

ELLORA'S CAVE XANADU

Two Knights
in *Camelot*

CHARLENE TEGLIA

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Once upon a time, Arthur married Guinevere and they lived happily ever after...until she fell in love with his knight, Lancelot. Forbidden passion for two men divided her loyalties. Being true to her heart meant giving herself to both of them, a choice that held devastating consequences. Their world collapsed as betrayal and jealousy tore them apart.

In present day Las Vegas, Art and Gwen meet Lance to launch the Excalibur anti-virus project. A true anti-virus solution has serious opposition from mobsters and hackers who profit from the status quo and soon the three are in a race to save Excalibur and themselves. But even if they succeed, their hearts remain in jeopardy as forbidden love refuses to die. Is history set to repeat itself? Or can three star-crossed lovers find a happy ending together?

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



www.ellorascave.com

Two Knights in Camelot

ISBN 9781419920592

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Cover art by

Electronic book publication September 2009

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TWO KNIGHTS IN CAMELOT

Charlene Teglia

Chapter One

In the crystal caves

"You're an interfering old fool." Morgana hissed the words through her teeth, her face tight with anger. Frustrated fury twisted her features into parody of her carefully cultivated seductive expression.

Had he truly ever been enchanted by her? It seemed impossible. But then, that was enchantment, wasn't it? Alacazam, alacazee, what you want is what you see... Merlin shook his head at his foolishness, past and present, and decided not to argue that point with her.

"Fool? Possibly. Interfering? Coming from you, that's the pot calling the kettle black. If you hadn't interfered then, you wouldn't be in this position now. I intend to see that this crucial time passes free from your brand of interference."

Morgana rattled the cage he'd trapped her in and let out an inarticulate scream. And then, like the conniving witch she was, she regained control of herself. Or at least of her power of speech. "It won't make any difference," she spat. "You're too late by centuries. Their world is gone. It never could have lasted in any case. You can hardly blame me for it ending."

"It could have lasted longer than it did," Merlin pointed out in a mild voice.

"Pointless sentimentality."

"Sentimental, I may be. Pointless? There we disagree. But then, you never could see the point of love."

Morgana let out a derisive laugh. "Love? You think this is about love?"

"What else?"

"Power, you fool." Scorn dripped from her voice. "Your little kingdom crumbled in a power play. It had nothing to do with love."

"It had everything to do with love," Merlin said softly. "And it will again."

"The only thing that will happen again is precisely what happened before. She'll betray them both and all three of them will end tragically. Again." Morgana settled herself in a studied casual pose. "And I'll have a front row seat to your inevitable disappointment. How amusing. Do you know, I believe I should thank you for making me your guest for the occasion."

"What a spiteful viper you are." At his words, the woman transformed into a snake, coiled and hissing. "You interfered with what they might have chosen before. They have another chance to choose now. And I will see to it that whatever future awaits them, it is one of their own choosing."

The snake writhed furiously and abruptly became a woman again. "It won't change anything. Camelot is gone forever."

"Camelot, my dear Morgana, is in the heart. It was never anywhere else."

With that, the wizard left his prisoner to her own devices.

* * * * *

Excalibur Hotel and Casino, Las Vegas

"Welcome to Sin City," Gwen said as another brightly lit screen advertising dancers in costumes a drag queen would covet glittered overhead. "Are we sure this is a good idea? Settling the details for the company's partnership over a weekend in Vegas?"

"Not just any weekend in Vegas. This is Defcon." Art reached over and touched the back of her hand, brushing the diamond engagement ring she wore in the process. "Every security professional in the country will be here. It's the perfect place to settle the future of Excalibur Software. Besides, you'll love the hotel. They do tournament reenactments."

Her fiancé's touch sent a thrum of anticipation through her. No matter how much business they had to deal with, there'd be opportunities for quality alone time. The

prospects of watching knights on horseback should have her bouncing in her seat with excitement. But apprehension made an effective buzzkill.

Nothing about this weekend felt right to Gwen. She'd been edgy and out of sorts during the flight, and it hadn't gotten better when they landed in Vegas and picked up the rental car before heading to their hotel.

Excalibur. Their destination and their reason for being there shared a name. Art loved the idea of staying in the Camelot-themed hotel while they worked out the business details. Gwen couldn't stop imagining all the things that could go wrong, no matter where they stayed.

Partnerships could be tremendously beneficial and profitable. They could also destroy a company and tear apart the people who owned it.

Arthur Rowan was a wonderful man. He was a brilliant man. He was also an idealist, one who saw the benefits of his anti-malware and anti-virus software and wanted to get it into the hands of as many end users as possible. Which was where the partnership came in. Lance Tremblay had the distribution Art needed.

On paper, Gwen had to agree it made sense. In reality, well, that was what had her nerves on edge. And why did they have to meet here, of all places? Fine, it was the security industry's big annual to-do. Sure, it made sense to attend out of professional interest.

But did they really have to settle something that could have such lasting and potentially devastating consequences on a weekend, in a place where everything was designed by the casino owners to disorient people and create a sense of excitement that could cause poor decision making? Such as, deciding to sign an agreement that could mean a huge IPO...or bankruptcy, when their new partner overextended them and left them holding the bag?

"Stop worrying. Nibbling on your lip is my job." Art gave her a half-smile that curved his mouth in a sensual line that was very nice to look at.

It might be shallow of her, but Gwen loved the fact that a brilliant mind and a generous heart came in such an attractive package. Art was tall with an elegant build kept toned by regular swimming. His prematurely gray hair made a striking contrast to his youthful features. His bright blue eyes met hers in a brief glance before he turned his attention back to parking, but that one look told her he intended to make sure she was thoroughly relaxed as soon as they checked in.

Now that was one benefit of a trip to Vegas Gwen was all in favor of. There had been far too many late nights recently, and not because they were burning up the sheets together. Art's passion for programming often meant he was up until the wee hours pursuing an idea instead of pleasure. With the partnership offer came increased pressure to have everything ready to launch Excalibur, and Gwen had been going to bed alone more frequently.

Toys and a long bubble bath only did so much to provide relief when a woman had gotten accustomed to regular sessions with a flesh-and-blood man. Especially when that man was as focused and thorough as Art, when she had his attention.

She'd have his undivided attention and a king-sized hotel bed at their disposal in about fifteen minutes. Gwen felt her nipples tighten as heated anticipation curled through her.

"You are dedicated to your job," she said.

"Not dedicated enough lately." He turned off the ignition and leaned over to kiss her. His mouth on hers was warm and very focused, and Gwen felt her heart kick into higher gear. When he raised his head and looked down into her face, she knew it was flushed and her lips were softened and swollen from a very thorough kiss, during which he had, in fact, given her lower lip a sensual nibbling that made her toes curl.

"Going to make it up to me?" Gwen asked, a husky note in her voice.

"Over and over." Art unfastened her seat belt and gave her a hip to breast caress in the process that made her glad she was sitting down.

Maybe Vegas wasn't such a bad idea, after all.

The hotel was as bewildering as she'd expected. A confusion of noise from the casino and medieval décor blending in a very modern structure created a fairy-tale setting that was distinctly adult.

"Are there really tournaments?" Gwen asked Art as they wheeled their suitcases toward the check-in counter.

"Yes. You'll love it." He smiled at her, and the spark of enthusiasm in his eye told Gwen he'd love it too. Of course, he'd been here before. He'd seen the show. *And he wants to share it with you, you lucky wench. Quit worrying. This is Vegas, the international playground for grownups. Play a little.*

"I'm looking forward to it." She thought of the two of them alone, a big bed to roll around in, and the spectacle of men jousting when they ventured out later for a different sort of entertainment. But mostly she wanted that bed under her and Art inside her, reassuring her on a very basic level.

Maybe they didn't have to wait for a bed. Maybe they could start in the elevator, kissing, touching...

Maybe not. Check-in was a smooth and fast process, but the elevator was full of people. She stood close to Art, but out of necessity and not the thrill of clandestine contact. "How big is Defcon, anyway?"

"Huge." Art's face turned serious and Gwen could've kicked herself for turning his mind back to business. "The security industry is an enormous growth area, and hackers continually point out the weak spots that are easy to exploit. Hackers and white-hats alike will be here in droves. The media too."

Gwen hadn't thought about the public aspect. Negotiating business with the backdrop of Las Vegas insanity was bad enough, but with the media everywhere looking for stories, they'd really have to stay sharp. Then again they weren't staying at the hotel that hosted the convention, so they ought to be able to keep a low profile. If they weren't able to come to terms with Lance, they didn't need rumors and speculation circulating about the viability of Art's creation.

And now she was thinking about business too. She mentally slammed the lid on that and deliberately brushed her breast against Art's arm as she shifted closer than strictly necessary to allow passengers to get off at the next floor.

"Are you coming on to me?" Art murmured the words against her ear, for her hearing alone.

"Yes." Gwen raised her face to his and winked. "Want to get lucky?"

"It's Vegas. Luck is in the air." Art nipped at her earlobe and a shiver of reaction traveled along her nerve endings down to her pelvis.

Their floor was next. They headed to their room at a sedate rush, eyes meeting, bodies brushing. Art slid his card key into the door and opened it, then stepped back. "Ladies first."

