on his other hand, looking down at his lover. "She's not here tonight. It's just you and me."

Julian sighed. "She'll get there. It's a lot to deal with if you aren't prepared. It's difficult even for us, and we know what's going on."

"I know, but I don't like that she doesn't trust us."

He gave Kyle a speaking look. "Be fair, Kyle."

Kyle moved his hand to brush along Julian's lengthening shaft. "I don't want to be fair."

"Let's see if we can distract you."

Julian turned to face Kyle, dislodging Kyle's hand. Gently, he pushed Kyle over onto his back. Smiling, he straddled Kyle's hips.

Julian leaned forward to kiss him, a simple press of lips. Julian lowered his hips a bit, gasping when his semi-aroused flesh rubbed along Kyle's steely length. Kyle laced his hands into Julian's dark hair, pulling him into a harder kiss.

Kyle's tongue swept into Julian's mouth, tangling them together and tasting of toothpaste and heat. Julian loved the way Kyle's tongue wrapped around his, twining them together in a dance somehow more intimate than sex. For long moments, he simply luxuriated in the feel and taste of Kyle.

Julian braced his hands on Kyle's smooth chest and pushed up, breaking the kiss. Sliding down to capture Kyle's thighs between his own, Julian ran his hands over Kyle's warm flesh. He mapped every slight dip and bump, tracing the lines with hunger and tenderness. Julian's cock continued to fill, the warm heaviness in his groin a pleasant counterpoint to the excitement building in his chest.

Julian drew circles around the edges of Kyle's nipples, his balls contracting as he watched the tiny nubs harden to points. Unable to resist the temptation, he dipped down to flick his tongue over one pale disk.

Kyle arched, gripping Julian's head. Julian eased one hand down between their bodies to cup Kyle's scrotum. A long sigh rewarded him and a slight movement indicated Kyle wanted to widen his legs.

Willing to accommodate, Julian moved to kneel between Kyle's thighs, pushing them apart with his knees. It was difficult to keep his mouth on Kyle's body while he maneuvered, but he didn't want to give up contact with that sweet bit of flesh.

His hand curled around the soft skin of Kyle's sac, easing around to rub his perineum. Kyle's cock jerked against Julian's breastbone, a nudge that kicked his pulse

rate up a notch.

Though reluctant to leave Kyle's nipple, Julian had bigger game in mind. Sliding his open mouth over Kyle's ribs, he moved steadily lower. He paused briefly to lick the faint white scars along his sides before moving on to the fascinating muscles of his abdomen. The hard ridges contracted and shivered under the delicate and knowing touch of Julian's tongue. Years of knowledge distilled into intense pleasure.

Julian delved into the shallow dimple of Kyle's navel, the hard length of Kyle's cock pressing insistently into the side of his neck. The soft skin of Kyle's glans bumped into the hollow behind Julian's ear, the nubs creating raised pinpricks of heat. Julian moved his head slightly, sliding that soft heat along the smooth skin of his neck while he moved lower.

Kyle grunted, lifting his hips in encouragement.

Julian swapped hands, moving his left hand to grasp Kyle's cock while his right hand moved down to grasp his own rock hard length. He began to pump in time with his heartbeat.

Once the rhythm caught hold, Julian turned his head to nuzzle Kyle's stiff length. He inhaled deeply, soaking in the earthy scent. Using only his lips, he worked along the underside of the shaft, his face pressing Kyle's cock against the tensed muscles of his belly.

"Come on, Julian. Stop teasing me."

Julian chuckled against him, enjoying the irritated arousal in his partner's voice. "You don't mean that. You like it when I tease you. You'll like it more when she teases you."

Kyle's cock leapt under Julian's lips.

"Oh, you like that idea, don't you?" Julian ran his tongue up Kyle's rigid flesh and around the flushed head before heading back down.

"Shut up, she'll hear you."

"No she won't. We're both too good at being quiet." To prove his point, Julian suddenly engulfed the first third of Kyle's cock, sucking hard and tightening his fists around them both.

Kyle's breath strangled in his throat, but the small noise didn't carry beyond Julian's ears. Julian tightened his fist over his own erection, enjoying his lover's distress.

Lifting his head, he grinned up at Kyle. "Just imagine how it will be, the three of us. Think of all the combinations, all the lovely possibilities."

Kyle growled low in his throat. "Shut up and suck, Julian."

"Yes, sir!" Julian swallowed his laugh and renewed his efforts.

He lost himself in the smooth glide of lips over skin, the rougher friction of his palm on his own cock. The salty flavor of Kyle's precome coated his tongue and Julian moaned his pleasure, running his tongue over the smooth head to gather up the precious fluid. His cheeks hollowed as he increased the suction.

Kyle's hips pushed up to meet the hot friction of Julian's mouth, a muffled grunt indicating his pleasure. One of Kyle's hands pressed into the back of Julian's head, urging him to take more.

Relaxing his throat, Julian eased further down Kyle's pulsing cock. The thick length pushed his jaws wide. Julian knew from experience that the joint would ache later, but it was worth it to see Kyle's head thrown back and his body arched in that perfect tension

of ecstasy.

“All of it, Jules. Take it all.”

Moving his hand to massage behind Kyle’s balls, Julian sank down the last bit to engulf Kyle’s cock to the root. It was impossible to breathe with his throat full of Kyle, but the momentary light-headedness paled beside Kyle’s grateful moan of relief.

“That’s it, Tlingling. Suck me, make me come,” Kyle whispered.

Julian rose a few inches, dragging in air through his nose. Working his throat, he eased back down. Up and down in slow movements that drove Kyle wild. Kyle flattened both hands against Julian’s head and held him in place, bucking hard to press his cock deeper. Julian gently squeezed Kyle’s scrotum and Kyle exploded. Kyle’s essence, thick and smoky with life, jetted into Julian’s throat. Julian swallowed, his mouth and throat working hard over Kyle’s emptying cock.

Julian could feel his own climax rising, his seed gathering heavily in his balls, the heat contracting in the small of his back. He shifted his grip to work the head, rubbing frantically over the sensitive tip and the even more sensitive nodules. The itch of impending orgasm tormented him.

Kyle fell back against the bed, but Julian held the softening bulk of him in his mouth, working himself toward orgasm. He looked up the length of his lover’s body, a fierce satisfaction layering over the arousal.

Kyle’s eyes fluttered for a moment before opening to meet Julian’s gaze. The sleepy, sated look pushed Julian over the edge of his orgasm, the pleasure pushing from his testicles and out through his cock in waves. Gasping, Julian fell back, letting Kyle’s cock slide from his lips. He jerked, sticky come filling his hand and seeping through his fingers. The boneless relief of release sapped his strength and he collapsed sideways to lie next to Kyle.

Chapter Five

Maddy fought her way free of the covers. Her breathing came in gulps and her pussy throbbed. She threw off her nightshirt, unable to bear the smooth friction against her over-stimulated nipples. Trembling with arousal and reaction, she flung her legs over the side of the bed and forced herself to sit. She shifted her weight, squirming when her damp panties pressed into her swollen flesh.

With a moan of frustration, she ran her hands through her hair. God. She'd never had such vivid sexual dreams before and she didn't want them now. She felt hot and itchy, certain that even masturbation wouldn't take the edge off her arousal. What the hell was happening to her?

She made her way on wobbly legs to the bathroom. Leaning heavily on the counter, she washed her face with cool water. It didn't do much to cool the burning in her blood, but she did feel marginally better.

She dropped her head forward and took a deep breath. Maybe she should do some meditation, try to calm herself down. It had been weeks since she'd really done any yoga and the discipline of it might help.

The decision helped settle her churning emotions, and the simple act of sitting tailor-fashion on the floor of the room began calming her agitated mind. Oh, she should have done this before going to bed.

Her shoulders began to relax, but a soft knock on her door jerked her upright.

Unconsciously, she crossed her arms over her bare breasts. "Yes?"

"Maddy? Is everything all right? I heard you moving around."

The concern in Julian's voice had her hunching protectively, pulling her knees up defensively. Rationally, she knew he could not possibly know what she had dreamed, but that didn't stop her instinctive response. "I'm fine. Just a little restless."

A slight rattle caught her attention. Maddy's gaze fixed with horror on the door knob. Please, God, do not let him come in here. Another thought occurred to her and her eyes widened. "I hope to hell you washed your hands!"

She slapped her hand over her mouth in a futile attempt to call back the words. What was wrong with her? If the dream was some kind of weird psychic episode, she had likely just engineered the confrontation she wanted to avoid. If not, Julian would think she was insane. Which, given her thoughts, might not be far off the mark.

"Maddy? Why would you say that?"

"You know what? I'm still not up to talking about this. It's four in the morning and I need to sleep. Everything's fine. Go away."

She knew she sounded bitchy, but she wanted him to leave. If he came in here, she was pretty sure she'd have a major meltdown. Her body wanted sex and sleep, her brain refused to shut off, her hormones were in an uproar, and, if that wasn't enough, someone evidently wanted her dead. Didn't she deserve a little slack?

Evidently Julian decided she did, because after a brief pause, she heard his footsteps moving away from the door. A moment later she heard the door to the next room close.

Relief made her boneless. For several breaths, she did nothing. Dead certain she wasn't going to get any more sleep tonight, she got up to find her iPod. If she couldn't

sleep, she could finish her packing. Might as well do something useful.

After a quick shower—which no doubt clued Kyle and Julian in to the fact that she wasn't sleeping—she dressed in the loose cotton pants and T-shirt she'd left out.

Less than twenty minutes later, she hefted the shoulder strap of her toiletry case. She grabbed the big wheeled suitcase and eased open the door.

The house seemed quiet, but she had to get past Julian and Kyle to get to the stairs. Somehow she didn't think they were heavy sleepers. Wouldn't be much of a bodyguard if you slept through everything, would you?

Slowly, she crept to the head of the stairs. Lifting the suitcase, she started down the steps. The wood creaked under her foot. Dammit. Wincing, she shifted her grip and took another step.

"Going somewhere?" Kyle's dry voice cut through the gloom.
Shit.

Maddy looked back over her shoulder to see both men standing in the dim light from the upstairs hall. She licked her lips and swallowed. Why did she suddenly feel like a teenager caught sneaking out of her parents' house?

"No," she answered, the word drawing out shakily. She firmed her jaw and swallowed again. "I'm just putting the suitcases in the car."

"No, you aren't," Kyle told her firmly. "Did you forget that there's a contract on you?"

She decided to ignore him. Turning, she continued down the stairs.

"Maddy? You are not going out there."

Annoying man. What did he think she was going to do? Take off? Okay, the idea held some appeal, but she wasn't an idiot. If he thought he could dictate to her, he had another think coming.

His bare feet made little sound coming down the stairs, but she felt him behind her. She dropped the bags in the doorway of the kitchen and spun to face him.

She wasn't afraid of him, exactly, but she felt more comfortable with some space between them. She edged backwards. In this case, physical distance seemed to be a prerequisite for maintaining emotional distance. Wasn't that Freudian of her? Or maybe Jungian. Whatever, she was definitely mental.

Kyle stepped over the suitcases with Julian right behind him. While Kyle kept his eyes focused on her, Julian moved the bags out of the doorway.

The lip of the island bumped the small of her back.

He closed the distance between them in two strides, bracing his hands on either side of her hips. He effectively trapped her.

"Back off."

"No. You're through running. I was willing to let this sit for a day or two, but you've forced the issue. We'll deal with this now."

"I wasn't leaving."

Kyle's doubtful look just made her more stubborn.

She folded her arms across her chest, pulling them tightly against her breasts to avoid touching Kyle. "I wasn't."

"Fine, you weren't." His flat tone let her know he didn't buy it.

His disbelief shouldn't hurt, but it did. The hurt mixed with irritation into a dangerous stew. "Back. Off."

Eyes narrowing, he lifted his hands from the island and straightened. The suppressed anger in her tone must have caught his attention.

Julian appeared at Kyle's shoulder. "Give her some space," he said quietly.

Kyle stepped back a pace, allowing Julian to come up beside him. They created a wall in front of her, but at least Kyle wasn't right on top of her anymore.

Maddy closed her eyes and drew in a deep breath, reaching for control. She knew her anger was misplaced. The situation had gotten too far out of her hands and she needed to calm herself down before she did something stupid.

Forcing herself to breathe slowly, Maddy imposed order on her scattered thoughts. She took a moment to consider why she teetered on the brink of losing it when she was normally fairly unflappable. She should have done this before. Her mind worked best with logic and order, and she hadn't had any of either since Kyle and Julian had showed up. No, before that. Since the dream of the three of them. Yes, she'd been running on adrenaline and instinct since the dream. She was tired, stressed, annoyed, and it all seemed out of her control. No wonder her nerves were frayed.

She opened her eyes. "I'm going to go sit in the living room. I need to think."

Julian's hand on Kyle's shoulder kept him from following her, and Maddy threw him a grateful look.

She curled into the corner of the sofa, tucking her feet under. Low voices carried to her from the kitchen. She didn't think Julian would be able to put Kyle off for long.

She fished her iPod out of her pocket and flipped to her "thinking" playlist. The steady repetition of African drums flooded her head while she leaned her cheek against the arm of the sofa.

Logic, then, to explain the illogical.

Fact one: someone evidently wanted her dead. Fact two: her two bodyguards fairly seared her eyeballs with their hotness and were clearly gay. Or if not gay, definitely bi. Fact three: she'd dreamed about said hot bodyguards before ever meeting them. And not any wimpy, floaty dream either. Fact four: the hot bodyguards seemed to think more was going on than a simple guarding of her body. Fact five: she kept getting little flashes of information about Kyle and Julian. Glimpses of them in vulnerable moments.

The first two facts were pretty straightforward. She could deal with those logically. Let Julian and Kyle do their bodyguard thing and ensure her safety. If she enjoyed a little eye candy along the way, what was the harm? Even if it went beyond that, even if she indulged in some serious play time, she might still be able to manage it.

But the rest freaked her out. Combining the prescient dream with the vignettes led her uncomfortably to the idea that she was either insane or suddenly psychic. She didn't feel insane, but wasn't that part of it? If you were insane, did you know you were insane?

Maddy huffed out a breath. African drums switched to Buddhist chant with a techno backbeat.

The second possibility, that she suddenly manifested psychic abilities, wasn't much better. So far whatever it was seemed linked to Kyle and Julian. On the one hand, hooray that she wasn't seeing plane crashes or murders or Charles and Camilla in bed. Eww. On the other hand, it made her very nervous that she seemed to have a direct pipeline to her new bodyguards. She didn't want to know in such intimate detail what they did in bed together, or what they wanted to do with her. It was both terrifyingly personal and oddly stressful. Did they have a similar line to her? What if it wasn't so much that she was

becoming psychic, but more that whatever existed among the three of them allowed some kind of extra communication? In that case, had they witnessed her with her previous lovers? The idea made her uncomfortable, not because she was ashamed of her past, but because she wanted to be the one to control that information.

A shiver of combined fear and titillation raised the fine hairs on the back of her neck.

She didn't see a way around it. She needed to really talk with Kyle and Julian to find out what these strange episodes meant. Even if she didn't really want to know.

* * * *

Dawn crept over the cliffs, the light spreading fingers through the windows of the rented house. Maddy blinked in the morning light, surprised to find she had dozed off.

A sudden crash from the kitchen had her shooting off the couch, her heart racing. She leaped to the doorway and heaved a relieved sigh. She leaned against the door frame to watch Julian pick up the pots and pans which had evidently spilled from the cabinet he'd opened. A quick look revealed no hint of her luggage.

Returning her gaze to Julian, she allowed herself to study him. This morning he wore casual navy slacks and a white polo under the sport coat. The slacks framed his muscular ass to perfection. She definitely wanted to sink her fingers into that bit of muscle. She wondered at the jacket, though. It seemed so formal, and his back looked odd under the material—like he was wearing armor of some kind. She frowned slightly, remembering the strange smooth boniness of his back from the vision. Was that real? If it was, what the hell was it?

Clearing her throat, she stepped across the threshold into the kitchen. Julian looked up, flashing a tentative smile.

“How are you this morning?”

“Better. Ready for a talk. Do we have time before we leave?”

He closed the cabinet and stood. Somehow, the mere act of his standing shifted her focus. She wasn't thinking of the talk she needed to have with them. No, her hormones overtook her brain so the attraction now stood front and center.

Maddy blinked rapidly, trying to clear her head of the fog of lust suddenly gumming up her normally agile mind. Giving up, she shifted her eyes to look out the window.

“I don't think so. Kyle wants to leave immediately. He doesn't think it's safe here, so he'd rather get on the road. Your suitcases are already in the car.”

She swung her gaze back to him, focusing on his left shoulder. She couldn't think about hot, sweaty sex just staring at his shoulder, right? “Why my car? Why not the truck?”

“We'll be splitting up for the drive. I'll ride with you and Kyle will drive the truck. When we get to the airport, someone will meet us and take the rentals back to the rental agency.”

“Fine. I think I can manage that. What then?”

“We'll be taking the corporate jet. We'll run through the basic security protocol they need, but it's faster and more secure than commercial.”

“Didn't you fly commercial up?”

“Yes, but you weren't with us.”

Good point. But she didn't want to spend hours so close she could touch them. What if that weird psychic thing happened again? Although distance didn't seem to be a

factor—since she hadn't even met them before the first vision. Then again, maybe the little flashes were something different than the first dream. The dream involved her—the flashes certainly didn't. Did she really want to know what caused this stuff? Could she live with herself if she chickened out?

“Anyone else on the plane?”

“The pilot and copilot, obviously, since the plane won't fly itself up here. Cam's going to meet us in Knoxville.”

“Knoxville? Tennessee? I thought we were staying in Canada.”

“I'll let Kyle explain.”

“Why don't you explain?” Her temper started to heat—not exactly helpful. She willed herself to be calm.

Julian shook his head. “I think it's better if Kyle explains it.”

“Where is he?”

“Running. He does that when he's upset.”

The temper drained a bit and she dipped her chin, acknowledging the hit. “I really wasn't leaving. I just couldn't sleep.” She looked up again to meet his amber gaze. She found it easier to talk to Julian than to Kyle. Something about Kyle kept her on edge. Oddly, Julian seemed almost soothing in comparison. No, soothing wasn't the right word. While Kyle continually challenged her, Julian simply accepted.

“We'll have time on the plane.”

Yeah, that's what she was afraid of. She'd already decided to talk, though. They'd just picked the time.

Chapter Six

The ride to Halifax took longer than she remembered. Of course, that could've had something to do with Julian sitting in the passenger seat and Kyle staying just off her bumper. Or it could've been the disappointed look she'd gotten from Kyle before he'd hurried them into the vehicles. She'd met him yesterday. How could his look have such a profound effect on her? She didn't know him. It shouldn't matter so much. But it did.

"Tell me about you," Maddy invited, turning her head for a quick look at Julian.

"Keep your eyes on the road. There isn't much to tell. I was born in a small town; my parents owned a small farm outside town. I joined the military young, and now I work for Talon."

She narrowed her eyes. He was lying. She didn't know how she knew, but she knew he wasn't telling her the truth—or not the whole truth. True to an extent, but it wasn't truth.

"That's not exactly the truth, is it?"

"It's true as far as it goes. And that's all you're getting right now. Why don't you tell me about you, instead?"

Maddy gave an indelicate snort. "You already know everything. You probably have a file with everything from my mother's C-section to my shoe size."

A soft laugh confirmed her assessment. "We do know a lot of facts. But we don't know you. What's your favorite color? Why did you choose to come up here? Who's your favorite author?"

She slid him another glance. "Those aren't professional questions."

"No, they aren't."

Silence settled around them for the next few miles—kilometers here, she reminded herself. Answering the questions explicitly moved them from professional to personal ground. While she felt sure that was what both men intended, she wasn't sure what she wanted. It was one thing to fantasize about them. It was another to pursue something beyond what they were being paid to do. Right. That, too. She kept forgetting that she'd hired Talon, so Kyle and Julian technically worked for her. Despite Hollywood's affection for banging the bodyguard, she wondered how it might impact their ability to do their job.

The real question, though, was whether she wanted to try exploring this thing between them. Especially when that exploration would almost certainly mean dealing with the psychic crap, too.

Now she'd come full circle. Hadn't she just decided to face this head on?

Exasperated with herself, she ran a hand through her hair. She caught Julian's wince out of the corner of her eye.

"You're a nervous passenger."

"Not usually."

"I don't think I believe that."

"Let's just say that I think Kyle's reflexes are better than yours."

She lifted her chin to acknowledge his point.

"I don't have a single favorite author," she said abruptly.

“Really? No author that stands out?” He didn’t comment on the extended length between question and answer. Wise of him.

“Lots of authors stand out, that’s why I don’t have a single favorite. I have lots of favorites. Depends on what kind of book I want to read, what my mood is, which of the author’s books I’m reading.”

“Give me an example.”

“Okay. Sometimes I’m really in the mood for a thriller. But do I choose romantic suspense? Maybe Nora Roberts. Or just straight suspense, with a good bit of gore and psycho freaks? Then I might go for James Patterson or Thomas Harris. Or maybe something with a sci-fi edge, like William Gibson? Or maybe I don’t want a thriller, I want a romance. But even there, you have historicals, paranormals, fantasy, contemporary, all kinds of things.”

“I see what you mean. What about music?”

“Same thing.” She gestured to the iPod sitting in the console between them. “I have music for every mood and genre. You’re welcome to look.”

“I have no idea how to use one of those.”

She gaped at him. He cleared his throat and looked pointedly at the road.

Snapping her eyes back to the road, she closed her mouth. “Seriously?”

“I’ve never had much interest in having one. I’d rather be aware of my surroundings.”

Well, that made sense. Probably not a good plan to have the security guys paying more attention to Theory of a Deadman than to the job at hand. She did wonder though...

“What kind of music do you like?”

Julian shrugged. “Whatever. I’ll listen to pretty much anything that’s on, I’m not picky.”

Maddy shook her head in wonder. “I can’t imagine that. I love music.”

She thought she saw the corner of his mouth curve up, but couldn’t tell for sure without turning to look.

“What about your favorite color? Do you have one?” Julian seemed intent on distracting himself by asking questions.

“I do, actually. I like platinum. The real one, not the hair color.”

“Platinum. That’s not a real color.”

Maddy barely held back a snort. “Of course it is. The metal has a distinctive color. It’s not flat like gray, but not as flashy as silver.”

Out of the corner of her eye she saw him open his mouth and then close it again. She pressed her lips together to hide her smug satisfaction.

Over the next hour, they spoke infrequently, Julian seeming loath to do anything that might take her attention from the road. It really amused and touched her that this tough guy exhibited such trepidation over her driving.

Julian’s cell rang just before the MacKay Bridge. When he hung up after the brief conversation, Maddy looked over expectantly.

He paled under his tan. “Road. We’re hundreds of feet over Halifax Harbor. I’d just as soon not test the safety of the rails.”

She rolled her eyes. “Was that Kyle?”

“Yes. He’s going to pull ahead and you can follow him.”

“Good idea. We aren’t that far from the airport now.”

Julian didn't relax until they parked. After a cursory look around, he practically dove out of the car.

Grinning, Maddy followed suit.

Kyle shook his head slightly at Julian's haste.

"Should I be offended? He's a very nervous passenger."

Kyle's mouth tightened briefly. "It isn't you. Julian had a ... narrow escape once. He is edgy in the passenger seat."

Damn. She wanted to know what happened, but it seemed both rude and invasive to ask. Why the hell didn't those little psychic blips show her—

The explosion threw him across the interior and into the reinforced side of the limo. He automatically rolled to protect the client, only noticing the pain in his shoulder and chest as he settled around the smaller man.

The limo flipped, tossing Julian like a pinball. Alcohol decanters smashed, spraying alcohol and crystal shrapnel. With a heavy crash, the limo skidded to a halt, bouncing Julian and his charge sharply. One of the bulletproof windows gaped open and the panels on one side had folded into the cabin of the limo like origami.

"Dammit! What the fuck is going on?" Julian roared over the sounds of gunfire and breaking glass.

"Fucking ambush." Kyle's voice centered him.

A quick replay set the scenario in his head. The limo driver had hit the car bomb. The explosion had tossed the limo like a Matchbox car. Fuck.

FUBAR. The situation had just gone FUBAR.

Julian moved slightly to check his charge. Fortunately, the man was unconscious. Unfortunately, that would make moving him a bitch and a half. Julian's hands moved over him, checking for injuries. In a detached way, he noticed the blood spattering the backs of his hands.

"Situation?" Julian frowned. His voice sounded distant, tinny. Something warm slid down his back.

"Limo driver's dead. Follow-on car is disabled, but not destroyed. Mr. Moyoti?"

"Alive, unconscious. Broken arm, probable concussion."

"How about you?"

He didn't bother to check himself. "Functional."

"Chopper en route. ETA twelve minutes."

Bullshit. No way the chopper would be here in less than twenty. Gritting his teeth, he eased Moyoti flat. Julian turned to pull his G36 from the rack. His back erupted in a flash of pain that momentarily blinded him. His hand convulsed on the stock, the polymer edges biting but not breaking the skin.

What the fuck was that?

His vision cleared, but the pain remained. Forcing himself to work through it, he unfolded the buttstock from the receiver and slapped a magazine into place. He pulled the magazines over, his shoulders and back screaming. More warmth slid down his back. He was bleeding.

His vision grayed around the edges again. He did not have time for this shit.

Maddy shook her head to clear it and rolled her shoulders, shrugging off the phantom pain.

"You're getting the visions, aren't you?" Kyle sounded somehow satisfied and

concerned at the same time.

She blinked and turned away. "I'm not talking about this now."

"You keep saying that. We have to talk about it sooner or later."

"I'm voting later. We have a plane to catch." She ducked around to get her luggage without looking at him. She didn't want to deal with this. Yes, she knew she had to, but that didn't mean she wanted to. They'd be stuck on a plane together for hours with no escape—she wouldn't be able to avoid this discussion. And though it disgusted her to think so, she recognized that if she had any other option—if her safety were not at issue—she would run like a rabbit from a fox.

And like the rabbit, odds were good they would chase her down.

* * * *

She'd never flown on a private plane. The jet was a sleek, gunmetal gray with a discreet stylized falcon in black on the tail section. It didn't look like the small planes she'd seen before. This one seemed to have an engine mounted on the top.

She stood next to the limo, clutching the laptop case. "What is that?"

"Dassault Falcon 50."

Maddy tilted her chin, giving Kyle a distinctly skeptical look.

"It's French," he offered, as if that explained everything. Maybe it did.

Kyle ushered her to the metal stairs, urging her up the steps. She ducked into the plane and froze in shock. Only Kyle nudging her from behind pushed her another few steps inside.

"Stay in here. We need to load the baggage."

Since she was still gawking, she didn't think that would be a problem. She'd expected it to look kind of like a first class cabin. It didn't. It looked like the inside of a yacht. A small galley at the front had gold accents. No kidding gold accents. And a huge plasma TV. Four leather recliners made up the front seating section, with fold-down tables on either side of the aisle. At the rear she could see a lavish bathroom, and just in front of that, one side boasted a long couch facing two more of the recliners.

She forced her feet to move. She dropped the case and collapsed into the closest chair. Her head dropped back against the overstuffed back and she sucked in a deep breath. The plane even smelled expensive—leather and lemons.

After a moment, Maddy gathered herself for a look around. From the seat, she could see the cockpit, currently empty. Huh. Where were the pilot and copilot?

As if she'd conjured them with her thoughts, two men stepped into the plane. Both wore dark slacks and collared knit shirts with a jacket. Was there some kind of dress code? If so, she was seriously underdressed.

The shadows of the interior didn't allow her to see eye color, but she saw enough to know that the taller of the two had the kind of square-jawed good looks that didn't stand out in a crowd. The shorter one, though, set a new standard. Absolutely, without doubt, the most beautiful man she'd seen in her life. So beautiful it nearly hurt to look at him.

The taller man nodded to her before ducking into the cockpit. The beautiful one stepped toward her, out of the shadows of the entry. The cabin light spotlighted the scar that ran from his right temple down, bisecting his eyebrow and curving over his cheekbone before ending just above his jaw. Oddly, it did more to highlight his ridiculous beauty than detract from it.

She met his gaze and blinked. Though his eyes could properly be described as brown, that in no way conveyed the swirling colors caught in the darkness.

And, yet, no spark.

Maddy heaved an inward sigh. So much for hoping her hormones were just responding to any hot guy. Guys didn't get hotter than this one—and there wasn't even a glimmer. Dammit.

He held out his hand, which she took automatically.

“Welcome aboard, Ms. Crane. I'm Cam Reger, CEO of Talon.” He gestured toward the cockpit. “Gavin will copilot.”

She blinked again. When they'd mentioned their boss, Cam, she'd thought maybe a supervisor. Not the CEO. And hadn't he been going to meet them in Knoxville? “Can't say I expected the head honcho. Nice to meet you. Call me Maddy.”

A tiny twitch at the corner of his mouth made her think he suppressed a laugh. “A pleasure, Maddy.”

“What's the plan, then?”

A tiny line appeared between his brows. “They didn't tell you?”

“Are you kidding? It's like pulling teeth to get Kyle to tell me anything.”

He made a noncommittal humming noise. “After we fly into Knoxville, we'll drive you to the Talon training facilities. You'll be staying there until it's time for your deposition. We'll fly you into Richmond the morning of the deposition.”

“Where, exactly, am I staying?”

“The three of you will be in the old hunting lodge. It's a bit away from the barracks and maintains full security precautions.”

“I'm glad I won't be in a tent, but that's not what I meant. I meant where is this training facility?”

“Ah. Southeastern Tennessee, in the Smokies.”

“All right.” She nearly laughed at herself. It wasn't like she had a choice at this point. She'd already made her choice.

All the fine hairs on her body lifted. She shifted her gaze over Cam's shoulder, confirming Kyle's arrival.

Cam let go of her hand. “Let me know if you need anything. Just knock on the cockpit door.”

She nodded absently, watching Kyle.

Julian stepped up behind Kyle and her breathing hitched. They were so beautiful together.

With a knowing smile, Cam put a hand on Kyle's shoulder and leaned in for a private word. Fascinated, Maddy watched Cam's fingers dig slightly into Kyle's shoulder and Kyle dip his head. Whatever he'd agreed to, he didn't like much.

Cam released Kyle and stepped into the cockpit. The door closed with a firm snap. Julian closed the entry hatch and Kyle moved, almost reluctantly, toward her.

“We should all sit in the back,” he said stiffly.

She arched her brows and rose to follow him. It was going to be a long flight if he intended to be pissy. But could she really blame him for it? Well, she could, because it seemed pretty unreasonable to expect her to just jump on board with whatever his plans were after less than twenty-four hours. On the other hand, she was being a pansy. Sooner or later, she needed to put on her big-girl panties and deal with this crap.

Julian shrugged and moved past her to sit on the long sofa, across from Kyle. Maddy chose the other chair. The buff leather coddled her like a lover. Okay, bad image. No thinking of lovers while sitting with Kyle and Julian. Damn. Too late.

She flushed, recalling the scene she'd imagined last night. Imagined? Seen? Oh, this psychic thing irritated her to no end.

The plane's engines revved. Cam's voice drifted into the cabin. "Buckle up, we're going to taxi out."

Takeoff thrilled her. The power, the force pressing her to the seat, the vibration of the plane—it seemed somehow sexual. Not that she needed an additional sexual rush. Her body didn't care whether she needed the additional stimulation. Her nipples tingled and she pressed her thighs together to contain the ache. Once airborne, it abated to a dull throb of pleasure. Maddy wasn't sure if it was a lingering response to takeoff or merely a return to the constant low-level arousal she seemed to experience around Kyle and Julian. She fished out her iPod and prepared to lose herself in the music.

Julian closed his eyes, but he wasn't asleep. Tense, he crossed his arms over his chest. Kyle sat in stoic silence, gazing out the window. Forget a knife, she'd need a chainsaw to cut this tension.

She had no one to blame but herself, really. She knew this was their way of respecting her desire not to talk about things. Kyle didn't like it and his disapproval fairly shimmered around him. Julian seemed a little sad and very tense. And their discomfort mattered to her. Maybe it shouldn't, but it did. Her childish hiding from this situation caused them pain on some level. She needed to suck up and deal. She knew that. She just needed to force herself to begin.

With a deep breath, she threw herself into the deep end. "Did you have any, um, sense about coming up here when you left?"

Julian's eyes sprang open and Kyle swung his chair around to face her. Oh, God. She'd done it now. Where were those big-girl panties?

"Well, yes," Julian said slowly. "My first flash of you happened in your office—when we were doing the first walkthrough." He pursed his lips before giving her a self-deprecating grin. "The first bit was really strong. You and Daskowitz, sitting shoulder to shoulder at that little table, going over paperwork. The next was you and Annie, also at that little table, eating lunch—Greek salad and some kind of lemony soup. It smelled good."

She stared at him, aghast. "When was this?"

"Four days ago."

"Four days. What about you, Kyle?"

"They began at the same time Julian's did."

Well, wasn't he Mr. Forthcoming? "Same scenes?"

"No, not always," he said carefully.

Maddy huffed out a breath. "Great. So you both have had days of these weird little tidbits and I had a single dream before we met."

A mischievous sparkle lit Julian's gold-brown eyes. "What kind of dream?"

She glared at him. Like he didn't know. "That's hardly the point, is it? The point here is that you two have had four days and numerous little insights into me. I'm in the dark. Mostly in the dark, anyway. So one of you," she pointed a finger accusingly at them, "is going to tell me what the hell is going on. Because stuff like this does not

happen to me.”

Kyle rubbed a hand over his lean jaw. “You had the same dream I did yesterday afternoon, didn’t you?”

“How do I know? Am I supposed to know what you dream?” No way she would cop to that dream right now.

His pale gaze pinned her, the lust strong enough to knock her breathless. She struggled to refill her suddenly empty lungs while heat flared again in her womb. Man, he was potent.

“Fine. Julian and I have a connection. The psychic bond is a sort of distant viewing. We can connect to each other and see what is going on at that moment. If Julian is outside checking security, I could open the connection and see what’s around him, and vice versa. It isn’t a deep connection, in the sense that we can’t read each other’s minds or anything like that. It’s more a kind of awareness. When I had the first vision of you, I thought that’s what happened. I thought that I picked up on something Julian saw.” He paused, cutting his eyes toward Julian.

“But I realized pretty quickly that it isn’t the same. The initial scenes of you were not in the present, they were in the past. That doesn’t really happen with the connection between Julian and me.”

“Really? How long have you known each other?” If her previous flash was accurate, she already knew the answer to this one.

Julian’s lips turned up into another one of those game smiles. “Since we were children.”

“Do you think the reason you don’t get past flashes with him might be because it’s always been available as the present to you? You don’t go back to see things from six weeks ago because you saw them when they happened?”

Kyle stared at her for a moment. “Maybe,” he allowed. “But we don’t have the connection all the time, so there are plenty of things I don’t know about.”

Maddy shrugged. “Yeah, but I think it has more to do with the fact that you’ve known each other since you were young.”

“It’s possible.”

Julian allowed his grin to widen. “You’re just irritated you didn’t think of it.”

Kyle glowered at Julian briefly before smoothing his expression.

Julian shrugged. “Whatever you believe, Kyle, the fact remains that Madeline has only had a couple of connections, rather than the many glimpses we have had of her. If I were in her position, I would be concerned.”

“Concerned,” Maddy repeated. “That’s a good word. Concerned I might be losing my marbles, concerned that two men I don’t know show up in the dark, concerned that they seem to have a psychic preview of my life. Yes, concerned.”

Julian’s smile faded. “Honey, when you put it like that, it doesn’t sound like much fun.”

“I’m more than a little freaked out by this. I need more information and maybe something resembling normality.”

Kyle’s lips actually twitched. It was the first time Maddy had seen a real sign of humor. “I don’t know if we can manage normal, but we can give you information. What we need, though, is an open mind and the understanding that this is absolutely confidential.”

She stared at him. Had he lost his mind? What, did he think she would go blabbing to everyone she knew that she'd had this incredible erotic dream that came to life? And, oh, by the way, she was having psychic glimpses into other people's pasts? Not freaking likely. "Fine."

"I think it will work better if I tell you a story."

She waved a hand at him. "Whatever."

"It isn't a short story, but I'll try to be brief."

"Go ahead."

Chapter Seven

Kyle sat on the edge of his chair, his legs splayed, his elbows resting on his knees, hands hanging down between them. He dragged in a breath.

“Fifty Earth years ago, on a planet called Tlinval, a race of people fought a civil war.”

Her heart stuttered. “Is this a bedtime story?”

Kyle looked at her reproachfully. “Can you just wait until the end?”

Julian reached across the aisle and patted her knee. She shrugged, annoyed at this game. “Sure.”

Evidently taking her word as some kind of signal, Julian unfastened his seatbelt and leaned forward. Maddy eyed him for a moment before returning her attention to Kyle.

“The civil war dragged on for many years. The insurgents fought to install a democratic government and throw out the emperor. They were idealistic people, wanting to create a system that embodied everything good about the Tlin. The emperor fought hard to maintain his position. His family had controlled the throne for millennia, since his ancestor had united the warring tribes. He believed that without a strong central authority, Tlinval would sink back into tribal warfare.”

Maddy opened her mouth to comment, but pressed her lips together at Kyle’s narrow look.

“Emperor Skal was defeated. In a final battle inside the palace, the rebels managed to contain the Imperial Guard and capture the royal family. In the fighting, Skal himself was mortally wounded.” Kyle’s fists clenched between his knees. Julian’s head fell forward.

“The new regime convened a court to judge the Imperial Guard. Every member of the Guard, from the youngest recruit to the eldest retiree, was banished from the planet.”

“Why not executed?”

“The new regime did not believe in the death penalty. In any case, the Imperial Guard and other “imperial elements” were banished. I don’t know where other supporters of the Empire ended up, but they transported the Guard here, to Earth. Given a few necessary tools to allow them to live amongst the humans, the new regime cast the Guard adrift on an alien planet.” He stopped talking. His jaw clenched and his pale eyes burned with anger.

“We arrived here just ahead of the first Gulf War.” Julian’s voice was subdued, strained. “We were forced to learn quickly. We needed to know what type of planet we were on, we needed to know how we could survive, maybe even contribute.”

Maddy scrambled up, her feet coming under her on the chair. She fought to keep her balance, her horrified eyes swinging between Julian and Kyle as her brain connected the dots. She didn’t want to acknowledge the pattern. “What the hell are you talking about? You’re saying you’re aliens? Some kind of storm trooper, Star Wars aliens?”

A bark of laughter, more caustic than amused, erupted from Kyle. “Yeah. Fucking storm troopers. Genetically engineered and trained to fight. That’s so much more accurate than you know.”

Julian moved to his knees in front of her. “Look, I know this is a shock, Maddy—”

“No, I don’t think shock covers it. Do you really expect me to believe that you are

some kind of alien soldiers?" Maddy made herself infuse the question with arch disdain. Which was difficult, because she actually did believe them. Which made her just as crazy as Kyle and Julian.

Kyle studied her for a moment. "I think you do believe us. You just don't think you should."

Damned perceptive male. "Uh huh. How about you wish I believed you?"

Julian sat back on his heels. "We can prove it. Or rather, we can prove we aren't human. You'll have to take our word for the rest."

"And how do you propose to do that?"

"When you compared us to storm troopers, you weren't too far off. The Imperial Guard was selected for a genetic predisposition to wings. All Tlin have wings, but most aren't functional. The Imperial Guard was chosen because we had the genetic markers for larger, flight-capable wings. Unfortunately, the musculature necessary for flight isn't included in the genes. That came courtesy of the emperor's scientists."

It hurt to hear the bitterness in his words.

"None of us had a choice," Kyle explained. "If you matched the genetic profile, you went into the training camps. When we reached physical maturity, we were taken to the labs. The scientists grafted ceramic support structure onto our wings. Those of us who made the transition became Imperial Guards. Those who didn't either died during the process or were euthanized when it became clear it hadn't taken."

Maddy gaped, falling down to sit cross-legged on the seat. "What?"

"We lost so many," Julian whispered. "Only about two thirds made it through the transition."

She forced down the bile that flooded the back of her throat. Her stomach churned at the idea of so many young lives lost. If she'd been on Tlinval, she'd have been on the side of the rebels. Slow, deep breaths helped calm the nausea.

Kyle cleared his throat. He'd regained his stone face. "The wings are retractable. They fold into a kind of skeletal armor over the back."

"Let me see," Maddy demanded quietly. She was impressed that her voice didn't shake.

Julian looked to Kyle, who nodded. He pushed to his feet. Shrugging off his jacket, he unbuttoned his collar and stripped the polo over his head, letting it fall down his arms to the floor. It took a lot of effort for Maddy not to drop her eyes to check him out. He held her gaze for a moment before turning away.