"I love your philosophy," she said with a happy grin. Especially since it extended to orgasms.

Suitcases were abandoned just inside the door. Art hung a "do not disturb" sign on the outside knob before closing them in while Gwen kicked off her shoes and began to unbutton her blouse.

Art was already naked to the waist before she got further. She unclipped her bra and dropped it to the floor in a race to catch up.

"Nice," Art said, pausing to look. Her breasts swelled in anticipation, nipples hardening, all of her heating up. Her skirt went next, and then she peeled out of pantyhose and the g-string that prevented unsightly lines while Art's pants went the way of his shirt and jacket.

His hands closed around her waist just as she finished stepping free of silky wisps of lingerie, pulling her close. "Very nice." His hands stroked up to cup her breasts, and Gwen wiggled her bare backside against his smooth, hard erection.

"I'll say." She turned in his arms and slid her hand around his shaft, stroking his cock while she rubbed her naked breasts against his hair-roughened chest.

“Ah, Gwen.” His eyes turned the color of the night sky as he swept her up in his arms and carried her to the bed, laying her down on it while he kissed her breathless. Her mouth opened for his, their tongues twined together, and it wasn’t nearly enough. He followed her down, covering her body with his, and it wasn’t close enough. The heady contact of skin to skin made her want more, and she arched under him, trying to get it.

“Not yet.” Art spoke against her lips, and then he was moving down, his mouth making a trail of heat that ended between her legs.

Gwen let her head fall back with a soft sound of pleasure as he kissed her sex with the same concentration he’d turned on her mouth. He tongued her clit until she wanted to beg for more, then licked down and thrust his tongue into her, making sure she was ready for fuller penetration. It didn’t take much. She was hot and slick, urgency thrumming through her, and Art’s mouth closing on her clit sent her over the edge.

She came in a rush, and opened her eyes to Art’s satisfied expression as he raised his head.

“Now.”

His voice was deep with masculine satisfaction and she smiled in response as he moved up over her again, his thighs between hers, the smooth, hard crown of his cock probing her sex before he pushed inside with a long, slow thrust. She arched up to take him deeper, wrapped her legs around his waist, and gave herself up to him.

Chapter Two

Lance Tremblay sipped his wine and wondered if it was wrong to want to steal a woman who belonged to another man. If the man had been his friend, there would be no question. When the man was his potential partner in a highly profitable enterprise, there should be even less question.

Yet he couldn't stop his eyes from returning to Gwendolyn Smith's face. She had the sort of classic features that aged well. Good bones, his French grandmother would say. Her complexion was equally lovely. Porcelain skin with a hint of rose, set off by an elegant sweep of golden hair that she wore in a twist. His fingers itched to free it and fill his hands with the silky mass. That would no doubt shock both the genius software designer and his very proper fiancée.

The couple was intimate. That showed in the way they looked at each other, the little touches, their posture. The way the woman on his arm leaned into Art as the maître d' led them to the table Lance had waited at told him they were a team. Nothing overt, nothing inappropriate to a public place or a business meeting, but it was there.

Gwen was not engaged to Art merely because she knew he was going to be a multimillionaire. They were lovers, and judging by the soft expression that slipped into her eyes when they met Art's, the connection was emotional as well as physical.

And she didn't trust him. For good reason since he was having inappropriate thoughts about her that included a fantasy of riding off with her on horseback, but her unease with him could become a problem in their negotiations. He should put her at ease. Win her over. For business.

Her brown eyes turned a little cool when they were resting on him, and even knowing it wasn't in his best interest, Lance wondered how they'd look if they glowed

with the light of passion. Like warm amber, he thought. His eyes held hers a little too long as his imagination led him down a dangerous path.

“Mr. Tremblay.” Her lush lips firmed under his regard, a small and silent reprimand for looking at her too closely. She picked up her wineglass, deliberately breaking the moment. “How did you become interested in my fiancé’s work?”

Lance noted her choice of words. Not *Art*, but *my fiancé*. Directing his attention to the relationship. The message was polite, but clear. *I’m taken. Look elsewhere.*

He didn’t want to look elsewhere, unless it meant making a study of the rest of her, preferably naked. If she was annoyed and distrustful now, when he only looked too long at her face, what would she do if his eyes dropped to her cleavage? Accidentally spill her wine on him, and then apologize with her mouth while her eyes said she was anything but sorry?

He was tempted to do it, just to see if she’d react the way he imagined. But that wasn’t the game he’d come here to play. He wanted Excalibur. He wanted Arthur Rowan. It was not in his best interests to want the woman in front of him. He should fall in with her wishes and look elsewhere. Vegas had no shortage of women, and any number of them would be willing to provide a distraction from amber eyes and a full mouth. Along with welcome relief from the unwanted desire that suddenly plagued him.

Sex. Anonymous. Meaningless. Safe.

Much safer to screw a stranger he could pick up in the hotel bar than to contemplate making a play for a woman who could ruin the deal he’d spent months setting up. Although if the deal went through, what then? How many times would he be in their company? How many times would he be alone with her, and what would it mean to the business if he continued to want another man’s woman?

He’d be tempted to walk away from such potentially messy complications right now, but Excalibur was one of a kind. The deal was too important to blow because some blonde made him feel like an adolescent boy being led around by his pants. He

wasn't eighteen. He was thirty-five and he could damn well keep them zipped. Or if not, at least unzip them with a partner who wasn't engaged to a man who was in a position to determine the course of his future.

Go and fuck if you have to, but don't fuck this up, Lance told himself. So he answered her question, made polite small talk, and only admired the slope of her breasts from his peripheral vision. Elegant, like her face. The sedate black dress she wore showed off the lines of her body and her high heels did enticing things to the length and shape of her legs. She'd made a very attractive picture walking through the restaurant. But she hadn't been walking to meet him. She'd been walking on the arm of another man.

Lance wasn't what she'd expected. They'd done thorough background work on him, so Gwen knew a lot of facts. She knew he gave a significant portion of his earnings to a charitable foundation that provided education and medical care to children in poverty-stricken areas. She knew his business was above-board. But the facts didn't prepare her for the man's presence.

Halfway through dinner Gwen excused herself and went to the ladies' lounge. She needed a minute to compose herself, and it didn't help when she imagined she felt a pair of hazel eyes resting on her silk-covered backside while she walked away. She'd almost tripped on her high heels at the thought of Lance's intent gaze fixed on her ass.

At least he wouldn't see unattractive lines if he was looking, Gwen thought, remembering the g-string she wore underneath.

Great. Now she was thinking about her skimpy underwear in the context of another man's eyes on them. He'd rattled her. That black hair, too long for corporate America, and a little too wild. Those eyes, so direct, so intense. He'd looked at her mouth until she thought she could feel the pressure of a phantom kiss. Her lips had softened and parted in reaction, and that was when she knew she had to leave the table.

It was all too suggestive, that's what was bothering her. Art and Lance meeting over Excalibur at a Camelot-themed hotel. She'd remarked on Lance's name when Art

first chose him. He'd just shrugged and said Lance was the one. Coincidence happened, but it bothered her a lot more now that she was face-to-face with the man.

She opened her small evening purse and took out powder and lipstick. She toyed with both, but it was just an excuse to occupy her hands. Although her face did look a little too heated. A swipe of concealing powder should fix that.

Her lower lip was missing most of its color, which meant she'd been indulging a nervous habit. With a mental note to herself to stop, Gwen slicked a sheen of soft rose over the full curve and then blotted her lips. She eyed her hair to see if it was slipping. A few strands were loose, softening the severe style. The effect was sexier than she'd like but since she hadn't thought to slip a few bobby pins into her bag, she was stuck with her hair and so were her dinner companions.

Art wouldn't notice. Lance probably already had.

She put away the lipstick tube and powder compact and looked at herself in the mirror, taking in the whole instead of examining individual parts. There was a betraying relaxation in her body, a sparkle in her eyes and a flush on her cheeks that said she'd had sex recently and was thinking about having it again.

That's right, she told her reflection in the mirror. *You had sex with Art. An hour before sitting down to dinner with Mr. Lance Tremblay, Art was going down on you.* So why was she so bothered by a man who hadn't done anything but look at her?

The answer followed directly on the heels of the question. Because the way he looked was almost as visceral as a touch. It was unnerving.

If Art wasn't there, she would come right out and tell him to stop. But she didn't want to say anything in front of Art because the man hadn't done anything. If looking at a woman and thinking a stray sexual thought was a crime, every man in the world would be in prison.

That helped put it in perspective and Gwen felt a measure of calm return. It didn't mean anything. And if it kept happening and it bothered her, she could be a grown-up

and talk to Lance about it. Privately, because it wasn't worth jeopardizing Art's plans over something so inconsequential as a look.

Okay then. She was ready to go back and be an adult and finish her dinner. Gwen squared her shoulders and made her way back to their table. That gave her an unexpected opportunity to observe the two men together. Art was animated, and Lance seemed equally enthusiastic. There was an expansive quality to their gestures, a unity in the way they leaned in to speak. They were fired up about the topic of their discussion.

This is really going to happen, Gwen thought. This partnership could really work. Especially if she quit overreacting to the way Lance looked at her.