Maddy sucked a breath in through her teeth. Okay, that was definitely odd. Something like a strangely patterned shell covered his back. No hint of his muscles or the normal bony structures showed through the shell. No spine, no shoulder blades, no ribs. It was beyond strange. "You too, Kyle."

He gave her a level stare before pushing out of the chair and draping his jacket over the back. Deliberately, he pulled off his shirt. Oh, he knew what it cost her not to scope out his chest and abs. He lifted an eyebrow before turning around.

His back, too, had that odd shell-like blankness. Both of them had odd patterns across the surface, like a series of etched lines.

"All right. I'll give you that you have something going on. But wings?"

Kyle turned back around. Julian followed his lead. This time she couldn't resist the urge to drop her eyes.

From the front, they were both beautiful specimens of masculinity. Kyle's broader shoulders and chest were carved in flat angles with barely any roundness. His ribs stood out, the dip of his sternum obvious. His smooth, pale skin stretched over his ridged abdomen. No hair anywhere on his chest or belly, or even under his arms. He did have scars—a lot of them. A network of white lines marred his shoulders and the upper third of his chest.

More curious than aroused, she switched her gaze to Julian. His darker skin showed the scars more clearly. So many. Over his shoulders and chest, down his upper arms to his elbows.

Frowning, she studied the scars that edged around his rib cage. More along the sides than the front of the torso, and she suspected they wrapped around to the back.

"I want to see the wings."

Julian's eyes widened even more and Kyle sighed heavily.

"Of course you do. I'd rather not. It hurts. And because Earth's gravity is heavier than Tlinval's we can't really fly in any case," Kyle told her. Julian closed his eyes, obviously concentrating.

"It isn't about whether you can fly. Frankly, until I see them, I don't think I'll believe it."

"Fine. But understand that we won't be able to pack them again for several hours, and they are very large and we're in a plane. So I'm going to the bathroom first."

Oh. Well, she hadn't really thought about the problem of getting around a plane with wings.

Julian's eyes popped open, consternation overwriting the earlier concentration.

"Crap. Me first. I already started the pull."

Kyle shrugged and Julian darted into the small bathroom at the back of the cabin.

"While you wait you can explain."

"The wings?"

"No, why you both get the visions."

"You mean why we both link to you?"

She squirmed, uncomfortable with his wording. "Yeah, that's a good start."

"It seems to be a quirk of the genetics. On Tlinval, there are a few women we can breed individually, but here on Earth and for most women on Tlinval, it takes two Tlin to breed a female."

"Excuse me?" She thought her eyes might be bugging out.

He looked embarrassed. "Some Tlin females have what amounts to hemipenes in their wing nodes. That allows them to activate the male sperm production. Since human females don't have that, another Tlin male provides that function. There were triads on Tlinval, but there were also pairs. Here, we need the triads."

Now she knew her eyes were bugging out. "Hemipenes. Okay, now you have to explain that. My human brain is not grasping this concept."

Kyle definitely looked embarrassed. Julian walked back in and Kyle took the opportunity to escape. "My turn. Julian can explain."

Julian's back humped up oddly, the bony plate lifted away and started to spread. Maddy cocked her head, staring. It distracted her from her question as she watched the plate split. Julian winced, sweat beading on his forehead. The two halves rotated out, the sound of bone grating across bone echoing through the cabin. It looked a lot like beetle

wings, actually. At least, until they began unfolding.

Breathing heavily, Julian hunched a bit and moved further toward the front of the plane. “Explain what?”

“Um, Kyle was explaining why two of you link to a single female,” Maddy said absently, her interest captured by the unfurling wings. Like watching an unrolling spiral. The upper line of bone solidified and vertical supports swung down from the horizontal main. The vertical supports began to push out quills. Weird. Like anything about this was normal?

Panting now, Julian focused on her. “Did he explain the function of the second male?”

“What? Oh, he said that the second male activates sperm production since human females don’t have the, um, equipment Tlin females do.”

He hissed out a breath. “Yeah. There’s a receptor organ in the male that needs to be stimulated in order for us to produce sperm. If that isn’t stimulated, we’re infertile.”

The quills began to sprout feathers. Dark and wet, like the feathers of a newly hatched chick, they clung to the quills. “I don’t mean to be rude, but you’re wet.”

He forced a smile. “Yeah. They’ll dry in a few. They’re always wet when they’re in the sheaths. On Tlinval, we didn’t tuck them. One of the gifts we were given when they dropped us off was a medical modification which allowed us to conceal the wings.” His ironic emphasis on the word indicated that he didn’t appreciate this particular gift.

“Huh.”

By the time Kyle returned, all of Julian’s feathers had extended, and his wings were a full ten feet across, though the top line of the wing wasn’t straight. Instead, a rounded upper curve gave way to a tapering line that ended a foot lower than his shoulders at the wing tips. The feathers began to dry, taking on the same brown-gold as the wings from her dream. Not that she had much doubt at this point.

He took up so much of the plane that she couldn’t envision how two of them were going to fit in here. “Kyle, you don’t need to do this. I don’t think you’ll both fit.”

“Too late. Already began the pull,” he gritted. Kyle moved to stand facing Julian in the aisle. His back did the same strange lifting, humping move.

Maddy dropped her head into her hands, closing her eyes.

A large meeting room with many winged Tlin. Their wings were unpacked, but folded along their backs in repose. The colors varied wildly, a veritable feast for the eyes. Three Tlin stood at the front of the room. In the middle of the crowd, Kyle and Julian stood together. Julian clasped Kyle’s hand, seeking reassurance. Kyle squeezed lightly, and the connection between the two men was palpable. They loved each other.

In that brief glimpse, Maddy saw into Kyle’s heart, saw the heavy responsibility he carried, responsibility not only for himself, but also for Julian and the mate they had yet to find. He wanted them to be happy, safe. He had never wanted to be an Imperial Guard. The choice had never been his to make, though, and he had done what was necessary to keep Julian safe. If the new Consular Republic had given them a chance, Kyle would have worked to prevent the return of the Imperial House. No one should be forced into the change as he and his brother guards had been.

But they hadn’t given them a chance. Instead, they’d been herded onto a star cruiser and shipped off planet. Now all he wanted was a family and some peace. He would do what needed to be done to make sure it happened.

She lifted her head from her hands and studied Kyle's blond head, bowed now while his wings unfurled. The hair around his ears was damp from exertion.

"It's not all your burden. Each individual must bear the responsibility for his or her own decisions and fate."

His head snapped around in surprise, his eyes blazing with a tumultuous mix of emotion. Rage, guilt, and something more subtle, more tender. Underneath it, Maddy sensed pain. Anguish caused by the rejection of the people he had hoped would save them.

An arrow of emotion pierced Maddy's heart. She would be safe with him, her heart and soul protected by the fierce need to shield what was his. He didn't love her, at least not yet. But he did consider her his. Theirs. Her heart trembled and began the long, slow fall.

"I don't know what you mean."

She shook her head, let it go. Kyle's wings were now fully unfurled, the feathers clinging wetly to their quills. The wings flapped slowly back and forth. He seemed to recover faster from unpacking the wings than Julian.

"Why does it hurt?"

Julian rolled his shoulders. "The grafting is more rigid than the natural wing. So when we pack or unpack the wings, the ceramic has to be forced into place where it overlaps the bones. Kind of like a tent pole that you have to unbend and then force past the end to allow the pole to slide into place completely."

"Oh. How long before you'll be able to put them back?"

"In an emergency, we could do it right away, but we'd pass out soon afterward. I'd prefer to wait at least six hours," Kyle said, watching her carefully.

"We don't have six hours. We'll be landing in, what, three hours?"

"True. We will be tired, but not disabled."

Maddy scooted off the seat. Hesitantly, she approached Julian, who folded his wings in against his body. The rounded tops of the wings topped his head, with the golden tips trailing off at around knee level. Artificial light caught in the subtle shading of the feathers, revealing the multiple layers and hues. The wings didn't come out far from his body, only a little wider than the position of his arms.

Now immediately behind him, Maddy studied the way the wings emerged from his back. Without the odd bony overlayment, the ridge of his spine became clearly visible. His shoulder blades were pronounced, as if there was more bone there than in a human. On either side of his spine, a long ridge of bone formed the base of each wing. His golden skin stretched to the joint before giving way to the feathers.

She reached out, consumed by the urge to touch him. The moment her hand met the bare skin of his back, between his wings, another flash of knowledge exploded in her brain.

Face down on a metal table, looking at the smooth metal floor of the medical chamber. On either side, other Imperial Guards were similarly affixed to the tables, arms and legs shackled. The drugs made him groggy and numbed his entire back, shoulders and part of his neck. None of them knew exactly what the doctors were doing, but they knew the grafting process could kill them. Two nurses had to leave, their nausea interfering with their ability to do their job. The surgery took a long time, or it seemed like a long time as Julian drifted in and out.

They were moved into a recovery room, bewildered and a little disconnected because of the drugs. The drugs began to wear off: the pain began.

Maddy pulled out of the vision. The memory of the pain lingered. Julian shifted to face her and her hand fell.

“Holy shit,” she muttered, rubbing her hands over her arms. “Why did they do that?”

“What did you see?” Kyle demanded.

Maddy shook her head. “I don’t want to go there. But I’ll say this: I think my visions are more than yours. You said you see me doing things, see each other doing things, like watching a movie. Sometimes it’s more than that for me. I feel the action. Like I’m experiencing it.”

Kyle stared at her blankly. “That does not happen.”

She blew out a breath in exasperation. “Obviously it does, since I just experienced it. It may not be what usually happens, but I assure you it did occur.”

“I did not mean that I doubt you. I just meant that, to my knowledge, it has never happened before.”

“That’s not true. The first vision I had of Maddy I could smell the soup. It didn’t occur to me before how different that is from what I see with you.” Julian shrugged.

Disgruntled, Maddy crossed her arms over her chest and glared at both men.

Julian put his hands out, placating. “Go easy, Maddy. We’re all a little off balance.”

She glared harder. “You, at least, knew this was a possibility. I had it dropped from out of the blue. Alien bird-men from Planet X, weird psychic phenomena and the bird-men can only have chicks if they buddy up. And, by the way, you haven’t explained to me exactly what is involved in that little set-up.”

Julian’s hands dropped and he gaped at her. A bare second later, he began laughing. Kyle shook his head, reaching up to rub the back of his neck. The motion had Julian smothering his laugh.

“I’ll grant you the bigger shock, but that doesn’t mean we are not struggling as well, Madeline.”

Kyle’s gentle reminder bled off some of her indignation. “You don’t seem to be struggling.”

And that was the crux of the matter. Maddy suddenly realized that while she floundered, they both appeared to be taking this in stride. Neither of them showed any hesitation or concern, no worries about her as a person or whether they would be a good match. It made her wonder exactly what they thought they knew about her. Even assuming she got past the strange predestination of the match—and she was pretty sure she was nearly past that—there were still unanswered questions and a distinct fear of the unknown. It galled her that she seemed to be the only one suffering from this angst. She didn’t do angst—that was for teenagers and the Goth scene, not lottery-winning accountants.

The laughter in Julian’s eyes died out, replaced by sympathy. “Oh, honey, you have to understand that we have been trained since we were infants not to show weakness. Any vulnerability, any crack in our armor, could be exploited. But just because we don’t show our uncertainty does not mean it is not there. Try to be patient. We know that humans expect a certain level of emotional communication, and we will try very hard to give you what you need.”

Maddy cut her eyes to Kyle for confirmation. Kyle nodded.

“What I need is for you to explain things to me. I need to understand what is going on, and I don’t want you keeping things from me. I need you to be totally open and honest with me. Is that so much to ask?”

A slight smile kicked up the corner of Kyle’s mouth. “It is not so much to ask. It is difficult, however, for us to do. But we will try. And if we are failing, I am sure you will be happy to bring it to our attention.”

Julian snickered.

“Fine. Let’s just clear some things up. Let’s talk about the dream.”

Kyle winced. “Yes, that was unusual. I’ve never heard of mates sharing dreams.”

“Did we dream the same dream? I said it earlier, and meant it, that I don’t know what you dreamed, only what I dreamed.”

Julian blushed, a formidable ridge appearing in his slacks. “Well, my dream was sexual.”

“Obviously,” Maddy said dryly. “Mine was, too. Anything specific?”

A muscle twitched in his shoulder, causing his wing to jerk a bit. “Well, we were on a bed, and Kyle and I were, um, pleasuring you.”

This time, Maddy saw the humor in the situation. With Julian tiptoeing around the sexual content of the dream and Kyle standing statue-still, they were going to be here all day trying to figure out if they dreamed the same thing. It was refreshing to be the one to throw them a curve ball.

“Okay, since you won’t just spit it out, I’ll do it. Just tell me as we go if your dream matched.”

Julian looked relieved, Kyle stone-faced, and they both nodded.

“Mine started with you and I facing each other,” she pointed to Kyle, who nodded. “I walked over, and Kyle held my face while he kissed me. While we were kissing, you came up behind me.” Julian nodded agreement.

“Then a bed appeared—who knows from where—and I lay on the bed, one of you on each side. I’m not going into details, but let’s just say that you each did your own thing and I had a very good time. Then you fucked me while Julian played with my clit.” She tipped her head toward Kyle.

Both men jolted at her raw description. Julian swallowed visibly and shifted to ease the pressure of his slacks over his obvious arousal. Kyle dropped his linked hands in front of his crotch. If he thought that would hide the bulge growing behind his fly he was dead wrong.

“After Kyle, Julian fucked me, and when we finished, you both sprouted wings. Easy and fast, not like just now.”

Kyle widened his stance this time, rolling his shoulders. Her attention caught on his pale wings, which shifted with the movement. For some reason, the wings didn’t strike her as bizarre now, but more a natural extension of the man. They spread through the cabin, the long flight feathers stretched and separated. The tension, the readiness, seemed a reflection of his arousal.

Julian cleared his throat. “That’s what I dreamed.”

“And I.”

Silence spun out, neither of the men elaborating on their acknowledgement.

Finally, Maddy shook her head, frustrated. “If neither of you has anything to add, I’ll just have a seat and plug in. Have a nice flight.”

Chapter Eight

Before she could take two steps toward the rear, she found her way blocked by a wall of feathers—mixed pale and dark. Swinging her head around, she pinned the men with an irritated stare. “Don’t pull that macho bullshit with me. Either put up or get the hell out of my way. If you are going to leave me hanging in the wind, I can do without your company.”

Julian dropped his wings immediately, folding them along his back. “I’m sorry, Maddy. I don’t want you to go, but I don’t know what to say, either.”

With deliberate slowness, Kyle pulled his wings back, but left them open. “What are we supposed to say, Madeline? The dream has a certain ... effect on me. I am concerned that any response I have could make you feel pressured.”

“Pressured? I have news for you, I already feel pressured. Do you think I don’t know that you two have already made up your minds that you want this thing to work? That you want me to have your babies?” She ran a hand through her hair and rolled her eyes. “There’s some pressure for you—hi, nice to meet you, wanna have some kids to continue my alien race? Don’t you get it? I’ve felt pressured since you showed up at my door. There isn’t a way to avoid it. I need to decide what I want, and that requires that you two,” she swept her hand out, “give me enough to make a decision. And so far, you haven’t given me squat on you personally. Yes, you’ve told me about the whole alien thing, but nothing about you. The only personal things I have are from this bizarre psychic thing we have going on, and it just isn’t enough.”

Kyle blinked in the face of her anger. Then his lips spread into a full-blown smile, wide enough to show incisors that were a little too pointed.

Maddy’s eyes widened, her anger draining fast as trepidation took hold. That fierce, predatory smile made her nervous. It also strummed a chord in her belly, triggering her arousal. That was inconvenient.

“This is easily remedied, Madeline. Ask any question. We will answer.”

“Fine. Tell me about your childhood.”

“I can speak for us both on this. The genetic screening to become an Imperial Guard occurred at birth. If the child carried the genetic markers, he was removed from his family and raised in an imperial crèche. Some families continued contact with their sons, but most just cut us off. At seven, I moved to the training facilities. I am a bit older than Julian, so came to the training center sooner. We were taught only what we needed to be Imperial Guards. We had no contact with the outside until after we received our modifications. It was not a childhood so much as a training period.”

Aghast, Maddy’s lips trembled before she firmed them. “That’s criminal. It’s a miracle you didn’t turn on the emperor yourself.”

Julian looked at the floor. “We couldn’t. Part of the modifications included a nerve chip which shut down our nervous system when activated. The emperor could activate it, or the Staves. All the Guard within range of the activator went down. They used our fellow Guard as hostages to our good behavior.”

“Are the Staves some kind of internal police?”

Kyle’s jaw firmed. “More like enforcers.”

“Do you still have the nerve chips?”

Kyle shook his head. “No, they removed the nerve chips right before dropping us here.”

“What about the Staves?”

Julian kept his eyes on the floor, but Kyle met her gaze squarely. “We killed them when we landed.”

“Not all of them,” Julian said softly. “Two escaped. We are still hunting them.”

A muscle in Kyle’s jaw jumped. “Yes. We fear what they will do, not only to us, but to humans.”

Another scene popped into her brain.

Several Tlin, including Kyle and Julian, twisted under the whips wielded by another pair of winged warriors. The new blood tracked through the dull, dried tracks of the old.

She muffled a scream and forcibly ripped herself from the vision. Breathing hard, she bent over, propping her hands on her knees. “Crap. Okay, no more talk about bad things. I keep getting the full treatment. Only good stuff.”

Both men moved in closer to her. Heavy hands dropped onto her back, their weight and heat reassuring her. A series of short visions swamped her. Kyle standing in her office, staring at the photo of her and Bennett at college graduation. She felt the piercing joy Kyle experienced at finding her. Julian discovering the satisfaction of building with his hands. Kyle and Julian, holding each other in the purple light of an alien night. Julian cradling Kyle’s head in his lap as they took turns sleeping in the star cruiser.

Image after image swept through her head. Nearly all of those happy moments involved both men. From the time Kyle chose Julian, they had known their bond was intensely personal. Many of the scenes had included the men either cuddling or actively having sex. The glut of sensation that accompanied the scenes ramped up her pulse and slapped her nerves to life. Her knees abruptly gave out, dropping her to the floor.

An alarmed sound to her right brought her out of the visions. Julian knelt beside her, his concern bordering on panic.

Hyperventilating would not be cool. In fact, it might end up with her passing out again—not good. Maddy closed her eyes and concentrated on slowing her breathing.

“Maddy? Are you all right?” Julian’s bone-melting voice carried both his concern and an underlying arousal.

Was she all right? Well, she felt drawn in some deep, abiding way to two men. Two alien men. It was just too weird, like a tabloid headline: “Accountant involved in Alien Love Triangle!”

She smothered a giggle. Oh, God. She was becoming hysterical.

“Madeline?” Kyle’s worried voice cut through her tumbling thoughts.

Gulping in a breath, she steadied herself on her hands and knees. The warmth of their palms through her shirt helped center her. Opening her eyes, she looked from one concerned face to the other. So beautiful. And if she believed them, trusted her gut, they could be hers.

“I’m okay. It’s just a little overwhelming.”

Julian moved his hand to tuck a strand of hair behind her ear. “We can try to slow down.”

A wry grimace passed over Kyle’s features. “True. It’ll hurt, but it’s more important that you be ready. The first time we seal the bond, I want you to be sure.”

Maddy shook her head, giving them a slight smile. "It's a good thing we have the psychic thing, otherwise you'd be waiting a long time."

Kyle inclined his head in acknowledgement of her point.

Julian winced. "I don't want to rush you, Maddy, but I'm dying here. Those memories worked me up some, and I was already pretty excited. If you aren't ready, can you cut us loose to, um, deal with it ourselves?"

Her eyes went wide and she sat back on her heels. Well, that answered her question about shared visions. Still, his words created a visual that had her creaming. Big fists sliding over hard flesh, straining toward orgasm. She made a little sound in her throat.

Kyle's gaze sharpened. "I think she likes that idea."

Studying her, Julian's face tightened. "Do you, Maddy?"

She licked her lips, eliciting an indrawn breath from Kyle. "Yeah. Yeah, I do."

"See, honey, the problem with that is that Kyle rarely jacks off when he's horny."

Her brows came together. Did Kyle have some superior alien self-control Julian lacked?

Kyle's strained chuckle cut across her thoughts. "True enough. Why should I jack myself off when Julian is so willing to take care of it for me?"

The heat rose in Maddy's cheeks and her entire body flashed hot at his words. She'd never realized she had this sort of kink, and maybe the dream kicked it off, but the thought of Julian and Kyle together definitely revved her engine.

Still, it suddenly struck her that Julian seemed to be on the giving end of the equation more often than not. For some reason, the inequality of that bothered her. "What about Julian?"

"What about me?"

"What do you get out of it?"

Julian's brows drew together. "I don't understand what you mean."

"It just seems like Kyle gets the goods and your left with the short end of the stick." She blinked at his expression, and hurriedly added, "Figuratively, not literally."

Kyle frowned at her, clearly not pleased with her assessment.

Julian laughed: a deep, rolling laugh that made him look years younger. "Oh, honey. I love it, I love everything about sex."

Kyle's expression lightened. "What he's not telling you is that he loves to make his partner lose control. He enjoys being the one to give and give until you lose it. And I'd never leave him hanging."

Maddy wasn't sure she quite understood the dynamic, but it clearly must work for them.

Some of her discomfiture must have shown on her face, because Julian patted her shoulder. "Why don't you just sit in that chair and watch? You can see for yourself how much I enjoy getting Kyle off. Though, frankly, the thought of getting you off is a lot more appealing right now."

He looked so hopeful she had to smother a laugh.

Kyle's lips tilted in that tiny movement that passed for a smile. "That would also be my preference. Though if I recall the dream correctly you weren't the only one getting off."

Maddy squirmed a little at the reminder, her pussy clenching. Without a word, she moved into the chair. She cleared her throat.

A satisfied smile tilted the corners of Julian's full lips and Kyle stood, kicking off his shoes while unbuckling his belt. Julian followed suit and a moment later both were naked before her.

My God. It took more self-control than was pretty not to gape. Neither of them seemed to have any body hair at all. Kyle's heavily muscled legs framed a truly magnificent cock. The dream had been extremely accurate, down to the detail of the vein winding around his length and the odd raised bumps circling his crown. Thick and heavy, the weight of his arousal pulled his hardened flesh away from his body.

But if Kyle was magnificent, Julian bordered on scary. Torn between lust and very real fear, Maddy stared. Thicker than her wrist, the idea of his cock filling her soaked her panties. She'd never been one to subscribe to the school of bigger is better, but in this case, the combination of Julian's size and his admitted desire to please his partner had definite appeal.

Julian winked at Maddy before turning to Kyle. He dropped to his knees, wings tucked back, the wingtips bent against the floor. Kyle lifted a hand to caress Julian's face and Julian's nearly angelic smile. Bending forward, he wrapped his hand tightly around the base of Kyle's cock. In profile, Maddy had a perfect view when Julian's tongue darted out to lave the head, swirling over the broad expanse.

Each movement of Julian's tongue somehow translated itself onto her pussy, a pale echo of his actions running along her nerves. She bit her lip to hold back a moan.

Kyle hummed deep in his chest, his head dropping back so that his face turned up to the ceiling. Julian took his time, using the flat of his tongue to explore, circling and sliding over the shaft. His other hand came up to cup Kyle's sac, kneading gently, eliciting a grunt of approval.

Maddy watched Julian's mouth sink down over Kyle's cock with amazed arousal. He swallowed him to the hilt. Kyle bit his lip, his incredibly sexy moan stroking Maddy's nerve endings.

Kyle's wings flexed, the tips brushing the soft leather next to her head, the trailing edge tickling her arm. She jerked under the unexpected caress, her hand falling into her lap. The jolt against her belly set off tremors in her core. Her pussy throbbed and her fingers itched to rub her clit. God. What was she thinking?

The wingtip brushed her skin again, tightening her nipples into sharp points. Watching them, seeing the intense concentration and obvious pleasure, hit a trigger she hadn't known she had. The burning between her thighs demanded her attention.

A quick check ensured her that both men had their eyes shut, focused solely on their own interaction. Slowly, not wanting to make a sound that might alert them, she slid her fingers under the waistband of her pants. Her eyes glued to Julian's mouth moving up and down over Kyle's cock, she settled back against the chair, spreading her thighs. Julian reached between his own legs to take his massive cock in hand.

Oh, man. Maddy shifted the soaked crotch of her panties to the side, sliding her fingers over her wet, yearning pussy. The sight of Julian sucking Kyle while fisting his own cock pushed her past whatever internal boundaries she thought she had. She pulled her fingers back, moving to quietly push her pants over her hips and off. The cool air of the cabin shocked her overheated flesh.

Kyle slid his hands down to the tops of Julian's wings, rubbing along the crease where the wings merged into his body. Julian jolted under the touch, his mouth pulling

harder at Kyle's cock.

Kyle's head came up, his eyes open and fixed on her. Her gaze clashed with his and the heat flared in his eyes. He made a pained sound when his eyes locked onto her exposed pussy and the fingers moving on her own flesh. His throat worked and he bit his lip, watching her slide two fingers inside.

Maddy swallowed her moan, the feel of her fingers not nearly enough. Kyle's breathing sounded like a bellows, overriding the softer sounds of Julian's sucking.

Heat flashed through her and her hand froze as the connection between them snapped into place. Those intense, pale eyes and sharp features pulled at something deep within her. More than the physical, an emotional link stretched between them.

Stunned, she dropped her gaze from his. The sight of Julian's mouth sliding over Kyle's cock settled something within her. Oddly, she wasn't jealous. Perhaps a bit envious—she wanted her mouth and hands on Kyle—but not jealous. Julian's face reflected his joy and pleasure at performing this intimate act.

Contrarily, Maddy wanted Julian to have the pleasure he so willingly gave Kyle. Not only because he was sexy as hell, but also, in a strange way, in appreciation for what he gave to Kyle.

"Madeline." Kyle's growl interrupted Julian's steady glide over Kyle's cock. Frozen with the shaft half-buried in his mouth, Julian opened his eyes. Angling his head slightly, he did his best to watch Maddy and keep his lips in place. His eyes widened when he noticed her hand tucked between her legs. Kyle's hard flesh muffled his strangled exclamation.

Maddy went to her knees and stripped her shirt over her head. The scrape of the cotton across her hardened nipples shot sparks through her. Julian dropped his hand from Kyle's body and turned to watch her, letting the cock slide from his mouth. Kyle's hand came up to grip himself, as if he missed the warmth of Julian's mouth.

She pushed off her panties and rose to her feet. Uncertainty stalled her progress.

Kyle reached out his free hand, inviting her to join them. With a sigh, she put her hand in his, marveling at the heat and hardness of his palm. The calloused pads of his fingers scraped the sensitive nerves of her hands, somehow sexual.

An additional tingle of awareness shimmered up her spine. In an echo of her dream, Kyle cupped her face, bringing her close for a kiss. His scent hit her nose and her nostrils flared. Like her dream, his skin smelled of rich, damp earth. The essence of fertility and life. Her eyes fluttered closed as his lips pressed softly into hers. The steady pressure relaxed her, unkinking her shoulders and loosening the muscles in her back. Her hands came up to grasp his wrists, not to push him away, but to brace herself. Slowly, Kyle's tongue slid along her lower lip, delicately seeking entry. Without hesitation, Maddy invited him inside. His mouth opened against hers and Julian's hands wrapped around her calves. She stumbled, startled by the reminder that she and Kyle were not alone. After the initial shock, she settled into the kiss, enjoying the added sensation of Julian's hands tracing light patterns over the skin of her legs, lingering at the sensitive backs of her knees.

Kyle's kiss deepened until she was so steeped in his rich flavor it seemed to permeate her own tissues. He took his time with the kiss, learning what rhythms pleased her, finding every sensitive spot and exploring it. She wondered briefly if it was possible to be absorbed through a kiss.

Finally, Kyle pulled back. His fingers traced along her jaw and she forced her eyelids open. He ran his tongue across his lips, as if gathering the last drops of her flavor. Maddy's sex clenched.

"I wish we had a bed," Kyle said gruffly.

Julian made a noise of agreement. Maddy wanted to look down into his face, but Kyle's hands held her in place.

"We don't need the bed," she murmured.

Kyle slid his hands down her throat, resting his long fingers on her shoulders and brushing his thumbs back and forth over her collarbones. His wings spread around them like a milky curtain, cutting them off from the rest of the world. The gentle touch contrasted with the hunger in his face. His lips gleamed with the moisture of their kiss, swollen and dark, making her want another taste.

She hooked her arms around Kyle's neck, pulling him back down. Her body turned into his, catching Julian between them. His face even with her hip, Julian pressed open-mouthed kisses along the outer curve from upper thigh to waist and his hand flattened against her lower back. The damp slide of his lips shot sensation up her spine, mixing with the slow heat of Kyle's possession.

Maddy pressed more firmly toward Kyle, flattening her sensitized breasts against the hard planes of his chest. In response, Kyle dove deep into her mouth, using his tongue to brand her on an elemental level. She would never get enough of these drugging kisses, of his earthy flavor. His arms dropped to her waist, landing on Julian's head. Kyle broke the kiss and they both looked down.

Julian sat back, rubbing the top of his head. "Watch it."

"Get out of the way."

Maddy bit her lip, but a small snort of laughter escaped. Julian flashed a smile before moving around her hip to stand behind her. Another echo of the dream, she shivered at being pressed between them. Kyle's erection nestled against the soft swell of her abdomen, a heated indicator of his arousal. Julian nudged the thick length of his cock into the crease of her buttocks, settling his testicles against the lower curve and letting the broad head ride against the small of her back. Kyle captured her low moan of pleasure, taking her mouth again. His hands cupped her cheeks around Julian.

Julian rubbed along the channel of her buttocks before sliding his hands up to tease the sides of her breasts. His mouth found the sensitive patch of skin at the nape of her neck, just under the swing line of her hair. Maddy arched her back, pushing into Kyle while Julian licked at her skin. She writhed between them, caught by the hardness of their bodies. Her pussy clenched, desperately seeking something to fill the emptiness inside her.

Kyle groaned against her lips, bucking his hips into her belly. His hands moved to brush the curves of her hips.

Julian sucked the skin of her nape against his teeth, sending off sparklers that sizzled over her nerve endings, drawing her nipples into tight points and pulsing wildly in her clit. She bent her neck, breaking free of Kyle's kiss to suck air into her starved lungs. Reality was so much more intense than the dream.

Julian began to lick down the line of her spine. Kyle cupped her breasts, rasping his thumbs over the hardened tips. Maddy gasped out the breath she'd just taken, her head falling forward to rest against Kyle. Her hands moved restlessly over his shoulders before

ducking under his arms to his back. And right onto the place where his wings melded to his body.

A massive shudder shook Kyle's frame, his cock jumping wildly against her belly as her hands traced that transition between wing and back. The scratchy tickle of the feathers against the backs of her hands had her lifting her head, trying to see around him. It was, of course, impossible, but she went up on her toes in the attempt.

Julian's tongue, at the small of her back, dipped lower at her movement. The hot slide of it over the nerve-rich flesh melted Maddy's bones. Her knees gave way completely.

Kyle's hands hooked under her arms and Julian wrapped his arms around her thighs, pressing his face into her lower back. Gently, they lowered her to the floor.

The rough carpet registered briefly before Kyle's mouth lowered to her breast, raining tiny kisses on the full lower curve. Julian gently parted her legs, sweeping her skin with light caresses.

Before she could process the sensations, Julian's mouth fastened over her sex.

Maddy cried out in shock and pleasure, and then cried out again when Kyle's lips closed over her nipple. The combined sensation of Kyle sucking intently at her breast and Julian laving over her slick pussy catapulted Maddy to the very edge of orgasm. She fought it, wanting to hold on to the pleasure coursing relentlessly through her.

"Oh, God," she moaned, struggling to contain the swelling tide of arousal that threatened to overwhelm her. Julian's lips worked her eager flesh in ways she couldn't describe. The sensation piled up faster than she could process, her legs straining. Her hands sought purchase, one winding feverishly into the thick mass of Julian's dark hair while the other dug into Kyle's shoulder.

Kyle replaced his mouth with the firm pinch of his fingers, drawing her nipple out, twisting it, elongating it so that the nerves seemed stretched to breaking. Maddy's head pressed hard into the carpet, her body a tight arch. The pressure against her skull helped back her off the edge, but only her stubborn will kept her from going over when Kyle sucked her other nipple into his mouth at the same moment Julian swirled his tongue around her clit. A pained moan escaped past clenched teeth and her hips twisted and bucked against Julian's mouth. Kyle's arm pinned her at the waist, pushing her body down and reducing her range of motion.

Her body needed an outlet. Without the ability to move, her control snapped. The hot pull of Kyle's mouth and the strong pressure of his fingers twisted into a tight wire of near-painful need that ran from her nipples to her clit. Julian's skillful tongue electrified that wire of sensation, setting off sparks behind her eyelids.

Julian sucked her clit into his mouth, flicking the exposed organ with his tongue. A high, keening cry broke from her throat and her jaw went slack. The orgasm burst through her, flooding every nerve and triggering spasms of pleasure that knocked her against the floor.

Kyle backed off her nipples, laving and stroking now. Julian's suction gentled and he used the softness of his lips to ease her down from the orgasm. The aftershocks rolled through her, minute quakes of softer pleasure.

Julian rolled over her leg, lying on his side next to her. Kyle kissed his way down her breast bone. Maddy pushed herself up onto her elbows when he paused at her navel. Julian leaned across her hip and Kyle moved to press his lips against his partner's. Maddy

watched them kiss, fascinated.

Julian's hand skimmed over the hair at the junction of her thighs on its way to Kyle's cheek. The light brush skittered along her nerve endings, reawakening her interest. The sight of Kyle's tongue tangling with Julian's was as erotic as anything she'd seen, somehow more intimate than Julian's earlier attention to Kyle's cock.

Kyle broke the kiss and licked his lips. "You taste of her," he murmured.

"She tastes good."

"Yes, indeed," Kyle agreed, dipping his tongue into Julian's mouth.

Maddy's pussy clenched when Julian sighed against Kyle's lips. The fires so recently quenched began to flicker to life. The sight of them—one light, one dark, both dear—kissing so intimately over her body, sharing her flavor, elicited a deep sense of fulfillment. She already thought of them, on some level, as hers.

Kyle shifted, breaking the kiss and settling himself between her thighs. The smooth friction of his legs along the insides of her thighs tingled along her nerves. Julian turned his attention to her, smiling. The piercing sweetness of his expression brought a lump to her throat. Hastily swallowing, she gave him a shaky smile of her own.

Julian set his mouth to her ribs, using his tongue to trace the ridges and dips of her ribs before laving the side of her breast. Maddy shuddered, her arms giving under her so that she lay back against the carpet. One arm caught under Julian while the other settled on Kyle's hip.

Kyle hooked his hands under her knees, pulling them up to give himself more access. The heat of his fingers against the delicate skin behind her knees shivered through her body. He ran the rough tips of his fingers up the insides of her thighs, skimming the sensitive hollow where her legs met her body.

Julian ran open-mouthed kisses up her neck, sliding along her jaw to finally settle on her lips. He began to slowly seduce her mouth and Maddy's eyes drifted closed. The sharp edges of his teeth nibbled delicately at the seam of her lips, begging entrance. Her jaw relaxed and her lips parted. Julian captured her bottom lip, still swollen from Kyle's kisses, between his teeth, scraping over the nerves, making her tremble beneath the two of them. Allowing her a single indrawn breath, Julian returned his lips to hers and sank into her mouth. He tasted of lime and Kyle's loamy earth and her own spicy tang. The combination made her light-headed.

Before she could find her balance, Kyle used his thumbs to part the slick flesh between her thighs. Cold air against hot skin sent shock waves through her, ratcheting up her arousal. Julian leisurely stroked inside her mouth and Kyle began a soft stroking of his own. His long fingers slid easily over her hot flesh before he sank a single finger deep inside. The shock of penetration was both welcome relief and renewed torment.

Julian swallowed Maddy's mewling cry and Kyle hummed approval when she drenched his finger. When he added a second finger and began a slow circling motion, Maddy's hips bucked in a silent plea. Kyle's low, rough chuckle vibrated through her before he pulled his fingers free of the soft clasp of her body.

Her protest lodged in her throat as he slammed his fingers back into her with enough force to scoot her up along the carpet. Julian worked an arm beneath her neck, along the line of her shoulders. The next thrust of Kyle's fingers pushed her against the firm support of Julian's arm.

Julian continued to eat at her mouth, using his free hand to play with her breasts,

while Kyle continued to ream those two fingers in and out of her aching pussy.

Maddy jerked her mouth from Julian's, panting. "Please. God, please, just fuck me."

Julian recaptured her mouth, pinching a nipple.

Kyle's breath heated her inner thigh. "No. I'm not sealing our bond on a plane."

Oh, crap. She'd totally forgotten they were even on a plane. Something about that should bother her, should hit her inner filters, but she couldn't quite remember why. Kyle's fingers inside her and Julian's wicked mouth robbed her of reason.

Then Kyle clamped his mouth over her clit and all thought evaporated. Nothing existed but the exquisite sensations these men gave her. Her entire being focused on the gathered heat, winding tighter inside. Julian's devouring kiss echoed the torturous laving of Kyle's tongue on her sex. Kyle's fingers curled up, stroking over her G-spot, and she was gone. Flying, falling, plummeting through the orgasm.

Long moments later, Kyle eased his fingers from her, and sat back with a final, gentle kiss.

Julian pulled back, too, stroking sweetly down her side and he carefully, slowly disengaging his mouth from hers.

Maddy fell back, boneless and exhausted. Never before had a release been so intensely personal. It scared her a bit, but she was too relaxed, too sated, to worry about it right now.

A soft sound caught her attention. She forced her heavy lids open and caught her breath. Oh.

They had resumed where they'd left off. Julian sucked Kyle's cock eagerly while his own straining cock slid easily through his fist, faster and harder than she expected. She scooted closer. God. His cock was unreal—a column of pale gold topped with a ruddy crown, veined and glorious in its imperfection. Copious moisture dripped from the tip, from those odd little nodes around the crown, caught by his hand and rubbed down the length to add to the slick motion. How would that slippery fluid taste?

Maddy stared, fascinated. Julian's shaft pulsed with the first wave of release, jerking and surging as long streamers of white hit the side of the leather chair between Kyle's spread legs. It seemed to go on forever, Julian's inarticulate cries muffled by Kyle's plunging erection. Unable to help herself, she reached forward to swipe a finger through the milky fluid. Lifting it to her mouth, she sucked her finger clean. Slightly bitter, a little salty, but mostly an odd floral flavor that made her think of exotic gardens. Julian's hand dropped from his body, hanging limp at his side.

Kyle's low growl caught her by surprise. He leaned in, eyes burning, and watched her suck Julian's come from her finger. Kyle thrust hard enough for Julian to make a small choking noise. He threw his head back and the veins on his neck stood out. His chest expanded and he threw his shoulders back, arching his body into Julian's. Kyle's orgasm gripped her imagination. He was utterly silent, the intensity of the orgasm conveyed in nothing more than the extreme tension of his body. A second later, a great shudder shook him, and he seemed to collapse, falling forward.

Julian grunted as Kyle's penis slid free and his weight sank onto him.

Maddy rolled to her belly, the carpet scratchy on her sensitized skin. She pushed herself to her knees and grabbed for her clothes. She took two wobbly steps toward the bathroom before Julian's slurred voice stopped her.

"Can you bring a couple of washcloths?"

Right. Neither fit in the bathroom just now. She nodded jerkily.

The door closed with a reassuring click and Maddy leaned against the vanity. A few deep breaths gave her the strength to clean herself with a fluffy white washcloth. She winced at the rough terrycloth on her sensitive skin.

She found herself oddly at peace. The sex—or almost sex—hollowed her out, and that concerned her a bit. If she so thoroughly lost herself in them physically, how certain was she that she wouldn't do the same emotionally?

She washed her face and dressed before wetting two cloths. Another deep breath. She opened the door.

The men sprawled sideways in the forward chairs, wings hanging over the arms. They watched her walk up the aisle.

Julian had one foot over the other arm of the chair and one foot on the floor, leaving him completely open. Even drained, his size was daunting. Kyle's knees were pulled up so his body curled into itself. A Renaissance angel—if angels wore that closed, wary expression.

She handed them the washcloths before retreating to the couch. She looked out the window to give them at least a modicum of privacy.

Oh.

Her brain finally kicked in. Privacy. Plane. Complete hottie CEO pilot and that cutie copilot. Well, hell.

Had she screamed? Maybe. That cockpit door didn't look very solid, and there was a pretty big gap under it. Somehow, she didn't think it would be particularly soundproof. Did she care?

Aside from the knee-jerk embarrassment, not really. That surprised her. She'd fought hard against the attraction, but it had happened so seamlessly it seemed natural. For the first time since yesterday's dream, she felt in control. Not in control of events, but in control of herself. She hadn't realized how disoriented she'd been. Evidently hot almost-sex cleared the cobwebs from her brain pretty well.