Lance saw her first, but Art's back was to her, so it wasn't fair to think that he might not have been as quick to notice. He smiled at her as she rejoined them. Just a smile, but it was the kind that reached his eyes and it made her draw in her breath. He had deep dimples and a square jaw and the slightly curly black hair gave him a piratical look. His shoulders were broad, his build more muscular than most of the people who gravitated to the software and technology industries. He looked like a weightlifter, not a desk jockey.

The individual parts made for a devastating whole. Lance Tremblay was hot, and she didn't doubt that most women on the receiving end of that smile would be plotting to slip him their hotel room keys. Or maybe just tossing their underwear at him.

She had a brief vision of him as a knight on horseback, smiling at the ladies who came to tie their favors to his arm, blinked, and shook her head. He'd be a lady-killer in any century but he really did look like he'd fit right in with the jousts and their act.

Her knees gave just a little as she took her seat. She picked up her wineglass and took a sip, letting the conversation continue, taking a second to digest the realization that she was disturbed by the way Lance looked at her because she was affected by the way he looked.

He was attractive. Very attractive. And she was having a typical reaction to meeting an attractive, charismatic member of the opposite sex—she noticed. She might be in

love with Art, but she wasn't blind and she certainly wasn't asexual. So, she noticed. It didn't mean anything, any more than a look from him did.

When she set her wineglass down, it was empty. Lance moved to refill it. She thanked him in a polite tone and fought to keep from biting her lower lip when his eyes rested there a heartbeat too long.

The conversation wasn't anywhere close to winding down when they'd finished eating and the dishes were all cleared away. Lance noticed the waiter's polite hovering and suggested they move the discussion to the nearby lounge.

It was a reasonable suggestion. A thoughtful one too. Vacating their table so the waiter could either have another round of diners or go home for the night instead of babysitting them showed consideration. Art wasn't inconsiderate, although he could be oblivious on occasion. When he was absorbed, he tended not to notice anything outside his immediate focus. In many ways Gwen thought the two men seemed well-matched, a good balance for each other.

But the move to a more relaxed atmosphere raised the tension she felt. Made her hyperaware of her proximity to both men, the music in the background, the groups of people around them reveling in the continual party atmosphere that was Vegas.

She let her gaze follow a couple around the dance floor because it was safer than accidentally catching Lance's eye. Watching them was the wrong choice if she wanted a distraction from her overheated imagination. The couple made it obvious they were heading straight for bed when they left. His, hers, whichever was closest.

The woman had her back to the man's chest, bodies glued together. His hands moved over her hips and waist, rocking into her rhythmically in a clear prelude to sex. Gwen felt her inner muscles react to the sight, clenching in anticipation of a hard, heated thrust. Her nipples tightened as if her breasts were a breath away from being cupped and squeezed while she was taken from behind.

She should look away. She didn't. The sight was too seductive, too raw and openly sexual. It was riveting.

"Want to dance?"

Lance's voice made her head jerk up. Her eyes met his, lips parting in surprise, sure she hadn't heard right.

"What?"

"Dance." He nodded towards the floor. "Give us a chance to chat without shouting over the music."

Gwen looked at Art's empty seat and wondered when he'd left. Had she been that involved in her voyeuristic moment?

"He had to take a call," Lance said, leaning toward her to speak near her ear. The table that separated them suddenly didn't feel like enough of a barrier. But he was right about trying to have a conversation across that distance.

If it was anybody else, would she hesitate? No, but Lance wasn't anybody else, and that was the problem. She was too aware of him being aware of her. Then again, if they were going to work together, sooner or later they'd have to deal with that. Maybe he wanted to do that now. Get it out in the open, diffuse the unwanted sexual tension with calm, adult discussion.

Gwen nodded, stood and walked with him the short distance to the dance floor. He put his hands on her waist and exerted pressure until they were almost but not quite touching.

"It's all right," he murmured, his lips so close she felt his breath stirring the tendrils of hair along the side of her neck. "I almost never attack women while dancing."

"Almost?" The joke surprised her into smiling.

"I'm tempted to make an exception."

"I'm tempted to find that tempting," Gwen said, deciding there was nothing to gain by dodging. Especially when he'd given her an opening to clear the air.

She felt the reaction in his hands, fingers tightening to dig into her flesh a fraction before he deliberately relaxed his hold again. "Ah." That one syllable held so many layers of expression. Masculine discovery, interest, caution.

"I thought it was obvious." She tipped her head back to look directly at him, giving a slight shrug.

"No, I thought I was only making you nervous."

"That, too."

His eyes darkened. "Sorry." Lance drew her closer and placed his cheek almost against hers, making it easier to talk. "You don't need to be nervous. I might be tempted, but I don't steal women from other men and I don't complicate business with pleasure. Especially now. This deal is important to all of us."

"Maybe not equally important to all of us," Gwen said in a neutral voice.

"If you're implying you don't have an equal interest in the deal, you're disingenuous." His voice was amused. "Not only do you stand to own half the assets when you marry Art, your work was integral to the design and implementation of the project."

She missed a step. "So you knew that."

"I guessed. You do design and usability. Art's the programmer. You did the user interface."

"I made it pretty." Gwen shrugged. "Art made it work."

"Even the heuristics. That's the interesting part. How well does it actually work?"

It was easier to be close to him when it was about Excalibur and not the push-pull of attraction. Gwen found herself relaxing into the dance. "Very well. The program learns from experience. It has to, or it couldn't adapt to changing tactics. Viruses win because they find openings to exploit. Excalibur closes them."

"You realize there's going to be opposition."

She nodded. Art had warned her about that in advance, before he'd contracted her help in the project. If he'd known they were going to fall in love, he wouldn't have used her. He didn't want her to be at risk. Their involvement created risk enough. To anybody targeting Art, she'd be a vulnerability to exploit.

Her name wasn't attached to Excalibur in any way, but Lance had put the pieces together easily enough. Others would too. Unease stirred.

Out loud she only said, "I know. A true solution will bring the wrath of crackers down on our heads." Hackers might come in shades of white or gray, but crackers were black hat all the way.

"And their employers," Lance murmured.

He didn't have to say more. It wasn't a secret that organized crime, including the Russian mob, funded the creation of the viruses and worms Excalibur would shut down. Not the sort of people Gwen wanted to anger. And having their profits eroded was bound to make some of them very angry.

Tension made dancing increasingly awkward, for entirely different reasons now. Lance's hold on her tightened, as if he wanted to reassure or protect. It altered the impact of his nearness, the brush of his body against hers offering comfort along with the distracting zing of hormones. He was a large man, and if he wanted to put himself between her and danger, Gwen didn't object. There was something almost chivalrous in the way he held her, rather than opportunistic.

Oddly, acknowledging the attraction and their mutual interests that meant it wouldn't be acted on didn't make it go away, but it created an intimacy she hadn't anticipated.

"What are you thinking?"

His low-pitched question caught Gwen by surprise. "Isn't that a woman's question?"

"Personal curiosity isn't gender-specific."

"Funny you should use that word. I was thinking that for two people who aren't going to have a male-female relationship, ours is already personal."

"Not business?"

Gwen thought of Art and shrugged. "Business can be personal. But I meant that by being honest enough to put our mutual attraction cards on the table, we have the beginning of friendship."

"Friendship." He shifted to look down into her face. "I wasn't expecting that."

"I don't think you were expecting chemistry, either."

"No." A light of humor danced in his eyes. "Friendship could be more dangerous."

"I don't think so." Gwen found herself smiling back at him, the curve of her lips matching his.

"I don't generally have to fight the urge to kiss my friends."

"You'll get over it in time." As she spoke, a voice echoed in her head. It sounded like hers, but the passion, the desperation in it were alien.

"I love you. I have always loved you. I will love you until the end of time."

"What if I don't?" Lance turned serious, his eyes darkening to match the change in mood.

"What?" Gwen blinked at him, hearing another echo. His voice, low, rough. *"You belong to another. I'll be damned for this."*

The voice that couldn't be hers answered. *"If heaven doesn't hold you, it is hell to me."*

Silken fabric dragged up to her hip. Masculine hands, strong enough to wield a sword, skillful enough to play a harp. Her body's need. Her heart's yearning. A cry from her and a groan from him as their flesh joined.

"Are you all right?"

Before she could find words, Lance was pushing her back into her chair, saying, "I'll go find Art."

Leaving. He was leaving her? Gwen reached out, frantic. Her hand closed on the fabric of his shirt. "No!"

Part of her watched what she was doing in horror. He was a stranger. A business partner. But her fingers wouldn't release their grasp. Then Lance was moving closer, sliding an arm around her. "I'll help you to your room, then."

"Yes. Please. Thank you." Gwen fought down panic. He wasn't going away. He'd stayed with her. And why should that matter so much? "Maybe I drank too much wine with dinner."

"You had two glasses." He pulled her into his side, supporting her. "Gwen, while we were in the bar, did you keep an eye on your drink?"

"No." The memory of the exhibitionist couple swept over her and mixed with the hunger she felt her alternate self tremble with as some other Lance surged inside her again and again. "I watched some dancers...I wasn't paying attention. I didn't see Art go. Do you think my drink got spiked?"

"It's possible." His voice was low and calm, drawing her along with him at a steady pace. "Don't panic. Let's get you to your room and see how you feel. Do you have your key?"

"Yes. In my bag." Had she left it in the bar?

"I've got it. And I've got you. Come on, almost there."

Lance steered them both around vacationing groups and amorous couples, into the elevator, out on the right floor. When they stopped outside the door, Gwen's head rested on his shoulder and her body sagged against his. He held her with one arm while he slid the key into the card reader and got them both through the door.

Once inside, he tossed her bag on the dresser and slid an arm under her knees to carry her cradled against his chest. He lowered her onto the bed and noted the rumpled covers. The bed had been used, and not for sleeping. Something like jealousy ripped at

him. He tamped it down and studied Gwen's face. She looked pale and flushed at the same time, eyes dilated, breathing a little too fast and unsteadily.

"I'll get you some water."

She nodded, and closed her eyes. Lance filled a glass for her at the sink. Then he threw cold water on his face and stared sternly at his reflection. "Snap out of it."

He helped Gwen sit up and watched her shaking hands try to guide the glass to her lips. Some of the water splashed onto her hand, and she stopped, turning it over to look at it in the light.

"That ring is strange. Why do I wear it?"

Chapter Three

Lance set the glass on the bedside table and told himself he was too young to have a stroke. "You're not yourself just now," he said, trying to keep his voice calm and even.

Gwen laughed, a low husky sound that went straight to some ungoverned part of his brain. "Not myself? Who would you have me be? A slave girl, bought for your pleasure?"

He looked into her amber eyes. They glowed with amusement and intelligence. A light rose still colored her cheeks, but it wasn't the flush of fever. "Gwen."

"I like your choice." She raised a hand to caress his cheek. The innocent contact shouldn't have stopped his breath. But it did. So did her next words. "No surnames or titles. We will be only Gwen and Lance."

He captured her hand in his and held it where it rested. Her palm didn't feel overly hot or cool to the touch. "Gwen, do you know where you are?"

"Alone with you."

"I'm not going to take advantage of that."

"Always so damned noble." Sudden anger flashed in her eyes and crackled in her voice. "As if it isn't worse to lie with your body than to act its truth."

"What truth? That I want you?"

She shook her head. "If it was only a fleeting want, we wouldn't have fallen. It was always more." Gwen shifted in his hold, moving closer. Her arm slid around his waist and her head settled into the curve of his neck and shoulder. "The moment I knew your soul, I was lost. Would I have been any less lost if I had given you my heart and denied you my body?"

"You're talking in the past tense." Lance knew he should let her go, put some space between them. He didn't. He felt almost as if that would break some spell and he wasn't quite ready to have it shatter.

She shrugged. "Past, future, it's all the same."

"You're disoriented." Which shouldn't make him want to freeze time, do anything to keep this moment from slipping away.

"No, you are." Gwen raised her head to frown at him. "Don't you know me? I know you."

"I'm not your lover, Gwen."

She laughed at that. "Well, you aren't my husband."

Husband. She didn't have one yet, but she planned to. And he wasn't the man she'd promised to marry. For some reason, that filled him with unreasonable anger. "I'm not Art."

"There is only one Arthur," Gwen agreed.

"You won't leave him."

"Of course not." Her eyes widened with shock.

"You love him."

"Yes."

"You can't love us both." But even as he said the words, he wondered.

"Love was never our problem." Gwen's fingers traced the outline of his face as she spoke. When her fingertip brushed his lip, he imagined it gathering the impression of a kiss. The kiss he wanted to give her. It took an effort to draw back instead of letting his lips ravish her hand before starting in on the rest of her.

"Gwen, you don't want this."

"Don't tell me what I want." Her lips compressed in a mutinous line. Before he could guess what she'd do or try to stop her, she undid the zipper at her back and

shrugged the dress down to her waist. With the fabric bunched around her hips and her naked torso gleaming above it, she looked like some exotic flower.

"You're not wearing a bra." It wasn't what he'd meant to say, but it was what came out. The sight of those small, perfect upthrust breasts and their blush-pink areolas stunned him. He wouldn't have thought her the type to go braless. Then again, the amount of back the dress bared meant she couldn't have done anything else.

"You noticed." Her lush lips formed the most sensual smile he'd ever seen. Could a smile seduce?

"I'm not blind."

"If you were, you could see me with your hands." Gwen arched her back as if inviting his palms to settle over those bared curves, learning the shape of them before using his fingertips to discover every detail. Then he could let them trail lower, across her abdomen, down to the soft drape of material that wouldn't impede him at all when he wanted to cup his hand between her legs to learn whether or not she was heated and slick and inviting there.

A sudden discomfort made him realize just how affected he was. His cock jutted against the binding pressure of his pants, too large for the space it occupied now because all the blood had left his brain and rushed to the part of him that was ready to take over all the thinking.

Thinking with his penis would be a bad plan. He'd remember why about five seconds after he'd finished coming, even if the reason escaped him just now.

Lance stood up and turned away. "You should get into bed." Then the covers would replace her dress and he wouldn't keep staring at her naked breasts.

The rustle of fabric behind him told him the plan was working. Then her dress fell at his feet and he stared at the inky pool of material as if it were some Rorschach blot he could interpret and understand as something, anything other than Gwen naked.

An image of naked Gwen burned in his brain while he stared blindly at her dress.

So much for the plan. Gwen obviously had a different one. One his body was fervently in favor of, which was why his feet stayed where they were as if rooted in place, instead of retreating across the carpet to the door and out, away, toward the nearest willing and unattached woman he could find.

The trouble was, he didn't want any nameless, faceless woman. He wanted the woman behind him who was tying him into knots. He wanted her with an urgency and ferocity that shook him, because he'd never wanted any woman so much he'd be willing to trade everything he had or hoped to gain for an hour alone with her.

"Insanity," Lance said out loud. Which didn't stop him from bending to retrieve her discarded dress. The silk flowed through his hands, still warm from her body. It was all too easy to imagine that he touched the silk of her skin instead. "You should put this back on. I should go."

"You should turn around," Gwen said.

"If I do that, we both know what will happen." No power on earth could stop him from getting out of his clothes and inside her body if he turned and saw her naked and waiting for him.

"That's why you should turn around. We're almost out of time."

It was the sadness in her voice that broke him. He could have resisted if she'd whispered words of seduction. But her sorrow shattered the heart he'd kept whole all his life. When he turned, he saw it echoed in her eyes.

"Gwen." He knelt on the bed and cupped her face in his hands. His lips touched the lids that lowered when he came closer. "You make me want to kiss away that look forever."

"Try." Her soft suggestion almost made him smile. Almost, but the moment was too fragile. He didn't know why she was sad or why he cared if she was, only that it was true. So he kissed her closed eyes and then her cheeks and then his lips touched the corner of her mouth.

A fraction of distance was all that kept their lips from meeting fully. His mind told him it was only a kiss. Not a question of life or death, not the moment that would stop his heart and start it again, altering the rhythm of its beating forever afterward. Just a kiss.

His mouth covered hers. She tasted warm and sweet and more intoxicating than anything he'd had to drink that evening. Her lips caressed his and parted for him. He would have been able to stop breathing more easily than he could have stopped his tongue from accepting that silent invitation and sliding inside to find hers.

Kissing her was better and worse than not kissing her. He burned. He ached. He hungered. He wanted more and wanted it now. He wanted to draw the anticipation out and make it last.

She tasted new and different and at the same time hauntingly familiar. He could almost believe he'd been kissing her for years. He knew what she would do before she did it, as if from memory. How she'd angle her head, the soft sound she'd make in the back of her throat, the way her tongue curled around his.

Gwen.

The name was right and not right. But he didn't want to ponder the mysteries of her name just now. He wanted to plunder the mysteries of her body.

"If you want me to stop, stop me now," he whispered against her lips while his hands went to the button at the waistband of his pants.

"Never stop." Her fingers tangled with his, helping and hindering at the same time until he was on the verge of almost laughing again. Then his clothes were gone and the fever in his skin was soothed by the cool silk of hers. He sprawled on top of her, needing her under him as if that would make her his. His thighs pushed between hers. She shifted to accommodate him, and his cock nudged against her sex, finding it covered with silk instead of open for his entry.

"Too many clothes," he muttered. He reached down, gripped a fistful of flimsy fabric, and heard a soul-satisfying sound as it tore free. Now he had all of her bare and

when he settled on top of her again, the head of his cock searched out the slick folds of her cunt. He flexed his hips, testing, and felt her give under the pressure. She was soft where he was hard, welcoming where he wanted to demand entry, moisture coating her to match the liquid that pearled at his slit opening and spread on contact to coat the head of his penis.

He should slow down. He should make sure she was as ready as the lubrication indicated, explore all of her with his lips and his hands. The thought of putting his mouth on her sex and coating his tongue with her honey made his cock swell and his balls ache.

"Next time," he muttered as he reached down to find the foil packet tucked in his wallet just in case. He got the condom out and on in record time. "Next time I'll go slower."

"Next time I might let you." Her body arched up under his, offering and demanding at the same time. Her nails raked down his back, a primitive display that made him shudder. He thrust deep, feeling her cunt open for his cock, taking him all the way inside. She closed around him like a hot, tight, velvet glove.

Lance rocked into her, hard and fast, feeling her tighten around him as her body drew taut. "That's it. Come for me."