"We're on final approach. We'll be landing in ten minutes." Cam's announcement interrupted her train of thought.

Julian looked over at Kyle. Kyle nodded in response to some unspoken question.

"We're going to pack the wings. It shouldn't take us long, but we'll be tired, especially after ... well, after." Julian's cheekbones colored.

She grinned at them. "Go ahead. If you pass out, I'll explain to Cam."

The repacking process mirrored the unfurling process, but seemed more difficult—maybe because the feathers were dry. It pained her to watch them. Kyle collapsed into a chair, panting. Though he'd put his pants back on, he didn't bother to retrieve his shirt or jacket. It seemed to take extreme effort to fasten his seatbelt.

Julian slumped onto the couch next to her. Breathing heavily, he leaned to the side. Maddy reached across him to buckle the belt for him.

He gave her a weak smile before his eyes slid closed.

The plane touched down moments later.

Chapter Nine

The drive to the training camp took longer than she expected. By the time they arrived, dusk crept up the mountains. She couldn't tell much in the encroaching darkness—trees and mountains and some buildings.

Cam pulled up alongside a neat cabin with a tin roof and a deep front porch. In short order, the men unloaded all the baggage and swept her inside.

"Try to stay on the property until we need to go in for the deposition," Cam advised. "If you need anything, let us know."

He sketched a salute toward her and headed back to the SUV.

Maddy turned a circle in the center of the living room. The bare walls and sturdy furnishings ruled out luxury, but the beamed ceilings were high. The open floor plan meant she could see through to the back of the cabin. Tall double doors stood open, leading to the front bedroom. She wondered if it had once been a study.

Kyle brushed past her on his way to the tiny kitchen. In moments, a pot heated on the stove and a smaller pan warmed sauce from a jar.

Feeling a bit at sea and useless, Maddy dropped onto the boxy, threadbare couch and pulled her headphones from her ears. She'd been on the iPod feed from the time they touched down. No way did she want to invite conversation from Cam and Gavin.

Julian sat next to her. She looked up and smiled at him. He still looked tired, though both he and Kyle slept on the car ride. Evidently, he had no problem trusting Cam at the wheel.

"You're okay, then." He released a long breath. "I was worried you'd be upset."

"Over this? Not really." She frowned. "You do understand that I'm not committing to anything, right?"

Julian quirked one eyebrow and inclined his head. "Not yet, anyway."

Maddy blinked. She expected arrogance from Kyle, not Julian.

Sex—or almost sex—had evidently changed things more than she'd realized. Before, Julian had been friendly. Now he seemed ... proprietary. Yes, that was the word. Proprietary.

She tipped her chin. Did he seriously think sex gave him some sort of claim on her? "I repeat: I am not committing."

Kyle lowered himself into the chair across from them. "Yes you are."

She gaped at him. "What the hell? You don't get to decide for me."

"I'm not. I'm just pointing out the obvious. You may not believe you are committing to us, but every relationship involves at least a minimal commitment."

Maddy snapped her teeth together. She needed to backtrack. Clearly they were working from different definitions of commitment. "Fine, I will restate. I am not committing to a long-term relationship. At this point, I'm not convinced a short-term relationship will work."

The corner of Kyle's mouth lifted. "Not yet, anyway."

His repetition of Julian's statement had her seeing red. She stifled a growl. Infuriating, stubborn males. Oh, but she had a weapon she could use. "Not your call, Kylan."

Julian jerked back from her and Kyle's eyes widened. His pupils expanded, nearly eclipsed the pale blue of his iris. He swallowed several times before managing to croak, "How do you know that name?"

She waved a hand. "Same way I know Jevulian. One of those psychic things."

Julian shuddered, his hands twitching before he curled them into fists.

Both men eyed her hungrily.

Oh, hell. Something just shy of fear sparked to life in her brain. She'd miscalculated. Instead of simply throwing them off their mark, she'd somehow awakened the predatory instinct. Her own instincts screamed at her: retreat. "The important point here is that neither of you owns me. I make my own decision, and if you can't get that through your skulls, we are going to have issues."

"You spoke my true name. And Julian's."

"You really need to focus on the point, here." No way she'd risk using his name again just now. Whatever the obsession with names, she'd clearly opened a can of worms with which she was not prepared to deal.

Kyle drew in a deep breath. "Madeline. Names have power for us. Not in the literal sense, but in a cultural sense. We all have names of usage—both mine and Julian's are close to our real names, but that isn't always the case. True names are reserved for private use by family and mates. By using our true names, you declared yourself mate in our culture."

Shit.

Totally derailed, she blinked at him. "Um. I could not be reasonably expected to know that."

Julian shifted beside her. "Perhaps not, but the fact remains that you invoked our true names deliberately. The only explanation for you even knowing our true names is the potential bond. You did do it deliberately, didn't you?"

Maddy squirmed in her seat. "Maybe I noticed that using your name seemed to make both of you a little ... distracted. But I definitely did not realize that the names had any import."

Kyle shook his head. "You used my true name to distract me?"

Oh, dear. "Not exactly. More to throw you off your stride."

"And gain an advantage in the discussion," Julian pointed out grimly.

She bit her lip. There was no sugar coating that. "Well, yes."

Both men stared at her.

Julian pushed himself up. She raised her eyes to meet his gaze. A combination of determination and sadness colored his expression. She opened her mouth to explain. She didn't know what she would have said, but he turned to look out the window, effectively blocking her out. She looked down at her hands.

Dammit, it wasn't fair. She didn't know the rules of their culture; she hadn't known she had violated some sacred trust. They could just get over it.

She switched her gaze to Kyle. "Look, I had no idea it would be a big deal. I don't think it's fair to be angry with me over that when I didn't know it was a problem."

He studied her thoughtfully.

"You're right, of course. But we're right, too. You confirmed the potential bond, and that gives us certain rights in our culture. You did this in ignorance, and we must make some allowance for that. We have just under two weeks before your deposition. I want

you to promise me that you will be with us for that time.”

She frowned. “I didn’t think I had a choice about that. You guys are my protection.”

Kyle shook his head. “We are no longer your protection. Cam relieved us of that when he picked us up in Halifax. He could see clearly that Julian and I were compromised, so he and Gav took the responsibility until we arrived here. Now facility security has it.”

She rolled her eyes. “And no one thought to mention this to me?”

Kyle lifted his hands. “Security is our province, Madeline. We will do what we think best. But that is beside the point. The point is that I mean be with us. See if we can work as a unit. I think we can, but you are uncertain.”

“You want me to hole up here for the next two weeks and play house.”

“Do not make light, Maddy.” Julian whirled to face her. “This is vitally important to us. I know you don’t understand, but please try to take it seriously.”

Maddy pulled at her lip. She hated apologizing, but she was making light, and it wasn’t fair to them. “You’re right. I can’t say I will commit to you, because I don’t know what that might mean. I can say I want to know what is going on here, and I am definitely interested in finding out where it might lead. Is that enough?”

Silence sat heavily while they studied her. God. What were they looking for now?

Kyle sighed, breaking the tension. “It will do for now. Let’s eat,” he suggested. “After dinner, we can talk.”

She shook her head. It seemed Kyle continually wanted to feed her. Was he trying to fatten her up or change the subject? Probably the latter.

Halfway through dinner, a question occurred to her. “Do you usually leave your wings out?”

Julian blinked at her. “It depends. Perimeter security keeps visitors to a minimum, and the guards on duty are required to have them packed in case they have to respond to a call. Most of the training facilities are underground or covered, so it isn’t a risk there.” He waved toward the windows. “The other buildings have extensive basements. The rooms above ground aren’t used that much. We have quarters in the tunnels.”

“Are you going to have your wings out while we’re here?”

Julian shrugged and looked at Kyle.

“It’s more comfortable to have them extended, but either way is fine. Do you prefer we keep them packed?”

Maddy paused, then shrugged. “Doesn’t make any difference to me. If you’re more comfortable with them out, go ahead. Might be a challenge in this house, though.”

“Not really. The high ceilings, the wider doors, are designed to allow for the wings.”

“That makes sense.”

Kyle rose, collecting dishes.

“I want to go back to the hemipenes thing.”

Julian dropped his fork.

Kyle set the dishes down in the sink. He cleared his throat. “All right.”

She leaned forward, propping her elbows on the table. “So females have hemipenes?”

“Some females, not all. Fewer with each generation.” Kyle’s mouth turned down thoughtfully. “I know there was a lot of research about that. Each generation had fewer large-winged males and fewer females with hemipenes.”

“Evolution at work,” Maddy murmured. “Okay, so, the female uses these hemipenes to stimulate sperm production? How does that work?”

Kyle resumed his seat. “The hemipenes excrete a hormone that stimulates sperm production. It’s the same hormone that is present in male ejaculate.”

She tilted her head. “Interesting.”

Julian stared at his plate, flushed color creeping up his neck. Maddy’s lips twitched at his obvious discomfort.

Kyle ran the back of his hand over his mouth. “Females don’t ejaculate. It’s not that forceful. The hemipenes have projections covered in the hormone. The projections fit into receptors in the Claxint gland, which stimulates sperm production.”

Maddy pinched the bridge of her nose. Crap on a cracker. “What the hell is a Claxint gland and does that mean that you have these ... projections?”

“Yes and no. Yes there are projections, no they aren’t like the ones on the hemipenes.”

“Wait, are the projections those little bumps on the heads of your cocks?”

Julian choked. Kyle cut him a hard look.

“They only appear near climax and they aren’t very large. They are easily covered.”

She looked back and forth between them. “You know I’m going to have to see this, right?”

Kyle sighed. “I assumed as much. And the Claxint gland is the gland in charge of sperm production in Tlin males. I suppose the closest thing in humans might be the prostate. Anything else while we’re discussing this?”

“Well, yeah.” Maddy considered for a moment how to ask her question. “Why can’t the hormone just be, um ... administered directly? Or put on some kind of carrier device?”

Julian coughed. “Are you asking why we can’t just put our own come on a dildo and fuck ourselves?”

She fought a blush and lost. “I guess so. Yeah.”

Kyle blew out a breath. “The hormone synthesizes with arousal and degrades immediately on contact with oxygen. Attempts to”—he paused, licking his lips—“harvest the hormone have thus far yielded very poor results. This is understandably distressing to Tlin who do not find other men sexually attractive.”

That would definitely stink. “Okay. So I’m guessing condoms wouldn’t work too well on you guys?”

The corner of Kyle’s mouth lifted. “Condoms are fine. Just no spermicide.”

“And do you have some of those non-spermicide condoms here?”

“We do.”

“Wanna try ’em out?”

Chapter Ten

They ended up in the front bedroom.

Maddy glanced around the room. Again, rustic: basic dresser, plain walls, and a lake-sized bed on a simple metal frame. Kyle moved to the side of the bed, stripping off his clothes.

She kicked her shoes off and started to pull her shirt over her head, nervous for no reason she could name. With what they'd already done on the plane, she shouldn't be this anxious. They mattered, though, and that was enough to have her tied in knots.

"Wait," Julian said, putting a hand out to forestall her. "I want to do that."

Her hands dropped to her sides, fingers twitching.

Julian stood in front of her, a slight smile tilting the corners of his mouth.

"I haven't had much experience with women," he told her quietly. "Kyle has been enough for me. But now, now there's you. I want this to be good for you."

Maddy opened her mouth, but no words sprang to mind. What could she say that wouldn't sound condescending or stupid?

He smoothed his palms down her arms and meshed his fingers with hers. Holding her in gentle captivity, he leaned in to kiss her.

His lips tempted hers with soft brushes and her eyes drifted closed. Sinking into the sweetness of his kiss, she opened easily for a deeper foray. The slow, hot slide of tongue on tongue warmed her, stirring heat to life.

Pulling back, he smiled at her. "Relax. Go with the feelings, Maddy, and everything else will follow."

A simple sentiment, but one with profound emotional implications for her. She already felt more for the two of them than seemed possible, certainly more than comfortable. The decision, though, had been made on the plane—maybe even before that. No going back now. "I'll try."

"Good enough for now," Julian murmured.

The echo of Kyle's earlier comment struck her. "How did you learn our language? Actually, why English?"

Julian shook his head at her. "You just can't turn off your brain, can you? We learned Earth languages on the voyage from Tlin. There was little to do but learn. The Tlin teachers came with us."

"You brought teachers? I thought you said only the guards were put down here?"

He frowned briefly. "Ah. The Tlin teachers are not people, they are machines. Like subliminal messages, I suppose."

"Oh. That makes sense, I guess."

"Now, stop thinking so hard."

His fingers eased free of hers, moving to the hem of her shirt. She took a deep breath and he winked at her. It cracked some of the tension and Maddy let her shoulders relax. He skimmed her shirt over her head and dropped it on the floor. Her nipples contracted in the cool air, eliciting a sound of approval from Julian. He traced the outer curve of her breast, then the line of her ribs. His fingers slid under the waistband of her pants, under the elastic edge of her panties. A swift tug bared her lower body. He stepped around

behind her and urged her out of the pool of her clothing.

Without Julian in front of her, she could see Kyle sitting on the edge of the bed, his hands braced on his spread knees. His cock rose, monumental, between his thighs.

Julian crowded her, his hands coming up to cup her breasts while his erection pressed into the curve of her ass and lower back. Kyle watched Julian's hands play across the full lower curve of her breasts, heat flaring in his eyes.

When he flicked a glance up over her shoulder, Maddy realized that Julian was watching Kyle, too. In response to whatever unspoken communication passed between them, Julian pinched her nipples gently between his fingers, drawing them out into distended points.

Maddy whimpered, heat stabbing through her. She could actually feel her pussy softening in response. Kyle's gaze ate over her, making her suddenly aware of how she must look, naked and aroused under Julian's knowing caresses. Her hands came up to grip Julian's forearms to anchor herself against competing urges to cover her body and sink into the sensuality. Had it only been yesterday she'd considered two men a crazy dream?

"So pretty, Maddy," Julian breathed against her neck.

"Over here, Julian." Kyle's bass growl sent shudders through Julian's body, his hips surging against her rear and pulling an answering shiver from Maddy.

Julian moved them slowly toward Kyle. Each step rubbed the length of his cock along the sensitive skin at the small of her back. Only his body at her back kept her upright when her knees threatened to buckle.

Julian stopped them a breath away from Kyle, who pulled his knees closer together and moved his hands to the edge of the bed.

"Spread your legs, Madeline." Kyle's order raised the fine hairs all over her body. God, what he did to her.

Careful to avoid both men's feet, she widened her stance. Julian nudged her forward slightly so that her legs bumped Kyle's. Maddy shuddered in Julian's hands.

What were they planning? Anticipation and a tiny spark of apprehension snaked through her. She licked her suddenly dry lips.

Kyle shook his head at her, his eyes softening slightly. "Madeline. Trust us. Our purpose is your pleasure. You need to trust us."

Maddy dipped her head. Trust them? Her response to them was so intense she wasn't sure she trusted herself.

Julian nuzzled the back of her neck again, his arms wrapping around her waist. "Let go, Maddy. Just let it happen. We won't let you fall."

Anxiety drained away. She evidently trusted them more than she trusted herself. That was a revelation she would need to examine later.

Kyle pulled her forward to straddle his lap. The head of his cock bumped her belly, a heated point of desire on her cool skin.

"Julian," Kyle said quietly. "I want you to slide between her legs."

Julian crowded against her, bending his knees slightly. The slight rasp of his arm as he reached between them to tip his erection forward pinched her nipples to tight points.

Julian slid his thick length along the softening flesh between her thighs and Maddy's gaze locked with Kyle's. She gasped at the press of Julian's body along her back, her spine arching in reaction.

With a low chuckle that vibrated against her skin, Julian reached around to run his thumbs over her hardened nipples, spilling tingling pleasure through her. Kyle leaned forward and her eyelids dropped closed. The movement pressed the three of them together, surrounding her with heat and masculine power.

Kyle sucked one nipple into his mouth, tonguing Julian's fingers along with the distended peak. The pleasure flared brightly and her breathing stuttered.

Julian began a subtle ebb and flow with his hips, rubbing his cock through her slick folds. On the forward stroke, the wide head lodged against her clit, trapped there by the hard line of Kyle's erection pressed into her belly.

Maddy's head fell back against Julian's shoulder. Heat surged with each stroke, building on itself. Someone whimpered. Was that her? Oh, God. They'd reduced her to mindless need faster than she could ever have dreamed.

Julian stepped back suddenly, the cool air of the room seeming frigid after the heat of his skin. Before she could protest, before the shock of his withdrawal could set in, Kyle stood, his hands hooked under her ass to support her.

Maddy's legs moved automatically to wrap around his waist, but he interrupted the motion by tossing her into the middle of the bed. She bounced once and settled in the center of the mattress. Less than a breath later, the men flanked her in the bed.

Disoriented, she tried to regroup. They didn't allow her time to think, moving immediately to fan the flames of her desire. Kyle sealed his mouth over hers, kissing her as if he could ingest the substance and sense of her through her lips and tongue. The intensity of the kiss should have scared her, speaking of a need far greater than sex, but it didn't. It enflamed her already overheated emotions, pushing down her rational self, eclipsing her intellect.

Julian slid down her body, licking and sucking along her ribs and across her belly. He rolled over her leg to settle between her thighs. His fingers traced over the damp flesh, opening her to him.

She wanted his mouth on her again, wanted it with a fierce hunger. Until this moment, she hadn't realized she'd missed the feel of his mouth on her, craved it. Demanding now, she bucked her hips in a wordless plea. The hot wash of Julian's breath over her sex was a softer echo of the heat of Kyle's mouth on hers.

The first touch of Julian's lips against her sensitive folds sent a shock through her. Kyle's kiss muffled her cry, but nothing could disguise the twisting need of her body. When Julian thrust his tongue into her, curving it up to lick along the front of her passage, she writhed like a thing possessed, her hands gripping Kyle's shoulders and her hips surging against Julian's mouth. When he replaced his tongue with his fingers, she heaved under the harsh burden of desire. With his fingers working inside her, he sucked her clitoris into his mouth, tonguing the exposed nub. Her sense of self spun off, heat and need rising until she was no more than raw instinct and response.

Kyle's fingers pinched at her nipples: one sensation too many. The dull roar of her pulse in her ears echoed the rush of explosive release. She moaned helplessly into Kyle's mouth, the melting heat shuddering through her.

Julian gentled his ministrations, pulling his fingers free of her clasping body, pressing his tongue, unmoving, to her throbbing clit. Kyle peeled his mouth from hers, leaving her panting through swollen lips.

Julian rolled from between her legs to lie alongside her, finally prompting her to

force her heavy eyelids open. Julian had propped himself on one elbow to look down into her face. With a gentle smile, he rested his big palm on the curve of her belly. His fingers traced tiny, soothing circles around her navel. His lips gleamed with the moisture from her body, and she smiled back, relaxing.

The bed dipped when Kyle lowered himself between her thighs. Maddy blinked, startled.

“No,” Julian admonished. “Don’t tense up, honey. Just relax and let Kyle do the work. All you need to do is enjoy it. Don’t you want it? Don’t you want him to fill you up? Don’t you want him inside you?”

Maddy shuddered. She did. God, she really did. But they were both so big. The pulse in her clit gave a hopeful throb at the thought of Kyle pressing deep into her. Oh, God.

Her hips twitched and Kyle chuckled, drawing her attention. “You want it.” He slid two fingers into her wet sheath, swirling them through her cream before pulling them free.

She stared, stunned and fascinated, when he rubbed her juices over the flaring crown of his cock. Unable to take her gaze away, she watched him slide the condom down and fit himself to the notch between her thighs.

Slowly, Kyle pressed forward, his fingers wrapped around the base of his erection to hold it steady.

Even relaxed, she felt the resistance in her body. It didn’t hurt, but the feeling of pressure alarmed her. When she started to scoot back, Julian’s hand suddenly firmed, pinning her to the bed.

“Just relax. Feel him stretch you, feel him opening you up. Just think how good it’s going to feel when he’s inside you. Think how well we can all fit together.”

Maddy whimpered at the dual pleasure of Julian’s seductive murmur in her ear and the stretch and give of Kyle’s inexorable advance. She tried to concentrate on his words, on the meaning, but the world narrowed to the point between her thighs where he worked himself in by tiny, hard-won increments.

With every forward push, nerves flared to life, rekindling her arousal. She hadn’t thought she could be so aroused by the act of penetration, but this was something beyond her experience. The tiny ridges added to her pleasure in ways completely out of proportion with their small size. Kyle’s face set into stony lines, the extent of his control evident in the sweat beading at his temples. The idea that he wanted her, that he wanted her pleasure enough to control himself, was its own turn on.

Suddenly impatient, Maddy planted her feet and arched her hips, forcing him deep. Her cry of mingled shock and relief was echoed by a stunned groan as Kyle seated fully within her.

“Great Mother,” Julian breathed. “That is so beautiful.” He shifted his arm, lifting it.

Kyle grunted, his hands moving to cup Maddy’s hips, his fingers pressing into her curves. He forced himself to remain still, allowing her to adjust around him. “You feel so good,” he ground out. “Hot and tight and so fucking wet.”

His words added more fuel to the fire that had begun deep inside her. She needed him to stoke it, stroke it, make her burn. She needed him to—

“Move,” she moaned. “God, please, Kyle, move. I need—I need—”

With a tortured groan, he pulled back. The slow drag of his cock, somehow more than it should be, enflamed her. No, no, he couldn’t leave her. She tightened around him,

trying to hold him inside her.

Kyle cursed and pushed forward, the slide easier now. Maddy sighed her approval. Slow, measured thrusts gradually worked into a steady rhythm. Out: friction, drag, need. In: slick, hot, want. He felt like every fantasy come home to roost.

Julian went to his knees next to her. The movement caught her attention and she opened her eyes enough to see. He knelt at her side, his eyes fixed on the place where her body and Kyle's came together. He fisted his enormous cock tight, so tight Maddy didn't know how it didn't hurt. He slid his fist along his length, the rhythm matching Kyle's thrusts. The tiny ridges on the crown deepened in color, seemed to swell. Well, she had said she wanted to see it, but she couldn't have known how erotic she would find those small nodules.

A tiny cry escaped her throat and she spasmed around Kyle's shaft. The internal stroking combined with the visuals to stoke her to the point of climax. Almost over the edge, but not quite.

"Harder," she demanded, desperation lending a raw edge to her voice. "Please, Kyle."

At the sound of his name, he broke. With a ragged cry, he pounded into her. His heavy, rolling thrusts came so fast she couldn't breathe. His hands tightened on her hips, lifting them, opening her further, pressing him deeper into her until she thought he would fuck them through the bed. And still she wanted more. God, she was so fucking close, so close...

A keening cry tore from her, a wordless plea.

Kyle shifted his angle, arching her hips even more, bowing her back so her breasts stood like offerings. The new angle spread her further, exposing her clit. Kyle slammed deep into her, his pubic bone pressing into that swollen bundle of nerves. The pleasure sucked the breath out of her, leaving her panting, waiting for the next thrust. One. Oh, God. Two. Three. Four.

The orgasm ripped through her, roaring along raw nerves until she screamed, helplessly. Her lids flew open. Aftershocks rolled through her, shudders she couldn't conceal even if she'd wanted to. Her eyes locked on Julian's cock just as his climax hit. The nodes stood up along the ridged crest of his cock, dark and throbbing, gleaming with the secreted hormone. She had a scant second before ribbons of heat landed across her breasts, her nipples. Her pussy clenched in response, a vise of reactive pleasure.

A moment later, Kyle threw his head back, his hoarse shout echoing in the room. She could feel him pulsing inside. How was that even possible?

Never had she come so hard. She'd thought her orgasm on the plane had been intense, but this was an order of magnitude larger, more intimate, more consuming. Scarier.

Kyle slumped onto Julian. A tight ball of emotion wedged itself under her breastbone even as her body released the last of its tension. They were so beautiful. Her eyes closed again.

With a sigh, Kyle eased out of her body. Maddy stifled a protest when he fell heavily to the side. Julian mirrored him, resuming his earlier position along her side.

Someone brushed a gentle touch along her hip. She was too limp to bother seeing who caressed her with such sweetness, instead simply enjoying the softer sensation.

Kyle tucked an arm under her, cradling her to him. Julian moved closer, throwing a

leg over both Maddy and Kyle and nuzzling into Maddy's neck.

“Comfortable?” Kyle's voice sounded rusty.

She barely had the energy to nod against him, but she knew something had changed, something fundamental. He'd been right to call it sealing a bond.

Chapter Eleven

Maddy woke in a tangle of limbs, so warm from shared body heat perspiration popped on her brow. She blinked open sleep-filled eyes to see a silky dark head resting on her chest. Julian. Kyle crowded against her right side, his arm pillowing her head.

Her deep breath caused Julian to shift slightly, his left hand squeezing the soft curve of her breast. She wiggled experimentally, trying to get free without waking either Julian or Kyle.

Kyle's arm tightened at her waist and the heavy weight of his leg across hers didn't budge. So much for that idea. Maybe she could do with waking only one of them; it seemed rude to wake them both.

Moving slowly, she lifted her right hand to Julian's shoulder. She shook him gently, barely moving his solid frame. He shifted again, burrowing into the side of her breast, his lips brushing her skin. An abrupt flare of sexual awareness raced through her. Her breath caught in her chest. Oh, she did not need that right now. She needed a bathroom.

"He sleeps like the dead after sex."

Her pussy clenched in reaction to Kyle's sleep-roughened voice in her ear.

"I have to go to the bathroom," she whispered.

He chuckled. His leg lifted just before he rolled them both away from Julian.

Julian's head fell to the bed and he grunted a small protest before settling back into sleep. Kyle wasn't kidding: he did sleep like the dead.

Kyle stopped his roll with her lying atop him, her back to his chest. His hands moved from her waist to cup her breasts.

"You feel good, Madeline."

Squirming a bit, she placed her hands on his. "I'm glad you think so," she whispered. "But I really do need the bathroom."

His hands dropped. She scrambled off him and into the bathroom with his quiet chuckle following.

After taking care of her most pressing need, she washed her hands and eyed the shower. Sticky from heat and sex, her body thrumming with awareness, a cool shower sounded divine.

Cracking open the door, she peeked out. Kyle sat on the edge of the bed waiting for her.

"I want a shower. Should I use the other bathroom?"

Kyle's teeth gleamed briefly in the darkness. "No, we can use this one."

We?

The lingering sexual awareness shot straight to arousal when Kyle stood. In two strides he was at the door.

"What about Julian?"

Kyle turned to look consideringly at the bed. After a moment, he said thoughtfully, "To borrow a phrase: you snooze, you lose."

She bit her lip to contain the laugh that bubbled up. The unexpected humor spurred some emotion that lodged in her chest. How could she resist his combination of serious intensity and surprising pockets of humor?

Taking advantage of her amusement, he backed her through the doorway, pulling the door shut behind them. He herded her into the shower, his big body making the oversized enclosure seem small.

She leaned against the cool tile while he adjusted the taps. After a moment, he urged her under the warm streams of water from the dual shower heads. She ducked her head to wet her hair before tipping her face up into the water.

Kyle stood close enough she could feel the heat radiating from his body. The contrast to the lukewarm water was oddly sensual.

He wrapped his arms around her waist and rested his cheek on her shoulder. She relaxed back into him, her head tipping to rest against his. It felt good, standing under the water, surrounded by his warmth. When had she last felt this content? Her eyes drifted closed.

Long moments passed while they simply stood, enjoying the feel of each other. Eventually, he straightened and reached for the shampoo. He nudged her from under the spray before beginning a slow massage of her scalp. Working the shampoo thoroughly into her hair, his strong fingers rubbed the tension out of her.

Maddy moaned, a guttural sound of pleasure almost lost in the rushing of the shower. Kyle dropped a kiss on the point of her shoulder.

“Like that?”

“Oh, yeah. Best part of getting a haircut is getting your hair washed.”

“Ah. Time to rinse.”

A moment later, his big hands, softened with soapy lather, cupped her shoulders. She pushed her hair out of her face and he turned her to face him.

His face was quiet, almost somber. His hands smoothed around her neck, his long fingers lathering her nape while his thumbs ran along her throat to her jaw. His thumbs met and overlapped, creating a light pressure across her neck that made her feel incredibly fragile. She knew he'd used those hands to kill, just as she knew he'd never use them to harm her.

The slightly oval pupils of his eyes expanded, the pale irises eclipsed to little more than their blue rim. She hadn't noticed the shape of his pupils before.

Maddy parted her lips, anticipating his kiss.

Unhurried, he lowered his head to press his lips to hers. He increased the pressure in tiny increments, taking a long time to settle fully onto her lips.

She sank into the kiss, letting the soft, drugging heaviness take her. The water beat around them, a thrumming backdrop to the slow, syrupy throb of her pulse. God, the man could kiss. Nothing had ever tasted so good, felt so right.

He drew slowly back from her and picked up the soap again.

Gently, as if she were infinitely precious, Kyle began to wash her. His hands slid carefully over her shoulders, down her arms, between her fingers. He turned her hands up and massaged them with soap-slick fingers. He reached around her, his palms slipping over the contours of her back.

The water slid over her, tracking through the suds and over her sensitized flesh, a subtle caress that wove itself into the dreamy haze of desire rising within her. This desire lacked the urgency of earlier, but it touched more deeply.

He circled her breasts with smooth, light touches that avoided her aching nipples. His fingers traced the line under her breasts, teased the lower curve. Even the water

cooperated, the rivulets splitting to run around her nipples instead of over them.

Maddy shuddered, her breath catching in her throat.

His hands moved down further, across the gentle slope of her abdomen, leaving her nipples tight and wanting.

She whimpered, a tiny begging sound. How could he leave her hanging like that?

“Patience, Madeline,” he admonished.

Reaching behind her again, he lathered the curves of her bottom, paying special attention to the sensitive nerves over her tailbone. He soaped over her hips, his thumbs skimming the edges of her pubic thatch. “Spread your legs for me.”

After a slight hesitation, she moved her feet apart. He knelt before her, his head now even with her pubis. Looking down, she could see his pale hair plastered to his skull, the broad expanse of his shoulders, the water bouncing off the taut skin and making crazy patterns. His cock jutted from his body, a meaty curve of desire. Just seeing his intense arousal caused her to shiver in reaction. She couldn’t remember any man being so eager after having had her. She hadn’t even touched him.

In contrast to the obvious urgency of his arousal, his hands were slow and easy. The very leisureliness of his hands soaping her thighs and calves tensed her muscles in anticipation.

She wanted to lick the water off his skin, savor his fertile earth flavor mixed with the water. God, she was losing her mind.

Abruptly, he stood. The sudden movement put her slightly off balance and Kyle held her shoulders to steady her. Her nose nearly brushed his collarbone and his arousal nudged the curve of her belly above her navel. Insane or not, she was going to taste him.

Maddy parted her lips, leaning in that last fraction of an inch to lay her mouth along the smooth line of his neck. He stilled, hands still lightly gripping her shoulders. Carefully, she sipped the water from his skin. He tasted like life—fertile and rich and a little earthy. Her appreciative hum vibrated against him and he shuddered.

Power welled up—he responded so easily. Her slightest touch seemed to resonate through him. Experimentally, she brushed her nipples against him. The wet friction sent tingles through her and raised goose bumps on her arms.

Kyle’s strangled moan gave her all the encouragement she needed. Shrugging off his loose grip, she leaned away from him slightly, lifting her mouth from the addictive taste of him. Raising one hand, she explored the flat planes of his chest, tracing the scars curling around from his back.

She hadn’t noticed before, but his chest was deeper, more rounded than a human’s. The odd shape made the layered muscles of his chest stand out more, like he was always mid-breath.

Water caught on his collarbone and ran in a rivulet down his chest, splitting into smaller streams. She followed the path with a fingertip, stepping back from him to chase the droplets down, down, over his ridged belly to where it caught in the indentation of his navel.

“You play with fire, Madeline.”

She grinned. “Water, Kyle. I know you’re not from here, but even you should know the difference.”

He huffed out a surprised laugh. “You know what I mean.”

Maddy drew her hand back. Kyle’s shoulders relaxed. Oh, foolish male.

With a wicked little smile, she leaned forward and licked up the center line of his chest. God, he tasted good.

He shuddered under her mouth, his hands coming up to push her away. She ran her tongue along the lower line of one pectoral, lifting her hands to rest them on the crests of his hip bones. Oh, those hip bones. They were definitely on her list.

“Madeline.” His chest rumbled under her mouth, his voice deepened with arousal.

Ignoring his warning, she rubbed her thumbs along the sensitive skin just inside his hipbone. She loved the contrast between the softness of the skin and the hardness of the bone beneath. She also loved the way he twitched against her belly when she slid her thumbs along that spot. She did it again.

“Madeline, stop.”

“No.” She used the point of her tongue to tease his nipple.

“Yes.” He grasped her elbows and put her firmly away from him, directly under the shower spray.

Though the water drowned her small squeak, it didn't dampen her glare. Dammit, she'd had plans for those hipbones. Her eyes narrowed.

She pushed her wet hair back from her face and reached forward, cupping her hand and using it to grasp his testicles.

He froze.

Had his attention now, didn't she?

Sliding to her knees, she looked up his body, meeting his oddly pale gaze. “You'll figure out that I take challenges very seriously.”

His throat worked briefly and his nostrils flared. He seemed torn between the desire to take control and wanting to see what she would do. Smiling, she took advantage of his hesitation and licked inside the ridge of his hipbone. His cock jerked in reaction, brushing her cheek.

Maddy changed her grip slightly, stroking the drawn skin under her fingertips. Kyle released a long breath and shifted his stance, allowing her a bit more room.

She nibbled her way down his hip before licking up again. The combination of water and male, the slight unevenness of bone under her tongue, the heat and vitality of his flesh, went straight to her head. Sighing against his skin, she released his sac and moved her hand to his thigh. The heavy muscles bunched and flexed under her touch.

They had given her so much in their previous encounters, she wanted to give something back to him. She wanted to give him this.

The skin where leg and body met was soft, smooth. She found the lack of hair odd, like he'd waxed every inch of his body. Pausing to explore the soft spot where his leg met his body, Maddy smiled at his inarticulate sound of encouragement.

She rested her cheek against his thigh, content for the moment to simply explore his textures. She drew small circles around the base of his cock, smiling at the way it bobbed, seeking more direct contact. Unhurried, she continued to circle him, fascinated by the subtle differences between Kyle and human males.

The vein that wrapped around his length was human enough, but the slight ridges, almost imperceptible, like dunes frozen beneath the skin, were definitely not. She'd compared him to her favorite sex toy before she'd met him, and it was more accurate than she'd guessed.

Curious, she wrapped her hand around him, holding him steady. Using her other

hand, she cupped the head of his cock. His grunt rewarded her for her initiative. With the water smoothing her way, she slid her grip down his shaft. The ridges created interesting texture, though nothing very obvious.

She glanced up to find him watching her. His pale, intense gaze gave her courage. Yes, he was alien—in every sense of that word—but he had used that difference only for her pleasure. Strength, intelligence, determination all used for her benefit, to keep her safe.

Maddy smiled. Different he might be, but she had a feeling the same tricks worked.

Keeping her eyes on his face, she shifted position, her mouth hovering over the tip of him. His gaze dropped to her mouth. Color flagged his cheekbones and that too-deep chest heaved an anticipatory breath.

Teasing him, she licked her lips. He made a strangled sound.

Holding him steady with one hand, she lowered her head, opening her lips but not touching him.

His hips jerked, bumping him against her mouth.

Slowly, she slid her lips over the smooth head, stopping when she had it entirely in her mouth. When he tried to push forward, she held his hips back. He wasn't going to rush her.

Sucking lightly, Maddy savored the feel of him in her mouth. Huh. Smoother, harder than human, with an odd groove on the underside. She ran her tongue along that groove and Kyle groaned, hips twitching. She did it again. A heavy shudder ran through him. Oh, what a lovely find.

She closed her eyes, losing herself in the moment. The water beat warm on her back, the rivulets running across her skin and making her shiver. The pulse in Kyle's cock beat against her tongue as she swallowed more of him. It was difficult, and she only managed a bit more than half before she gave up trying to get more into her mouth. When she pulled back, tightening the suction, her eyes flew wide. Those little ridges caught along the insides of her cheeks, resisting the motion. The sensation was surprisingly erotic, so she sank down again. Over and over, up and down, she let her mouth ride him and her tongue run along the underside groove while her hands gripped and stroked the part of him not in her mouth.

Kyle's breathing came in short, choppy pants. One hand wound into her wet hair, pulling it back from her face.

"Gods. Madeline, Madeline, stop."

She tightened her hands on him, sucked harder. No way was she stopping. He tasted too good, felt too amazing. The groove under her tongue pulsed, swelled. Oooh.

"Madeline," he warned, fingers tightening in her hair. He tugged slightly, and she knew in that moment he could pull her off him, and she might complain, but she also knew she wouldn't complain too much. Instead, he only hinted. Instead, he gave her his trust.

Tears burned behind her eyes. She hadn't earned that trust. She had fought him on nearly everything. But he seemed willing now to let her set the pace, and that meant everything to her. Everything.

A trickle of liquid coated her tongue, pulling her back into the moment. It wasn't thick like semen, more the consistency of water. Sweet, like cream soda. Shock stilled her head.

Past stopping, Kyle took up the movement himself, thrusting forward. Only her hands on his cock saved her from gagging when he threw his head back and roared—there was no other word for it.

A grassy, metallic flavor replaced the sweetness. His cock pulsed in time with his release, the tiny ridges swelling with each spasm. She felt each pulse of his release, felt the weaker echo pulse between her thighs.

He slumped back against the shower wall, pulling free of her hands and mouth.

Long moments passed. Maddy's body throbbed with unfulfilled arousal. Her tongue tingled, but the mingled sweet and earthy flavors of Kyle's body began to ebb.

The water began to cool, and Maddy forced herself up off the floor. Kyle stirred, reaching over to turn off the taps.

In the sudden quiet, Maddy became acutely aware of her nakedness, of the arousal still pulsing through her, of the sharp points of her nipples and the delicate tracks of water over her skin. The silence seemed somehow to magnify everything.

Kyle reached out, almost tentatively, and cupped the side of her head. He brought his other hand up, settling lightly on the curve of her hip. His forehead dropped to rest against hers.

"Thank you, Madeline. Thank you."

Her brows drew together in confusion. "Um, you're welcome."

"Ahem."

The unexpected intrusion startled her, and she tried to pull back from Kyle. He tightened his fingers against her, holding her in place.

They turned their faces to see Julian standing in the middle of the bathroom, towels in hand.

Julian smiled. "My turn to bring the towels."

For some reason, that made everything right. The awkwardness melted away and Maddy extended an arm to Julian. Somehow, somewhere along the way, she'd gotten used to thinking of them as a unit. Kyle and Julian, Julian and Kyle. Everything was all right if the two of them were together. They'd make everything all right.

* * * *

The morning light leaked in around the curtains, giving the room a soft glow. It seemed fitting, since she felt incandescent. Part of it was the loose, relaxed feel of a well-sated body, the reminder twinges between her thighs of the pleasure of the night before. But the biggest part was waking between them. Waking surrounded by heat and strength.

Julian bumped her hip, a friendly nudge. "Wanna play?"

Turning her head, she smiled. "What are we playing?"

He leered playfully. "Hide the sausage?"

The laughter bubbled up, spilled out. She was helpless to control it, and wasn't sure she wanted to anyway. She felt lighter this morning, more at ease with them. At some point, she'd settled herself into seeing where this went, and happiness followed her decision.

Kyle moved on her other side, propping himself up on an elbow. "What's so funny?"

Maddy tried to explain, but couldn't gasp the words past her laughter. Kyle finally shook his head and rolled out of bed.

He stood over them for a moment. "I'm going to make breakfast. After that, I figure

we can hike, maybe do some fishing.”

Maddy hiccupped, fighting down the giggles. “Fishing? I’ve never fished.”

Kyle’s slow smile distracted her from her amusement.

“I guess you’ll have to learn.”

She watched him walk out, his loose stride at odds with the stiffness of packed wings along his back. She shook her head.

Julian rested one warm hand on her belly and dropped a light kiss on the point of her shoulder.

“So? Interested?”

“Oh, I think I could be convinced,” she drawled.

Chapter Twelve

Maddy squinted against the glare off the pavement. The window tint wasn't dark enough to cut the bright summer sun. Funny how she'd grown used to the tree-shaded Smoky Mountains so quickly.

Odd, too, after the quiet and freedom of the last two weeks, was the way they were crammed into the SUV. The three of them had done nothing more strenuous than a few hikes and a lot of sweaty, mind-bending sex. Sex in the bedrooms, in the kitchen, in the living room, in the woods. She'd never before realized that sex could work so many different muscles.

The second day at the cabin, she'd been too sore to take either of them. Kyle had bent Julian over the arm of the sofa and had ridden him while Julian used his mouth to bring her over and over. Maddy squirmed at the memory.