She did, with a wild abandon that sent him right over the edge behind her. Her cunt tightened around his cock, over and over, milking his balls empty while they both came in a frenzied rush.

Gwen went limp under him, relaxed and spent, eyes closed, a little satisfied smile playing around her lips. Lance forced himself to pull out and roll off her, before he crushed her.

He levered himself up on one elbow to watch her, enjoying the sight of her splayed legs and bare breasts. He cupped a hand over her mound, feeling possessive and proprietary. He hadn't been the first to get her naked on this bed, but he was the one who had her there now.

That thought triggered another. He could picture Art moving over Gwen, and in his mental image, Gwen's face had a sensual flush of pleasurable expectation and her eyes were as soft and inviting as her body. His hand flexed, squeezing her cunt, fingertips pressing against her opening. Gwen hadn't said she'd leave Art. She'd said she loved him.

He got to his feet and went to dispose of the condom and clean up, cursing himself for his uncharacteristic loss of control. He hadn't thought past the moment of release. He hadn't even thought to ask Gwen if she was on the pill. Condoms weren't foolproof. If she got pregnant, would she know which of them was the father?

His eye fell on the purse he'd retrieved for her from their bar table. Lance opened it and searched inside. He found the slim plastic compact that held her birth control pills. When he flicked it open, he saw the day's pill already gone. That answered one question, at least.

The piece of paper that fell out in the process answered another. The note was short and to the point, and it explained why Gwen had suddenly decided she had to have him.

She really did love Arthur Rowan. She'd fucked a complete stranger to prove it.

Chapter Four

Lance felt the sharp bite of betrayal like a knife in his belly. His hand closed around the sheet of paper, crumpling it in his fist.

A second later reason prodded him. Gwen hadn't lied to him. She'd said she loved Art and never intended to leave him. She'd had sex with him because she thought she had to, and maybe she was right. Whatever she'd been thinking, it was done now.

What next? He smoothed out the paper and read it again. Was Art in danger? Were they? He couldn't assume they weren't being watched. If there was a camera in the bedroom, he might not have been seen reading the note. But he didn't have time to stand around indulging a jealous fit because the woman he wanted wasn't his. Not if he wanted her safe, and her fiancé returned.

The incriminating note went back into her purse along with her room key. He turned on the shower and left it running while he went back to scoop Gwen into his arms.

"I need you to wash my back," he said in a clear voice. "You're the one who clawed me up. It's the least you can do."

"Mmm," Gwen agreed. She rested her head on his shoulder.

The small gesture made his gut twist. It was designed to look like affection. He knew better than to believe appearances.

Lance waited until he had her next to the shower to set her on her feet. "I found the note," he breathed against her ear.

"What?" She tried to pull back. Lance held her fast.

"Stay," he whispered. "The water's masking our voices, but there might be a camera. If you keep your mouth hidden against me, nobody watching can read your lips."

She went very still. "Lance? Are you saying we're being spied on? That somebody might be watching us right now? What goddamned note?"

Her voice came out in a low whisper despite the rigidity in her body and the intensity of her speech.

The note you got in the bar, Lance wanted to shout. *You could've told me. I would have slept with you anyway.* Instead he only said, "Never mind now. We might not have much time. You need to get dressed and get someplace safe. Stay near people, anyplace public and brightly lit. Keep a sharp eye out for anybody following you. Don't let yourself get cornered."

"Lance?" She breathed a note of fear into the single word.

"Do what I tell you." He wished he could yell. He wanted to command her obedience. Needed to believe she'd listen, be safe. If it wasn't already too late.

"I don't want a shower," she said out loud, pulling away. "You go ahead. I'm hungry."

"There's room service," Lance pointed out.

Gwen shook her head. "It'll take too long. The buffet's always open. Come and meet me there when you're ready."

She snagged clothes from the suitcase on a low stand in the dressing area next to the shower. She dressed with an efficiency of motion designed to not look like hurrying and didn't look up until she finished fastening her shoes. Her eyes met his then, dark with unspoken things he could almost see trembling on her lips. He kissed her before he could think better of it, the brief hard press of his mouth saying goodbye. "Hurry," he whispered.

Out loud, he said, "I'll find you." Then he stepped into the shower and hoped he was buying her enough time. That it hadn't already run out.

Gwen turned the hall corner, wondering if her heart was going to explode in her chest. Terror cleared her brain, at least, and when she saw the events of the last hour replaying in her memory she wondered what the hell she'd been thinking.

She loved Art. Despite which she'd taken the first opportunity to fuck another man. Not just any man, but their proposed partner. Screwing up their personal and professional lives with one insane action.

It hadn't felt insane at the time. It had felt necessary, urgent, inevitable. Maybe she'd been on drugs. Maybe Lance was onto something when he'd asked about her drink. Maybe she wasn't a cheating whore.

Nobody was behind her, so Gwen fumbled in her purse as if checking for her room key. She felt a piece of paper. The note Lance talked about? She glanced around for mirrors, security cameras. Nothing. So she palmed it and read the lines. Then she slid it back into her bag and continued on her way as if her entire being wasn't seared in agony.

If you ever want to see Arthur Rowan again, you will take Lance Tremblay to your hotel room and seduce him. We'll know if you don't cooperate.

Art had gone to take a phone call and hadn't come back. The note must've been slipped into her bag while she was dancing, or maybe while she watched the couple on the dance floor. Her drink could've been doctored at the same time. Although she hadn't felt drugged. Just oddly doubled. As if there had been two of her and one of them had been intimately acquainted with Lance. Had been starved for him, in fact.

She remembered the frantic fear she'd felt when she thought he'd leave her. There might be drugs that would cloud thinking and lower inhibitions, but what drug made you feel like you were in love with a man you'd never seen before?

Since there was no answer for that, Gwen put it aside. Lance had good reason to think the hotel room was bugged—the note implied that. There might be cameras or microphones in the room. Maybe both. Her skin crawled at the thought of unknown strangers watching her making love with Art before they kidnapped him and threatened her with a note. Then watching her strip and spread her legs for Lance.

Her stomach churned with nausea. The only good point was that whoever held Art thought she was cooperating. But Lance might be in danger. She might be too. And Art. Her chest felt tight, as if she couldn't draw a full breath. Art might not be safe, wherever he was. Whoever had taken him might just be playing with all of them.

This was about Excalibur. It had to be. Somebody wanted the project to fail. Or wanted to steal the project before it launched. Somebody who might not have put together the same pieces Lance did, who might think she was a dumb blonde and a good opportunity to play the two men against each other. But not a threat.

Gwen made her way toward the lobby, following Lance's advice. She blended with groups and avoided dark areas. She went to the buffet even though she didn't think she could ever eat again, because she'd said she was going there and if she'd been overheard, she didn't want to arouse suspicion. Also, Lance might try to meet her there.

Once in her seat, she pulled her smart phone out of her pocket and checked for internet connection. She was on a network. Good. No messages from Art. Bad. Where was he?

She was on the verge of biting through her lower lip when Lance appeared looking freshly showered and utterly welcome. He made his way through the buffet as if he didn't have anything but hunger on his mind, and slid into the seat across from her with the smile of a recently satisfied lover.

Or maybe she was projecting.

Gwen straightened up and stopped taking her nerves out on her mouth. "Hello. I wasn't sure you'd make it."

"I never stand up a beautiful woman." He reached out, captured her hand, and raised it to his lips. He kissed her palm, then the inside of her wrist. She stared at him, rocked by the depth of her reaction to his unexpected action. He'd kissed her hand. Her hand. And she felt like they'd just had sex in public.

Of course, in a way they had. Maybe. Probably. Video cameras were such tiny things now, they could be hidden anywhere. For all she knew, "Gwen Does Lance" was already being streamed on the internet.

"Good to know," she managed to say in a reasonably light tone.

"I did get a message," Lance went on, kissing her knuckles while he spoke.

She sucked in a breath. For two reasons. Lance's lips on her skin made her weak in the knees, and the fact that he was hiding them in her hand under the guise of kissing meant that they had trouble.

"Oh?"

"No words. Just a video file." His eyes held hers. Her stomach sank. She could guess what he'd seen.

"Of?"

"You. With Art."

So. The room had been bugged before they checked in. Somebody had been waiting for them.

"Nothing else?" It didn't make sense. Somebody wanted Lance to see her sleeping with her fiancé? Was that supposed to shock him? Or make him think he'd been set up to be recorded next?

Lance gave a negative shake of his head. Gwen stared at him, perplexed. She didn't realize she was biting on her lip again until Lance's fingertips pressed there, stopping her.

Gwen sat forward, leaning across the small table. She kissed his cheek so she could murmur in his ear, "I don't know what that was supposed to accomplish, but I think this is about Excalibur."

"You think?" He skimmed her cheek with his lips, mimicking her. "Vegas is full of hackers, we're here to solidify the partnership, and we're being electronically monitored."

"I need access to your servers," Gwen whispered while she pretended to nuzzle him because he was irresistible. He was irresistible, which made it easy to pretend.

"Why?"

"Because Excalibur is the sword in the stone."

He pulled back and gave her a long, thoughtful look. It was clear from the look that he didn't understand. But he drew her close again to ask, "How?"

"Routers," Gwen said by way of explanation. "Art wrote some of the code for the software used by router manufacturers. Excalibur is already all over the internet. All it needs is the key to pull the sword from the stone. You have server farms. Use them to transmit the key. Nobody will be able to stop or steal Excalibur after that."

Lance grew very still. "You're taking a risk telling me that. If I'm behind Arthur's disappearance, you've just played into my hand. And told me you have the key."

"You aren't the one behind this," Gwen breathed.

"How do you know?"

"It's very hard to lie with your body." His had tried to protect her on the dance floor, had possessed her on the bed. The sex had been raw and primal, not controlled or polished. Whatever insanity had flared between them, he'd been caught in it as completely as she was. He hadn't been acting. "You would never hurt me."

She knew it as surely as she knew she'd never be capable of hurting him. She hadn't been acting, either. Some part of her thought she loved him.

Lance framed her face with his hands and kissed her, so slowly and thoroughly that when he finished Gwen felt like she'd never been kissed before. And also like she'd been kissing him all her life.

"You confuse me," she blurted.

"I confuse you?" He raised a brow, clearly returning the sentiment.

"Yes. When you kiss me, I feel like I've always known what kissing you was like. I'd just forgotten until you reminded me. It's very confusing."

"Let me confuse you some more." He bent forward and brushed his mouth across hers once, twice, then let his lips trail up to kiss the spot just beneath her earlobe. He breathed a series of numbers and letters. Gwen closed her eyes and pictured the characters in her mind, making the memory visual and auditory to better imprint it.

Her cell phone buzzed. She picked it up, and saw a text message waiting. She opened the message and read the instructions. She looked up at Lance. He watched her with steady eyes. He made her feel calmer, more centered. Odd, considering how completely he'd overturned her world. "Excuse me. I need to find the restroom."

He made a gesture that managed to convey acceptance and regret and a patient willingness to wait for her return. Gwen kissed his cheek again and breathed out the key. Then she walked toward the ladies' room, not knowing if she'd ever see him again. If he'd be taken before she returned, or if she'd be taken before he could reach her.

It didn't matter now. Both of them had the necessary pieces to release Excalibur. Launching it might endanger all three of them, or might save them. But once it was done, it couldn't be undone. Killing them wouldn't stop it.

Chapter Five

"You'll come with me." The voice wasn't Gwen's. Lance hadn't really expected it to be hers. Gwen had done a lot of surprising things tonight, but she hadn't stuck a gun into his side. This voice was feminine, but had a Russian accent that made him think of her as Natasha. Was there a Boris nearby? Time would tell.

"I make it a policy not to disappoint beautiful women," Lance said. "But you put me in a difficult position. If I stay, I disappoint you. If I go with you before my dinner partner comes back, I disappoint her."

"She will get used to disappointment," Natasha replied. "Come."

Lance stood, hoping Gwen was getting away. The text message she'd received had to have been her next set of instructions. "Are you responsible for the fascinating video sample I got this evening?"

"You found it fascinating?"

"Yes." Lance thought it over. "The image quality was very good. The angle captured a lot of the action."

"There was a lot of action to capture."

"There was," Lance agreed. Art might be a genius with computers, but he was clearly no slacker when it came to women. Gwen hadn't cheated on him because he couldn't satisfy her in bed.

"She's a whore," Natasha stated. "She slept with him before she slept with you. In the same bed."

"She's engaged to him," Lance pointed out in the spirit of fairness. "If I can't persuade her to leave him for me, maybe I don't deserve to win the best penis contest."

"You take her side?"

"I take my own side."

Natasha made what might have been an approving noise. But he noticed that she left the gun in his ribs. He didn't try to disarm her. He needed information. Unless he'd seriously misread the situation, his best chance to get it meant cooperating.

He didn't anticipate the chloroform she slapped over his face as soon as the elevator door closed on the two of them.

* * * * *

Gwen positioned herself at a slot machine and fed a coin in. She got her cell phone out and waited for signal. She pulled the lever, inserted another coin, and worked her way to the command line for admin access on a server halfway around the world from Nevada. While she played the slots with the mechanical rhythm of a Vegas regular, she also tapped in Lance's alpha-numeric sequence and waited for approval.

Access denied.

Terror clutched at her. What if Lance had given her the wrong information, made her think she had access when she was only being played?

Quit panicking, Gwen told herself. *Typos happen*. She retyped the characters, careful not to make a mistake this time. And this time, she didn't.

When access was granted, she entered the key and prayed she was doing the right thing by pulling the sword from the stone. If she was wrong, if she'd just killed Art, she hoped they'd come to kill her, too.

She cleared her screen, set her browser to a popular website featuring cat images with silly captions, and put the cell phone back in her bag. She won five thousand dollars on her next pull of the lever, and was only glad because it meant casino security would surround her, at least for a few minutes.

When the uproar died down and she was alone with her check, Gwen tried to find safety with it at a blackjack table. Before she could sit down, a hand closed over her arm.

"You will come with me."

The hand and the voice belonged to an eastern European man who didn't seem like the type a smart person would argue with. Gwen went.

* * * * *

When she woke up, her mouth tasted like cotton, her head ached, and Art was across the room from her. Her heart leaped at the sight of him. If she'd been asked a week ago if it that was possible, she would have said it was a nice figure of speech. But life had gotten eventful since they'd arrived in Vegas and now she knew that a heart could leap. Art was alive and safe, or at least he was for now, and she was so relieved she just sat there drinking him in with her eyes.

He was asleep sitting up, or maybe he'd been drugged. His hands were duct-taped behind his back, and he was leaning against a table leg. A movement on the other side of the room caught her attention, and she drew in a sharp breath when she saw Lance in the same condition. But alive. Both of her men were beautifully, miraculously alive.

"I see you are awake," the voice of her male captor said. Gwen looked around but didn't see him. Intercom system? "I kept my word. You cooperated, and you are now seeing Arthur Rowan alive."

"Let him go," Gwen said. She didn't have to fake the tremor in her voice. "I did what you wanted."

"Yes, you did." The voice sounded obscene. Gwen wasn't overly surprised when a video display appeared on the wall. A second formed beside the first. So she got to watch herself perform with both men in tandem. A cold knot of dread formed in her stomach. Whatever was coming next wasn't going to be good.

Art woke up while the video played. She wasn't sure, but she thought Lance was awake too. Faking unconsciousness, maybe.

"You see why you shouldn't trust the woman," the voice said. "Or the man. Both of them betrayed you. Give me what I want, and you can go."

"What about them?" Art asked in the mild voice Gwen had learned meant he'd turned lethal underneath.

If only she knew who his wrath was aimed at. Her? Lance?

"Leave the two of them to me," the man suggested. "I'll amuse myself with her while he has to watch. Until I tire of toying with them."

She would have thrown up, but her stomach was empty.

"No," Art said.

Not because he still loved her, probably. But because he was a good man, and honorable men didn't leave women they'd once loved to be raped and murdered. That was some comfort, but Gwen hoped it wouldn't get Art killed.

"I will have what I want. I'll amuse myself with her while both of you watch, if you prefer that."

"I don't think I'd find that very amusing," Gwen heard herself say. She looked more closely at Art's hands. Were they still trapped? Or had he managed to free himself? "Then again, maybe you have a very tiny penis. That'd be good for a laugh."

"I'll teach you not to speak unless spoken to," mystery man threatened.

Was Lance awake? Had he worked himself loose too? Was she imagining things, seeing what she wanted to see?

"You slept with him," Art bit out in a cold, flat voice.

"Yes." Gwen could hardly deny it, even if she'd wanted to. The proof was right in front of them. On endless replay, apparently.

"She did it for you," Lance said from the other side of the room.

So she hadn't imagined that he was awake.

"For me?" Art looked at the video image, then at Lance. "How does my fiancé coming her brains out with another man benefit me?"

"She faked it," Lance said. "I would have, if I were her. She didn't have much choice. She got a note that said she'd do it if she ever wanted to see you alive again, and that they'd know if she didn't cooperate. Clearly they did have a way of keeping tabs."

Lance sounded awfully understanding for a man who thought she'd used him to save the man she loved.

"She told you about this note?" Art asked.

"No. I found it. After."

"And then you confronted her."

"No." Lance met Art's eyes steadily. "Then I gave the best performance I was capable of for any eyes and ears that might be on us and tried to send her to safety."

"You weren't hurt? Angry?"

"I'm human," Lance said. A very indirect answer, Gwen noticed. "And being human, I understood. Gwen loves you."

"Why are you telling me this?"

"Mostly to waste Boris' time. Gwen got a second message. It meant one or both of us were about to be taken next. If it was her, I had a job to do. If it was me, she'd do it." His eyes went to her. "You did do it, didn't you?"

"I did."

"Then Boris loses. No matter what he does with us."

"That's true," Gwen agreed.

"You pulled the sword from the stone," Art said.

Gwen nodded. "I thought it was the right thing to do."

"What do you mean, pulled the sword from the stone?" The disembodied voice Lance had referred to as Boris grew sharp.

"I launched Excalibur," Gwen said, spelling it out for him. "It's entwined with router software all over the internet. You'll never be able to shut it down without pulling the plug on everything simultaneously, and that can't be done."