Kyle quirked an eyebrow at her, a knowing smile lurking at the edges of his mouth. Julian's hand on her knee burned her skin through her linen suit. God. They'd turned her into a sex maniac.

The two rented SUVs pulled into the parking garage and she fumbled in her purse for her sunglasses. Moments later, they parked at an angle across several spots.

"I hate people like you," Maddy told Gav after he turned off the ignition. "Can't you just park in one spot?"

Gav smiled easily. "Not when you're thinking security. This provides more possible cover."

Right. The whole reason for the plethora of Tlin on this little jaunt.

They formed a phalanx around her as they exited the garage. Kyle walked ahead of her, Julian behind her. They didn't even try to be discreet and this was Richmond, after all, not Hollywood, so naturally people looked.

The walk from the garage to the office tower housing the nasty nerds' lawyers' office took longer than she expected. The Tlin refused to give any ground to the crowds moving on the sidewalk. It was embarrassing.

Gav, acting as point man, opened the door to the building. He nodded to the first of her guard. Single file, they spilled into the lobby and began reforming the phalanx. Kyle stepped in ahead of her.

Something slammed into her, knocking her forward. She stumbled into Kyle. The plate glass window adjacent to the door shattered. A heavy weight behind her pushed her into the building and down to the floor. Her knees cracked on the hard tile and she fell to her belly, pain radiating up her thighs. Something large landed on her back, smashing her against the cold floor. Slowly, and she turned her head enough to see Kyle lying on the floor next to her. Blood ran over his face, bright red against the pale skin.

A high, panicked scream split the air, cutting across the harsh sound of Cam's orders and the rain of glass into the lobby. Only when hands physically turned her head from Kyle did she realize that she was the one screaming. One of the men grabbed Kyle under the shoulders and dragged his limp form further into the lobby. Another man mopped up the small pool of blood. Why was he doing that?

The low, shaking voice in her ear began to make sense. Julian muttered reassurances,

but the tone was much less certain than the words. Trembling under him, she noticed the hot wetness running over her own face.

Oh, God. She'd only just found him. She'd only just given them a chance.

Maddy choked on a sob.

"Hold it together," Julian said hoarsely. "He's still alive."

The breath froze in her lungs. "He's alive?"

"Yes. Hurt, knocked out, but alive. Now, we need to get you out of here so we can get Kyle some help. You know he can't go to a human hospital. Can you move?"

He lifted from her a tiny bit, enough to allow her to move. Only then did she realize that Julian was the something heavy that had hit her—he'd knocked her out of harm's way.

The wail of sirens grew louder, the screams and panic of the people outside began to register.

Maddy put her hands out to push up, but her right arm wouldn't hold. She collapsed, surprised. Hot knives of pain stabbed through her shoulder and she whimpered.

"Maddy?"

"My arm. Something's wrong with my arm."

"Gav!"

Julian's sudden shout rang in her head. She winced, but it was just another layer of pain to add to the growing horror.

Gav's wingtip-clad feet appeared in front of her. "What's the problem?"

"She's hurt. I can't tell how badly."

Gav's sharp intake of breath seemed loud. "All right. We need to get Kyle out of here. Val and Casey will stay with you. You go with her to the hospital. Hunter will take care of Kyle. Cam and Tracker are after the shooter. I need to deal with the cops. Can you hold it together?"

"Yeah."

Julian eased to sitting beside her. He pulled her into his lap, cradling her against him and shielding her from the street with his body. She closed her eyes, leaning on him. It wasn't fair—Julian's tie to Kyle was stronger than hers—but she needed to lean on him.

Feet skidded across the tile.

"Oh, shit! Get the paramedics in here, we have wounded!"

In more ways than one.

* * * *

The hospital was cold and smelled of cheap disinfectant. At least she had her own room. Money did have its advantages.

Kevin Dawes sat at her bedside. Deep grooves around his lips and a line between his brows marred his otherwise smooth countenance.

"We've rescheduled the deposition. If you don't feel up to it, let me know and we'll reschedule it again."

Maddy nodded, wincing a bit when the motion pulled her shoulder muscle. She'd been shot through the shoulder. A clean wound, according to the surgeon. She should make a full recovery with a bit of therapy. Physically, anyway.

"Any idea who did this?" She probably had a better idea than Dawes did at this point, but she wasn't about to tell him that.

He pressed his lips together. “We’re working on some leads. We’d like to put you in protective custody.”

“No.”

“Ms. Crane—”

“No. Agent Dawes, I appreciate that you want to keep me safe. I really do. But you can’t do for me what Talon can. Why waste your resources?”

He frowned harder. “They didn’t protect you today.”

She took a deep breath. He was not winning points with her.

“Since you didn’t think there was a threat at all, I’d argue that they did their job well. If they hadn’t been there, I’d be dead. The detail prevented a clean shot and they covered me immediately.”

A curt nod acknowledged her point.

She sighed. “This isn’t a pissing contest, Agent Dawes. I want you to find whoever did this. If I can help you do that, I will. You already know who’s angry at me and why. Any of those people would have known about today’s deposition, it wasn’t a secret.”

“We’ll see what we can find out. In the meantime, I’d rather you stay out of sight.”

“I’m in the hospital. Not going anywhere until tomorrow.” She barely resisted rolling her eyes.

“We’ll be in touch, then. If you change your mind, call me.”

“I won’t change my mind.”

With a last hard look, he opened the door.

Julian brushed past the agent with only a brief glance. The door swung shut. He scooted the single chair to her bedside between the bed and window. Reaching forward, he lowered the bedrail.

Maddy watched him closely. He looked as fragile as she felt. She reached her left hand toward him. Julian squeezed her hand, his head bent.

“Kyle?” She was afraid to ask, but she needed to know.

He met her gaze. Julian’s haunted eyes sent a chill right through her.

“He’s holding his own. The actual bullet wounds aren’t the real problem. One was from the bullet that went through you.” He flinched when he said it, his voice shaking. He took a deep breath, then laughed. It sounded acid, bitter. “That one barely left a scratch. At least the wings are good for something.”

Now she squeezed his hand.

“The other bullet grazed his head. A lot of bleeding, but nothing dire. The real problem is that he really cracked his head when he hit the floor. Combined with the blood loss and trauma, it’s serious. He has a concussion, but beyond that they aren’t sure how long he’ll need to recover.”

“Has he regained consciousness?”

“Briefly. They have him on meds to keep him sedated, which is exactly what they wouldn’t do in a human hospital, but is what he needs. At least, that’s what the medics tell me.”

They sat silently for a moment, holding hands.

Maddy didn’t know what to say. It seemed unreal to her. Kyle radiated vitality and strength. She couldn’t imagine him fighting for his life. And yet she had seen his blood spreading across that cold floor.

“Today nearly killed me.” Julian’s voice cracked.

Maddy understood. Julian and Kyle had been together so long, through so much turmoil. If Kyle's injury struck her like a blow to the gut, what must it be like for Julian? In this, at least, they could prop each other up. She squeezed his hand again. "I'm sure he'll pull through. He's tough."

He lifted his eyes to hers again. Something dark and dangerous swirled behind the golden brown of his irises. "You think this is about Kyle?"

Confused, her brows drew together. "Yes."

He pulled his hand from hers and pushed out of the chair. Swiping a hand through his hair, he turned to face the window.

Thoroughly lost, Maddy shook her head. "Julian? What's wrong?"

His harsh laugh cut like shards of glass. "Gods, Maddy. Do you think so little of me?"

"What? No, Julian, I—"

"You were shot today, Maddy," he bit out, whipping around to glare at her. "You. And you think I am only concerned for Kyle? Do you think I don't care about you? I know Kyle will be fine. He's had worse injuries. Hell, we both have. But you're human. You don't have the same advantage we do. You could have been killed."

Maddy gaped. She was completely unprepared for the heat of his anger. He was right, it hadn't occurred to her that he would be upset about her being shot. Looking into his face now, she knew she'd missed something. He wasn't just willing to accept her because of their bond. He actively wanted her—not the sex, not the extension of the bond with Kyle, but her. How had she missed this?

"I—" she stuttered to a halt. She what? What did she want to say?

Julian shook his head at her. "You sell yourself short. You're smart, you're stubborn, you give everything. Your sense of honor is a thing of righteous beauty. How could we not love you? How could I not love you?"

He gave her another of those steady looks, the kind that made her feel like a grade schooler getting a lecture from a teacher. She would have hunched her shoulders if the bandages allowed it.

"I'll be back later. I need to take a walk."

"Julian, I'm sorry," she said to his back. It was too little, but he acknowledged her with a brief nod. The door closed quietly behind him.

She collapsed against the pillows, listening to the heart monitor race. He'd punched a hole right through her, and it hurt worse than the bullet wound. He'd torn away all the protective layers and exposed the inner workings of her heart and soul. And she hadn't even realized he had the power to do it.

He was right. Totally right. She didn't understand how two men—especially two such different and wonderful men—could be serious about a relationship with her. Not just a relationship but a lifetime. With both of them. What the hell was wrong with her? She had feelings for both of them. More than just feelings.

She liked Julian, enjoyed his easy humor and charm. The first soft edges of love already colored her view of him: a softer, steadier sort of love than she felt for Kyle. She needed Kyle with a soul-deep hunger she couldn't have imagined even yesterday, but Julian held her steady. With crystal clarity, Maddy suddenly saw the path before her. She could mate them, and she believed they could make it work.

The last of her barriers fell.

For the first time since this whole fiasco had begun, she felt grounded. Giving herself permission to love two men, to simply believe in them and in herself, freed her. Understanding that simple truth assured her she made the right choice. Maddy smiled to herself. Drifting a bit, she allowed herself to imagine life with Julian and Kyle.

A sharp rap on the door jerked her out of her reverie. Blinking she turned her head. Cam stood in the doorway. "Can I come in?"

Frowning, unsure in the wake of such momentous personal revelations, she nodded.

"We caught the shooter. Turned him over to the cops. He's rolling on the broker, but he doesn't have much information. The broker is offshore, so I don't think that will be any help to the cops."

"Agent Dawes was in here earlier. They want me in protective custody."

Cam's eyes narrowed. "What did you say?"

A smile ghosted over her lips. "I told him no. He didn't like it."

Cam inclined his head. "Thank you for that."

"For what? You saw the threat. Without you, I'd have been a sitting duck. You did a better job than Dawes. And I like being alive. I'm picky like that."

His lips twitched. He didn't say anything, and after a moment, the silence became awkward.

He shoved his hands into his slacks pockets in a gesture Maddy might have labeled nervous. She cocked her head, studying him. Cam's nerves made her anxious.

"What is it?" Her demand sounded harsh to her own ears. Had something happened to Kyle?

Cam sighed, removing his hands from his pockets. "Nothing. Clearly I need to work on casual. I wasn't trying to scare you."

Unaccountably amused, Maddy lifted a brow.

He grinned wryly. "Fine, I'll just get right to it. We need an accountant. No, we have an accountant, but I don't trust him fully. What we need is a Chief Financial Officer. Gavin's got that job now, but he's miserable at it, so he leaves it to the accountant."

For a heartbeat, she wasn't sure she'd heard him correctly. "Cam, you can't just offer me the CFO job. For all you know, I could be a terrible accountant and a worse financial manager."

Cam smiled, shaking his head. "You aren't. You're a fine accountant and an excellent financial manager. We checked you out before taking the job, remember?"

Oh. Right. Well, that took some of the wind out of her sails. Still... "I haven't agreed to stay."

Cam's knowing smile scraped her nerves. Damned arrogant males.

"Fine," he allowed. She knew he was humoring her, the jerk. "Think about it and let me know."

"What about the young ones?"

He shook his head at her. "Some of the young ones are interested in other pursuits, but there's a limit to what training they can get. Since they're unmodified, they can't pack their wings in the same way we can. If they can't pack their wings, life becomes challenging. We can home school for a lot of things, and then there's online classes for a lot more. Beyond that, though, we can't really do much."

Maddy considered for a moment. No medical training, no advanced professional training, limited options for advanced technical training. That really did put the Tlin at a

major disadvantage. On the other hand, the security business evidently made money hand over fist, and all the older, modified Tlin contributed in some way in that area. It was obvious, though, that they really did need help.

“I think you should be hunting for your mates. The more resources we have available, the more likely we can keep the Tlin from ending up guinea pigs in some government lab.”

Cam’s lips quirked. Maddy realized then that she’d included herself in their fight.

We. Such a telling little pronoun.

With a jaunty salute, Cam turned on his heel. Maddy watched him walk out, wondering how he had so easily read her. She obviously needed to work on her poker face.

Still smiling, she allowed herself to drift off.

* * * *

The quiet snick of the door closing dragged her awake. What was the deal with hospitals? Were the nurses trained to wait until you were asleep to come in and poke at you?

Maddy’s eyes fluttered open. The gray light in the room told her it was dark outside. She turned her head toward the door. A darker shadow hovered near the door. Odd. The nurses usually turned on the light willy-nilly, without a care for whether she was sleeping. The shadow moved slowly toward her, resolving into a willowy female shape in scrubs. Maddy relaxed. A nurse, then. The most considerate nurse in the hospital, evidently.

Maddy let her lids drop. A strange scraping sound had her forcing them open again.

The faint light seeping between the blinds glinted off the needle of the syringe in the nurse’s hand as she approached the IV stand.

Wait. That was wrong.

A sudden chill spread through her and she instinctively tensed. Every other time the nurses had put something in the IV, they’d used syringes without needles and hooked them to the little docking station thingies on the IV line. No needles. And the chair—the chair had been moved in front of the door. That must have been the scraping sound she’d heard.

“What are you doing?” Her voice was scratchy from sleep.

Chapter Thirteen

The woman whirled in the tiny space between bed and IV stand. The slatted light fell across her face—not a nurse. Cheryl—what the hell was her last name?—from payroll. Maddy shook her head. This made no sense.

“Bitch,” Cheryl hissed. The whites of her eyes glowed in the dim light. Her face twisted into a snarl. She shifted her grip and raised the syringe over her head.

Maddy had a split second. She rolled off the far side of the bed, grateful Julian had forgotten to raise the rail. Pain exploded, radiating up her arm. She’d ripped out the IV. Blood arced from the wound, splattering across Cheryl and spraying across the ceiling. It looked black in the gray light.

More pain slammed into her. Her already bruised knees cracked into the floor, her right arm gave out under her, the wounded shoulder unable to support her weight. Forcing herself to ignore the pain, she scrambled up, using the chair for leverage. Crazy chick climbed onto the bed, starting across it with the syringe still gripped in her fist.

Fight or flight.

Time slowed, stretched out. Jesus, the woman was insane. Connors had God only knows how many pieces of ass, and this one decided to kill her for ratting out the firm? It showed clearly on Cheryl’s face. Whatever her damage, she was not going to be talked down. Maddy lunged awkwardly around the end of the bed. She glanced at the door with its chair blockade and knew she’d never make it outside. A heavy thump on the door gave her hope. The cavalry had arrived.

Cheryl reached out to grab her, but she was off balance and only managed to rake her nails across Maddy’s arm. Momentum carried Cheryl forward off the edge of the bed.

She couldn’t count on the cavalry. They’d never get in here in time. The sting of the scratches barely registered against the searing burn from the bullet wound and the IV site. It was distant, though, like a memory of pain.

Cheryl sprang to her feet and started around the bed.

“You’re dead, bitch! I’ll do it myself this time.”

Rage welled up, filling her. This crazy freak hired the hit. She was responsible for spilling Kyle’s blood. Because of this woman, she might lose her one real shot at happily ever after, however screwed up it was. Oh, hell, no.

Maddy grabbed the IV pole. Awkwardly hefting it with her left hand, she brought her injured arm around to grip the pole like a baseball bat.

Cheryl’s eyes widened a fraction.

Maddy swung, putting everything she had into it. She had one shot. It would be God count.

The IV pole smashed into the side of Cheryl’s head with a sickening crunch. The hit sang up Maddy’s arms, throbbed through her shoulder, the force making her teeth ache. She couldn’t maintain her grip and the pole clattered to the floor.

Cheryl skidded sideways with the blow before collapsing. Shaking her head, she pushed up on her hands. Maddy hadn’t had enough juice to knock her out, but she was clearly dazed.

The door crashed open. The sudden light from the overheads hurt Maddy’s eyes.

Julian took in the scene in an instant. He jumped on Cheryl, flipping her onto her belly and putting his knee in her back.

Cheryl squirmed ineffectually under him, cursing. Blood seeped from the side of her head, matting her hair.

Good. After watching Kyle bleed on the floor of that lobby, Maddy wasn't inclined toward sympathy. Not to mention the whole trying to kill her thing.

Julian looked over at her. "Maddy, honey, are you okay?"

Suddenly exhausted, Maddy slid to the floor. "Oh, sure," she said weakly.

A nurse—a real one—stopped in the doorway. "What is going on in here?"

Talk about a day late and a dollar short.

* * * *

Maddy stood at Kyle's bedside. His face was pale, drawn, and his head had been shaved to allow for the bandages on one side. His wings were unpacked, folded under him. According to the Tlin medic, keeping them packed took energy away from healing.

Though he hadn't regained consciousness again, they told her that was normal. Tlin tended to sleep through healing. A blessing on the one hand, allowing more energy to be directed to healing and allowing them to sleep through the pain, but a curse on the other, since it left them vulnerable at their weakest moment.

They were so confident he'd make a full recovery that they'd moved him from the infirmary to the private quarters he and Julian shared in the underground tunnels.

Still, it didn't matter how many times they told her he would be okay, she needed him to open his eyes and tell her himself. Only then would she really believe it. Then again, if the medic had the right of it, Kyle would wake when he was completely healed, so the reassurance would be moot. She still wanted it.

She could hear Julian banging around in the tiny kitchenette. They'd arrived only moments before Kyle had been moved out of the infirmary, and Maddy's shoulder still ached a bit from the changes in pressure on the flight and the bumpy ride from the airport. She didn't care, she was happy to be out of the hospital.

The local police had taken Cheryl into custody. During a screaming hissy fit while Julian held her for the cops, Cheryl revealed that she believed Connors intended to marry her. Connors evidently dropped Cheryl like a hot potato after the federal agents showed up, and Cheryl blamed Maddy. If Maddy hadn't blown the whistle, in Cheryl's mind, Connors would have married her and she would have lived happily ever after. Assuming, of course, she hadn't gone psycho because of something else.

Huffing out a breath and dismissing Psycho Cheryl from her mind, she turned her attention back to Kyle. Brushing a hand along Kyle's arm, Maddy took comfort in the heat radiating from him.

She lifted his hand to her mouth, pressing a light kiss along his scarred knuckles.

His hand twitched under her lips. She nearly dropped it.

"Julian." She pitched her voice a little louder than normal, but tried to keep the excitement out of it. That little twitch might not be anything. If she kept telling herself that, maybe she wouldn't be disappointed if it wasn't anything.

She continued to hold Kyle's hand, but he didn't move again. She felt Julian's presence like a balm.

"What is it?"

“He moved.”

Julian stood next to her, the heat of his body seeping through the thin material of her shirt, the feathers of his wing tickling along her arm. “He moved? What did he do?”

Maddy shrugged, affecting ease. “Moved his hand.”

Julian laid a hand on her shoulder. The weight of it anchored her, settled the nervous racing of her pulse. “What were you doing?”

“Holding his hand.” She cleared her throat. “I kissed his hand.”

“Hmmm. Do it again.”

She lifted Kyle’s hand and repeated the gentle kiss. His hand twitched again.

“His eyes flickered, too,” Julian said quietly.

Maddy looked up at Julian, placing Kyle’s hand back on the bed. “Does that mean he’s coming out of it?”

Julian’s slow smile answered before he did. “Yes, it does.”

She reached up, placing her hand over Julian’s on her shoulder. “Julian.”

“Yes, Maddy?”

“Before he wakes, I want you to know that I, well, I…” She swallowed. Why was this so difficult? “I love you, too.” The words came in a rush, pushed out on a forceful exhalation.

Julian’s eyes widened, the gold darkening to almost copper. With a beatific smile, he swooped down to press his lips to hers. Her eyes drifted closed, hands falling to her lap. The kiss sank into her, seeping into her bones. Kyle seared himself into her heart, but Julian had slowly melded himself to her soul. The combination of the two of them warmed her from the inside out.

He swept her into his arms, lifting her from the floor. The protest died on her lips when he deposited her on a seat just outside the bedroom. She’d barely caught her breath before he dropped to his knees in front of her. His mouth dipped to claim hers and his hum of satisfaction vibrated against her lips and tongue, calling an answering twinge from her sex.