"You've killed me," the man said. "If my bosses find you when they come looking for me, it might buy me some time. So I leave you like a peace offering."

If he worked for the Russian mob, Gwen really hoped they weren't still there like a peace offering when the bosses arrived.

There was a brief silence. Then Art asked her, "Before that, you gave the key to Lance? So he could do it if you couldn't?"

"Yes. I knew we could trust him."

Art gave her a look she couldn't read. "How do I know I can trust either of you?"

"I don't know," Gwen said. "You only have my word for it that I would have told you about Lance if you hadn't seen the video first. But there is one thing Lance didn't tell you the truth about. Not because he lied, but because he didn't know."

"What?" Art and Lance asked the question together.

"I didn't sleep with him because of the note. He found it before I did. I didn't read it myself until after he'd sent me out of the room."

Silence. Gwen twisted her own bound wrists behind her back. Duct tape was fiendishly hard to break.

"Why?" It was Lance who asked.

"Because," Gwen said simply. "I couldn't do anything else. It was like I had two people in my brain, and one of them remembered being in love with you and being your lover. I don't think I imagined that, because the reality was exactly the way I remembered. I was hoping I could blame it on being drugged, but drugs don't make you remember being in love. They don't make you remember exactly how it felt to have sex with a partner you'd never been with. I can't explain that."

"You didn't know about the note." Lance stared at her. "All those things you said. You meant them?"

"I did. Or the other me did, anyway. It's kind of confusing."

"So you slept with him because you wanted him," Art said.

"If it was only wanting, we wouldn't have fallen," Gwen said, feeling wistful and sad. "I love him, Art. And I love you. I don't think there's any way to fix that. So you probably can't trust me."

"It's not that confusing," Lance said. "Do you want to know why I slept with you?"

"Because I took off my dress and threw it at you?"

Art made a choking sound.

"No," Lance said. "Because I felt like I'd been in love with you all my life. But I'd forgotten until I saw you. I can't explain that, either. But it's the truth."

"You love each other," Art summed up. "Which neither of you can explain, because you had never laid eyes on each other before tonight."

"That or we were both drugged," Gwen offered. "I guess we'll know if we wake up tomorrow sober but still feel the same way."

"Right." Art shook his free hands, crossed to her, freed her, and helped her stand. Then he turned to help Lance. And the two of them broke the locked door that imprisoned them in somebody else's hotel room, so all three of them could get on with escaping before the Russian mafia found them.

* * * * *

A week later, Gwen sat across from Art in the temporary office he and Lance had rented while they tied up loose ends in Vegas. Art was behind his desk. She was in the guest chair facing it. The chair felt stiff and formal. Just like her.

She set the ring on the desk in front of him before she could lose her nerve or her fragile grip on her emotions. Giving it up meant the death of a dream. She'd intended to return it sooner, but there hadn't been an opportunity. Or rather she hadn't created an opportunity. It had been easier to avoid Art, letting the rush of work separate them.

And she'd been working up the nerve to see him face-to-face. She hadn't wanted to see the disappointment in his eyes. Or the hurt. She'd failed him. Even if he could forgive her for that, she couldn't forgive herself.

So she had to return his ring. Then she'd get out of his life.

"You're going to him, then," Art said, looking at the ring.

"No." Gwen was surprised by the calm tone of her voice. Maybe she sounded calm because she'd exhausted every emotion she had. "I can't go to him."

"Why not?" Art picked up the ring and turned it, as if watching the diamond make rainbows out of light.

"Because I love you," Gwen stated. She'd thought that was obvious. "I can't go to one man when I'm in love with another."

"Why leave me, then?"

"Same reason." She loved both of them. She couldn't have either of them.

"You remember loving him."

"I remember loving both of you. I just met you first." Not that it would have made any difference. It would have ended the same way.

"I lost you over him once already," Art said. "I don't intend to lose you again. Don't you think you could learn to live with loving both of us?"

Gwen stared at him. "And pretend I don't ache for him at night when I'm lying beside you? What kind of life would that be? What kind of relationship would that be?" Then she frowned. "What do you mean, you lost me over him once already?"

"You know. You remember." His eyes were steady. His voice gentle.

"I have strange dreams and memories that can't really be mine, even if they are ruining my life," Gwen said. Then she realized she'd used the wrong tense. "Did ruin. I almost married a millionaire."

Lance and Art had announced the joint launch of Excalibur at Defcon. The partnership was already an enormous success. The mysterious Boris and his female accomplice hadn't been found. Art had traced the text message she'd gotten to an online account. The user's name was listed only as Mordred.

"You still could." Art offered the ring back to her on his upraised palm. "You're entitled to a share of the money even if you won't reconsider the marriage, but I hope you will. This belongs to you. I didn't ask for it back."

"I'd reconsider if you and Lance would share." The words came out before she even realized she'd thought them. As soon as she heard the secret wish of her torn heart spoken aloud, the world seemed to slow, hushed and waiting for whatever answer might come.

"Would you?" Art turned his head. "What do you think, Lance?"

Lance came all the way into the office and stood beside the desk, facing her. His eyes caught and held hers. "I'm in. If she'll wear my ring along with yours. I don't care how we legalize it as long as the three of us know she's my wife too."

The two of them visibly aligned staggered her as their body language underscored the words she'd never dreamed she'd hear. They were serious. "You've both lost your minds."

"Coward." Lance actually smiled at her, which didn't take any of the sting out of the insult. She wasn't a coward. She wasn't afraid to love them. Was she?

"Marry us both, Guinevere," Art said in a soft voice. "Neither of us can bear to lose you again. The world is a different place now. We're different. We have choices we didn't have before."

If she hadn't been sitting down, her knees might have failed her. "Don't call me that." Her voice came out too sharp. It was only a name. A word. A sound. But it belonged to the memory of pain and loss.

"You know who you are. You know who we are."

"Reincarnation." Gwen looked at the ring on Art's open palm as she said it. She wanted it back. It had felt like she'd lost the best part of herself when she'd taken it off. "It doesn't matter. I failed you, Arthur. I'm not worthy."

"If love makes a heart unworthy, what hope does the world have?"

"You have an answer for everything." She wrapped her arms around herself, feeling cold in spite of the desert sun streaming through one wide window. "We loved each other before. It didn't solve anything."

"I was proud. I was young. I hadn't suffered enough to know how rare love is, what a treasure it is in whatever form you may find it."

Tears burned the backs of her eyes. She hadn't exhausted her supply after all. "I destroyed your kingdom."

"You loved my best knight. If love could shatter the world we'd built, what chance did we have against hate?"

Gwen shook her head, at a loss for an answer. She turned to Lance. "Are you going to exonerate me too?"

"We all made mistakes. Then and now. But they were honest mistakes." Lance came to kneel in front of her. He took her hand and held it between both of his. "And in spite of everything, we did work together this time instead of letting ourselves be divided. That's where we all failed before. If we'd stood together, it might have ended very differently."

"We did work together," Gwen said, thinking of it in that light. None of them could have launched Excalibur alone. It had taken all three of them extending trust. Despite circumstances that should have made them all suspicious of each other.

"I think we're all much better off as a team." Lance kissed her hand, his eyes coaxing. "Why don't you give us a night to convince you?"

It was tempting, especially with his kiss still warming the skin on the back of her hand and sending heat along her nerve endings. She looked to Art and saw desire in his blue eyes. They were seriously offering her a night together. It sounded like a dream come true. The chance to be loved by both men she loved.

"You think this could work?" She directed the question to Art.

He nodded.

It was one thing to fantasize about having two lovers at once, being shared between two men. The reality was bound to be something different. But she knew from past memories that being with them separately hadn't worked. Did they have anything to lose by trying?

"Okay." Gwen leaned forward to brush her mouth against Lance's. A tiny kiss that made her hungry for more. "You win. A night for all of us to see what it's like. If you prove to me that the three of us can be happy together, I'll marry both of you."

"We already know we're miserable separately," Art pointed out.

"Yes, but what if we're miserable together too?" She couldn't stand to be the cause of their misery. Better to set them both free to find happiness with somebody else. Except that it hadn't worked before, and the sense of history repeating told her it wouldn't work now either. The three of them were bound together.

"Tell me how miserable you are an hour from now." Art left his desk and came around to her. He slid the ring back onto her finger, his eyes holding hers like a silent vow. It settled into place, welcome and familiar, but the promise it represented had changed. This wasn't just about the two of them anymore.

Then he moved to unbutton her shirt. He started at the hollow of her throat and worked his way down, not quite touching her in the process. When he'd freed the last button, he opened her shirt to display the pale peach silk of her bra to Lance. Who leaned in to kiss the curve of her breast, trailing his lips along it, following the edge of her bra cup until he kissed the valley in between her breasts.

The kiss there shivered along her nerve endings, making her nipples harden and her breasts ache to be touched. Art stripped her shirt away and unfastened the hooks behind her that held the bra in place. Then he took that off her, too, leaving her bare from the waist up. His hand cupped one breast. Lance mirrored the action on her opposite side. Her eyes fell shut as the sensation of being touched by both of them washed over her.

Two masculine hands were replaced by two mouths, tonguing her nipples as if they'd choreographed it while desire heated her to the flashpoint. She wasn't sure which of them went to work undoing her pants, but it was Art who closed his mouth over hers, kissing her with expert skill. His tongue sought hers out as he deepened the kiss, the taste of him so welcome and familiar she felt like she'd come home.