He unfastened the snap on her jeans, playing his fingers along the stiff waistband, dipping into her navel under her loose shirt. The zipper hissed as he pulled the tab down. Before she could register his movement, he lifted her hips and stripped her out of her jeans and panties, leaving her in nothing but her shirt.

“Thank you, honey. Thank you for giving us a chance,” he whispered against her swollen lips.

“Believe me, Julian, it’s my pleasure. I can’t imagine life without you now.”

“Oh, honey. We’ll make it our mission to ensure you never can imagine life without us.”

He pushed the shirt up under her arms, baring her breasts and part of her bandaged shoulder. The purpose stamped on his features sent a frisson of desire through her.

She smiled, watched him lift his hands to cuddle soft curves.

“I love your breasts. So pretty and perfect.” He leaned forward to lick one nipple and she shuddered.

Heat pooled between her thighs. Her knees hugged against his ribs, relishing the taut strength revealed in the layered muscle. Leaning forward, she settled her breasts more heavily in his hands.

Julian rewarded her by opening his lips, drawing the hard bud of her nipple into his

mouth.

Warm suction drew the heat out in pulsing streams, sensitizing her skin and speeding her breathing. His mouth worked magic and Maddy's breath caught in her throat.

One hand drifted down her torso, tracing the dip and curve of her waist, the jut of her hipbone. He tapped his fingertips in the groove where thigh met hip, causing her pulse to waver erratically.

Julian released her nipple, nuzzling the plump mound of her breast. His heated tongue laved her aching flesh, slid away. He danced over her skin toward her breastbone, then down along the midline of her body. Pausing at her navel, he dipped in for a quick swirl.

Her pussy clenched. She wanted so much more than that tiny penetration. She pressed her hands into his shoulders, urging him down, silently asking for what she needed.

Humid heat tickled the lower curve of her belly when he chuckled at her insistence.

Clearly in the mood to drive her insane, he pressed her thighs wider, settling his shoulders between them.

Maddy looked down the line of her body, watching him massage her soft labia, a sexual touch that soothed the flames inside her. Her shirt fell down to cloak her, the soft material rubbing her sensitized nipples.

Slowly, so slowly, he used the edges of his hands to part her, exposing her vulnerable inner flesh.

"Beautiful," he breathed. Again, the damp warmth of his breath tickled over her, this time across her clit, stirring the coals of her arousal.

Angling his hands, he slid his thumbs along the opening to her body, tracing her entrance.

Her head fell back under the onslaught of pleasure. Who knew the simple drag of his calloused thumbs over the nerve-rich flesh of her entry could be so meltingly delicious?

"Like that, honey?"

"Ye-es."

"Good." His satisfaction at her pleasure rang in his voice.

"Smug bastard," she moaned, eyes drifting shut.

He chuckled again. "I've waited a long time to please my mate. I like doing a good job."

"God. You do. Are. Whatever."

His hands shifted a bit, and he gently pinched her clit between the first fingers of each hand. She gasped and arched her spine off the chair, pleasure stabbing deep as he rolled the throbbing organ in his fingers. Her hands fluttered up, rested on the tense, thick muscles of his shoulders.

"You started without me."

Chapter Fourteen

Kyle's voice cut through the room, freezing them both in place. Maddy's eyes popped open and locked with Kyle's pale gaze over the tops of Julian's wings.

Julian's hands dropped away and he twisted to look at Kyle.

"Kyle?" Her voice trembled.

Kyle leaned heavily on the doorjamb.

"I'm fine." The corner of his mouth kicked up. "Tired. How are you doing?" He nodded to the bulk of the bandage visible at her shoulder and the bandages along her right arm from where the IV pulled out.

"Sore. The meds help, but it hurts like hell. Better than the alternative." She blinked back tears of relief. He was okay. Really okay. She leaned heavily into Julian, her hands gripping his shoulders.

Kyle's face lost all traces of amusement. "Yeah. We need to catch the client, or they'll keep coming."

Maddy glanced down at Julian.

"We did. Or, rather, Maddy did most of the work. The crazy girlfriend of one of the partners came after her in the hospital. By the time I got in there, Maddy'd already brained her with an IV pole."

Maddy scoffed. "You held psychobitch for the police. I certainly couldn't have."

Julian shrugged. "Doesn't matter now. What's important is that she's in custody."

Kyle glanced back and forth between them, his expression unreadable. "You seem easier."

Maddy ducked her head, somehow uncomfortable with his statement. So much had happened between her and Julian while Kyle was unconscious. It seemed strange to have to catch him up.

Julian's hand wrapped around her calf, squeezing gently. That simple touch grounded her. She smiled her appreciation.

Kyle grunted, pulling her attention back to him. His eyes glazed over.

For a terrifying moment, she wondered if Kyle wasn't truly healed. She threw a panicked glance at Julian, but he looked more thoughtful than worried. Again, he helped her center herself with no more than being. Her personal touchstone.

After a moment, Kyle shook his head and his gaze focused on them. "Ahh. It's good, then, Julian?"

"Very good."

Confused, she glanced from one man to the other.

Julian smiled, pushing himself to his feet. His wings briefly obscured her view of the other man. "Kyle just proved your theory. The reason we don't see each other's pasts any more is because we don't need to. He needed to now, so he did."

Oh. That made sense. Hooray for the psychic thing. Sort of.

Julian helped her out of the chair. The shirt fell around her hips, barely covering the essentials.

What did she say to him, where did she start? Julian's hand tightened on hers, and she squeezed back.

“Cam came to see me in the hospital.”

“Sure, he told me he dropped in.” Julian’s lips twitched. “He said the feds wanted to put you in protective custody and you told them to stuff it.”

Maddy shook her head. “I did not tell them to stuff it. I merely declined the offer.”

Their knowing looks irritated her. Exasperated, she huffed out a sigh. “Do you want me to tell you this or not?”

Kyle tilted his head and lifted his chin, an arrogant gesture of encouragement. She fought the immediate urge to smile. When did Kyle’s arrogance become endearing? She shook her head again.

“Anyway, Cam came to see me. He wants me to take over from Gavin as Chief Financial Officer for Talon, which effectively means taking over as CFO for the colony.”

Julian’s smile lit his face. “That’s great!”

“I haven’t said I’ll do it.”

Julian’s smile closed down, replaced with a mix of hurt and confusion. Kyle’s shuttered expression revealed nothing.

She sighed. “You’re doing it again. I cannot function without some kind of feedback. I don’t know what you want, how this might work, what you expect of me, what is supposed to happen. I’m not even sure I know what I want.”

Kyle’s brows drew together. “What do you mean you don’t know what we want? We’ve made it clear from the beginning.”

“No. What you’ve made clear from the beginning is that you think you can breed with me and that you like me well enough. Most of the time, anyway.”

Kyle recoiled, as if he’d been punched in the face. Julian’s mouth went slack and his eyes widened. Shock painted his features.

Kyle recovered first. “You think we like you and want to breed you.”

His even tone made her wary. “Yes. You’ve been clear enough from the beginning that you think we’ll be compatible mates and that you want a family.”

“Well, sure,” Julian began, but Kyle cut him off with an abrupt slice of his hand.

“Did we not share our bodies in every way possible?”

Heat swirled through her system. She stepped back to the chair and sat heavily, not trusting her knees to hold her. She crossed her legs, pressing her thighs tightly together to control the ache. “The sex is amazing.”

Kyle scrubbed his hands over his face. Julian stared at her like she had suddenly sprouted wings.

“I’m reminding myself that your culture is different than ours. I keep forgetting because we fit so well.”

Maddy tilted her head. “Do we? I just don’t feel like I have any idea what is going on with you two. Julian had to practically slap me in the face with his feelings to get my attention.”

Julian stood next to Kyle in the doorway. Kyle took his hand, rubbing his thumb along the knuckles. A comforting, familiar gesture.

Maddy pointed at them. “There. That’s just what I mean. You two are like halves of a whole.”

Julian looked down at their joined hands. “True and not true. It’s true we are complements to each other, but it’s less like halves of a whole and more like ... like a good meal. Just because the meat and potatoes go well together doesn’t mean there isn’t

room for a great salad. While the meal is good—satisfying—without the salad, it’s more complete, closer to whole with the salad.”

She blinked at him. “I’m a salad?”

Julian’s shoulders slumped, his wings dragging on the floor. “No, just... I’m not helping, am I?”

She frowned at them. Was Julian right? She’d been raised in a culture that believed in couples. Was it only that holding her back? A belief that couples were a discrete unit, that one combination of two had to be inherently stronger than other combinations? That three could not form a unique whole?

“I think what Julian is trying to say, Madeline, is that there isn’t a ‘main’ couple and a third wheel here. All three are now necessary. Like a tricycle.”

She barked out a surprised laugh. “Please. Stop with the awful metaphors. I think I get your point. I guess I have been working on the assumption that I was an ... add-on.”

Julian crossed to her and knelt. He held her hands in his. “No, not an add-on. A beautiful, wonderful completion of our whole. Yes, we came looking for you because we thought we would be able to breed you and have children, but there is so much more. You’re smart, funny, brave. How could we not love you?”

She blinked back the tears that suddenly filmed her vision. “You really mean it.”

Kyle pushed off the door frame, coming to kneel beside Julian. “Madeline. I didn’t realize you didn’t understand your value to us. Yes, we want to have children with you, if that is possible. But now, now that we know you, now that we have been in your thoughts and you in ours, now that we have shared ourselves, it is far beyond that. I love you. I love us.”

A single tear escaped and tracked down her cheek. “I ... I love you, too. I love you both.”

Kyle brushed her hair back from her temple, an infinitely gentle touch. “Good.” He leaned forward to kiss her forehead. “Now, about the job. If you don’t want to do it, we will go where you go.”

Maddy leaned back, searching his face. “Just like that. Leave your entire life behind to follow me?”

Julian gripped her hand. “Maddy, you are part of our life now. We’ve certainly adapted to new situations before. At least this time, it will be our choice and for our happiness.”

Kyle nodded his agreement, brushing a hand over Julian’s.

Maddy stared. They were offering to give up the safety of the colony, the support of their society, in order to go with her. She didn’t think Cam would cut them off, but they just didn’t know, and the possibility didn’t seem to matter to them. They were serious, and the depth of their commitment humbled her. Especially since she had no compelling reason to return to Richmond. Just her fear.

And that was really what it came down to. She was afraid.

She’d never considered herself cowardly, and it shamed her to find out that she was. Where she’d always congratulated herself on breezing through relationship breakups and moving on, she could see now that she’d never really committed, never invested in the relationship. Her life had been a series of superficial romances. Now that she faced something that touched her deeply, she wanted to run like a scared rabbit. Why hadn’t she realized this before?

She took a deep breath. "I'm scared."

Julian abandoned her hand to lay his head in her lap and wrap his arms around her waist.

"What are you afraid of, Madeline? We're here. We aren't going anywhere without you."

Tears stung behind her nose. "That means I have to be there for you. That's scary for me. What if I screw it up?"

Julian squeezed lightly, turning his face up to her. "You'll screw up. I'll screw up. And whether he wants to admit it or not, Kyle will screw up. No one is perfect, honey. The key is working it out."

Maddy closed her eyes. She'd never been one to waver, and this couldn't be an exception. If you were going to jump, you needed to jump. It didn't do any good to put it off once you'd made the decision—and she had made her decision. She wanted to commit herself to Kyle and Julian.

Maddy opened her eyes, turning her face to meet Kyle's. "All right. But I don't think I'm ready to be a mom, and I don't understand enough about you or, well, your culture, to make a good decision about raising any child."

Julian reached up to cup her chin, turning her face to his. Hope, and a kind of wonder, lit his features. "You really are going to stay with us."

A slow smile stretched her lips. "Yes."

Kyle grabbed her up, knocking Julian's arm away and sweeping her into his embrace. He turned her between them, allowing Julian to wrap his arms around them.

Kyle dropped his mouth to hers, whispering against her lips. "Thank you."

"Believe me, it will be my pleasure."

Julian smiled. "We will make sure of it."

Suiting action to words, Julian bore her down to the mattress. Maddy lost track of Kyle when Julian claimed her mouth. Sweet, persuasive, full of love and passion, it was a kiss like no other. Tears threatened briefly, but were lost in the rising joy and passion.

Julian broke the kiss, trailing laving kisses down her neck to the collar of her shirt. With a grunt, he stripped it off her, tossing it who knew where. Resuming his downward journey, he captured the tip of one breast, rolling the hardened peak between his lips. He shifted, moving to lie along her side, changing the angle.

Kyle's hands gripped her ankles and Maddy jolted. Deliberately, his fingers slid up her legs, spreading them wider, finally settling her thighs over his shoulders.

She moaned her approval and was rewarded with the warmth of Julian's mouth on her nipple. Heat surged, and her hips bucked.

Kyle parted her most intimate flesh, opening her to him. Julian cupped her other breast lightly, tracing patterns with his nails on the underside. She shivered.

Limbs heavy with the weight of passion, Maddy lifted one hand to Julian's head, weaving her fingers into his hair. The midnight strands slid through her fingers, another layer of sensation.

She couldn't see Kyle through the golden curtain of Julian's wing, only feel his breathing against her a scant instant before his mouth settled on her in the most intimate of kisses. She arched under Julian, but he pressed her down again.

Kyle worked her sensitive inner lips, sucking at them until she cried out. His tongue swept the entrance to her body, but it was his fingers that penetrated her.

She screamed, pleasure spiking through her. Kyle's chuckle vibrated against already enflamed nerves, and she shuddered heavily.

Oh, God. It felt so good, so amazing. But she wanted...

"Julian," she panted.

He lifted his head from her breast to look at her.

"Let me ... oh!" she broke off when Kyle flicked her clit with the hardened point of his tongue. "Oh, God. Need you."

Julian somehow managed to understand her incoherent request. He moved up, fastening his lips to hers in another consuming kiss. It was just what she needed. She poured her desire for the two men into Julian, reveling in the heat of his hands on her breasts, the wet fire of Kyle's mouth between her thighs. It was everything she'd dreamed, more than she'd ever hoped. And it was hers.

The orgasm rolled over her, rolled her under, and she screamed again, the sound swallowed by Julian's continued kiss. Kyle didn't stop, didn't give her a chance to recover, but pushed her up again. His lips and tongue worked in ways that seemed impossible, and her body responded to every lick, every suckle.

Orgasms bled together, impossible to separate. Reality faded, nothing left but the two men and a burning sea of need.

Finally, Kyle lifted his mouth from her body. Limp, restless, Maddy tried to protest, but nearly choked on the words when Kyle pressed the wide head of his cock to her entrance.

Julian released her mouth slowly, lingering over her lips for a final taste before sitting back. Maddy's eyes drifted open. Kyle poised above her, eyes glowing and wings spread, limned like an avenging angel. Her pussy clenched and released. The subtle caress caused Kyle to growl and press his hips forward, breaching her entry with only the leading edge of his crown. Maddy bit her lip at the tease.

Julian ducked under Kyle's wing and reappeared behind Kyle, his hands sliding along the upper edge of the wings, the small foil packet in his fingers bright against the pale feathers. Where the hell had that come from?

Kyle shuddered and the head of his cock lodged more deeply in her body. Maddy gasped as her body stretched to accommodate him. The sting shot up her spine, slapping her pleasure centers into overdrive. Julian dropped to his knees and set his mouth on the corded muscle between shoulder and neck while his hands dropped out of sight.

Whatever he did, Kyle liked. With a grunt, Kyle's hips bucked, shoving him further into her body in one push. The burn rocketed through her and Maddy cried out. Only Kyle's hands, holding her hips firmly in place, kept her from squirming away. The pleasure was too intense, too close to the edge of pain, and Maddy's brain balked.

Kyle cursed, holding himself still. "Julian, for pity's sake leave off. Let me get in her first."

The raw appeal flooded her pussy as she realized how close to the edge Kyle actually was. Julian licked up Kyle's neck before biting his ear. Kyle fought to control himself and his hips moved in an aborted thrust. He gained another inch inside her and Maddy's nipples drew to stiff points. Julian released Kyle's ear to smile knowingly at Maddy before disappearing completely behind Kyle.

The last piece dropped into place as she identified with Julian. She understood his need to give pleasure—the pure, shining satisfaction of giving for its own sake. She'd

never really experienced that sexual altruism before—the closest had been in the shower with Kyle, but even then, she'd had that underlying expectation of reciprocation. Julian's pleasure, though, centered on the act itself.

Kyle's chest heaved, drawing in a deep breath. "Have to get in you," he grated through clenched teeth. He forged deeper into her body and his fingers dug into her hips. With every incremental gain, Maddy's tension increased, heat spiraling more and more tightly within her. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity of anticipation, he slid the final fraction into her. His testicles rested heavily against her, a warm, soft pressure in direct contrast to the demanding thrust of his cock in her pussy.

Maddy's quiet noise of relief was nearly drowned out by the combined panting breaths of the two men. She watched the hot flash of pleasure-pain on Kyle's face as his fingers dug into her with bruising force. His hips smashed forward, scooting her backwards on the bed. Julian appeared over Kyle's shoulder. She didn't have to see Julian's look of satisfied pleasure or the dark stain of arousal on his cheekbones to know what he'd done.

A sudden flare of white-hot curiosity burst within her, yanking the threads of her arousal. "Tell me how he feels, Julian," she demanded breathlessly.

Kyle's eyes widened and his hips jerked, the jolt sending a delicious twinge through her pelvis. Julian looked briefly surprised before his face lit with mischievous intent.

"Mmmm. He's hot and smooth. His ass is so hard I bounce off when I go too deep." He suited action to words, bumping Kyle deeper into her with his thrust. Kyle made a strained noise, his neck cording with tension.

Hissing through his teeth, Kyle pulled back, dragging along her sensitive inner walls, until only the head of his cock remained lodged in her. Maddy swallowed her protest when Julian grunted, as he obviously pushed more deeply into Kyle. Kyle changed the angle of her hips slightly before plowing back into her in a long, heavy thrust. He slid slowly out again and repeated the stroke.

Maddy hummed her impatience, wanting the faster, harder climb to orgasm. Julian agreed and reared back from Kyle before shoving him forward so that he fell over Maddy, catching himself with his hands on either side of her ribcage. The new position shifted him inside her. He wasn't as deep this way, but the shallow angle pressed his pubic bone into her clit. She went momentarily blind as the pleasure flashed through her.

When her sight returned a split second later, she stared directly into Julian's gold-brown eyes. He recoiled again and came back fast, shoving Kyle home. Maddy gasped, her head tipping back. Her legs lifted, but couldn't find purchase between the two hard male bodies above her. Kyle's biceps bulged as he picked up Julian's rhythm and began pumping into her. On the first stroke he ran along the upper wall of her pussy, strafing her G-spot before his pelvis compressed her clit against her pubic bone. She whimpered, hot arousal gathering in her womb. With each fast, shallow stroke, her need grew. Her legs strained, reaching for the release that was tantalizingly close. Her pussy rippled at the deeper stroke and Kyle seemed to snap. His eyes glazed and he moved his weight onto his forearms to change his angle again. He dropped his mouth to her nipple. He sucked hard, drawing on the hard nub like he could swallow her whole. Heat exploded along her nerves, setting fire to the tension coiling in her muscles. A deep, hard thrust bumped her cervix, reverberating through her pelvis. She shrieked, her head thrashing, as the orgasm slammed through her, roaring outward from her core and subsuming

everything. Her vision narrowed and her entire body heaved under the combined weight of the men.

Dimly, she heard Julian swear and felt the jolt as Kyle heaved into her. Kyle's hoarse shout carried a note of shock that nearly drowned out Julian's lingering groan. She managed a pained squeak when their dual weight crushed down.

Cursing vividly, the men tried to move off her, succeeding in tangling their limbs and sliding off to the side in a comic heap.

Kyle let out what could only be described as a yelp, his wing caught beneath Julian. Snorting out a weak laugh, Julian managed to disentangle himself before flopping onto his stomach, his own wings folded along his back. Kyle followed suit, dropping a heavy arm over Maddy's waist and tucking her into his side.

Maddy closed her eyes, snuggling in.

It was good to be home.

The End

About the Author:

ELISE LOGAN writes completely hot stories that cross genres and boundaries.

Elise, born in Texas, currently lives in Virginia and has lived in various southern locales. She has a massive aversion to the cold and a virulent dislike of non-competition compliant chili.

She began writing short children's stories in grade school and moved to angsty poetry and essays in her teens, even making a foray into lyrics. College and graduate school put a hold on fiction writing, but the stories kept piling up.

Finally, in the midst of raising her daughter and trying to finish her dissertation, she gave up the fight and began writing fiction.

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