Cool air met the skin of her abdomen. Hands lifted her hips, tugged her pants down. And then she was naked in Art's guest chair while he kissed her and another man stroked his hands all over her body.

"Right here, in your office?" Gwen managed to get the question out. Although as quickly as they'd gotten her naked, there couldn't be any question of where. Except maybe to choose between desk and floor.

"It's too far to the nearest bed," Art answered. "I want you, Gwen. I need you. I love you."

She needed him too. She'd missed him all week, ached for his touch, for the sound of his voice. She loved him, and that made him as necessary to her as air. She clutched at his shirt to bring him closer while he kissed her again. Lance kissed her belly and ran a hand lower, between her legs, petting her sex while Art ravished her mouth. When she felt one finger push slowly inside, she groaned. And opened her thighs wider, inviting more.

This was really happening. She was naked, being kissed by one man, while another stroked her pussy until she was writhing. They were turning her into a knot of quivering need and the penetration of Lance's finger wasn't nearly enough. When he withdrew that, she wanted to scream.

Art lifted her out of the chair, turned her, and backed her against the desk, hitching her hips up onto it. He pushed her thighs apart, stepped between them, and unfastened his pants while Lance came behind her to support her back. Lance held her, kissing the side of her neck, caressing her breasts, while Art freed his cock and guided it between

her legs. He rubbed the head along her folds, coating himself with the slick moisture he found there before he thrust into her.

Gwen dropped her head back onto Lance's shoulder, biting her lip to keep from coming instantly, before Art was even all the way inside her. The raw pleasure of his body entering hers while Lance held her and touched her was almost more than she could stand.

The position made Art's thrusts shallow, but his width made her feel every inch of his penetration. He reached down to stroke her clit while he rocked into her, and that made her break. Her spine bowed as orgasm ripped through her. His followed, his cock jerking inside her as he came. Art kept thrusting into her until they were both spent.

It couldn't have been ten minutes from the time she'd agreed to be with both of them. Gwen sat there, panting and shuddering in the aftermath of pleasure, feeling dazed from the reunion of their flesh. Could their hearts truly be reunited? The thought of the three of them forging a new union that enveloped all of them shimmered in her mind like a dream of paradise.

Art kissed her again and again, his mouth on hers so tender and loving it made her heart ache. She could feel the love in the way he touched her and took her. "I love you," she whispered against his lips.

"I love you," Art answered.

She burrowed into him and wrapped her arms around him, hugging him close, blinking against the stinging in her eyes. "I thought I'd lost you."

He hugged her back, hard. "I thought you loved him more than me."

"Different. Not more or less." Then she shifted on the hard wood of the desk. "Are you really planning to keep me here all night? Or is there a bed somewhere big enough for three?"

Lance laughed, a low sensual sound she'd never get tired of hearing. Art smoothed her hair and kissed her forehead. "There's a bed big enough for three. But once we get you in it, we might never let you out."

"I'll take my chances," Gwen said.

Chapter Six

The three of them went back to where it had started, the hotel room Gwen still shared with Art, although they'd never been in it at the same time since the first day they'd arrived. Gwen had thought that was luck, letting her postpone the inevitable until she felt less raw and more able to move forward. Now she realized Art had orchestrated that space between them. Giving her room so she wouldn't feel the need to flee. She'd run away the last time. Maybe they really could learn from their mistakes.

Gwen stared at the bed she'd shared with both men separately. In a very short time, they'd created a lot of history in that bed.

"Good thing the camera's gone." The two men had gone after it, right after they'd escaped together. If she hadn't seen the destroyed remains, she wouldn't have been able to sleep in this room. With safety and privacy assured, though, staying here had meant keeping a connection, however fragile, to both of her lovers.

Art finished hanging the Do Not Disturb sign and locking the door behind them. He crossed the room to stand beside her, his hand going to rest on her hip. "I'm not sure who enjoyed crushing it more, Lance or me."

"It's a draw," Lance said. He moved to take her other side, his fingers twining with hers. "I'm not against the idea of making home movies for the three of us to enjoy, but I have a strong aversion to sneaking voyeurs and blackmailers."

"What happened to that footage, anyway?" Gwen asked, not really stalling. She just hadn't thought to ask, after her initial relief when it wasn't broadcast on the internet following Art and Lance's business announcement.

"We took care of it." There was something in Art's voice that made her turn her head and meet his eyes.

"Oh?"

"Yes." He smiled, and it wasn't a kind expression. It held the fierce joy of victory over injustice. "We erased it. And everything else the hacker known as Mordred did or ever tries to do on any computer that ever connects to the internet."

Their version of revenge warmed her soul. "Good thing you guys are on the right side."

"We use our powers only for good," Art agreed. "And now we're going to use them to win our lady's favor."

"You already have that," Gwen admitted.

Lance's hand tightened on hers as he bent to kiss the sensitive spot just below her ear. "Maybe we want to show off for you anyway. And you're still not convinced a relationship that includes all three of us can work."

Not convinced, maybe, but the experience in the office made her cautiously hopeful.

Caution slipped away as Lance's lips travelled along her jawline and then teased the corner of her mouth. "I love you, Gwen. Let us love you together."

For an answer, she turned her face the fraction it took for her mouth to meet his. He kissed her long and deep, holding her hand while Art undressed her with practiced speed. She cooperated, shifting and raising an arm or foot as needed. When she was naked between them, she muttered against Lance's lips, "You have too many clothes on."

"Not for long." He let go of her hand so he could use both of his to strip. Behind her, she heard the rustle of fabric and the hiss of a zipper that told her Art was shedding clothing too. Then they were finished and there weren't any more barriers between them and what they all wanted.

The knowledge made her knees weak. So it was fortunate that Lance picked her up before she fell down. The two men arranged her on her side on the bed and positioned themselves on either side of her, Lance facing her, Arthur spooning up behind.

"This...oh," she whispered, at a loss for words. Arthur's body bent protectively around hers, his hand resting on her waist, his penis cushioned by her bare butt. Lance's chest met her nipples. Lower, his hard length brushed her belly. The contact seared her, awakened forbidden longings. She wanted her body joined with both of theirs, shared fully. She wasn't sure it was possible or how to ask. But just being between them was more than she'd dared to hope for.

"It shakes me too," Lance admitted. He hooked her thigh over his and pulled her closer. Art stayed with her, holding and caressing her, giving permission and approval to enjoy another man's touch. "I need you more than I imagined I could need anyone. I need to touch you and know you're safe here with us both."

"I don't know how safe this is," Gwen said unsteadily. She arched her back and moved with them both, pressing Art's cock into the cleft between her buttocks while her pelvis tilted to invite Lance's possession. His shaft rode between her thighs, his head pressing into her labia. The touch of his most intimate flesh to hers made her breath catch.

"Physically? I'm in perfect health. We all are."

Gwen let out a little laugh and shook her head. "That's not what I meant."

"Your heart is as safe with both of us as your body is," Lance promised.

"You didn't have a jealous fit when Art screwed me in front of you on the desk," Gwen allowed. "That doesn't mean I'm not still a little worried. It's not just my heart I want safe."

"You love us both," Art said, kissing her temple as his skillful fingers reached down to tease her clit, opening and readying her for Lance to take. "Let us both love you."

"I want you to," she admitted. "I want both of you to love me. With your bodies. Together."

He went still behind her. "What are you asking for?"

She fisted her hand in the sheet, nervous and frustrated. "I don't know. I don't know how this works. I mean, I could take you in my mouth if Lance was kneeling behind me, but I want to try something more. Something that lets me have sex face-to-face with one of you while the other..." Her voice trailed off into uncertainty.

"You want me to take you from behind?" Art kept petting her pussy, arousing her further while his cock heated her backside until it was all she could do not to squirm. "Full double penetration?"

"I'm not sure. I mean, hot idea. But, well. It could be awkward. Difficult."

"It doesn't have to be," Art murmured, a thread of sexual assurance in his voice. "Remember your birthday?"

She remembered. He had spent a week leading up to it. Anal play the first night, limited to gentle single-digit penetration with plenty of lubricant. More the next night. And as she grew more comfortable they'd progressed to two fingers scissoring deep inside, stretching her tissues. The next night he'd given her a small anal plug and left it inserted while they made love. The sensation of being penetrated two ways had aroused her to new heights and made their bodies fit together even tighter, increasing their mutual pleasure.

Finally he'd had her on her side while he very gently, very carefully fucked her in the ass for the first time and used a vibrator between her thighs to mind-blowing effect.

Her body shivered with remembered pleasure. "How could I forget?"

"You didn't find that awkward or difficult."

"No." Anything but. "Still. This isn't just the two of us. Can that really work with three people?"

Two men thrust against her in unison, wordlessly expressing willingness to try.

"If we're reasonably careful, yes," Art said. "What do you think, Lance?"

"I'd love to have my cock in her cunt while she takes you in the ass," Lance said, rocking against her so that his head pushed a little inside. "I'd love to watch her face

while we make her come apart. But I don't want her hurt. Is she used to anal sex, or does she want more than she can take without us leading up to it?"

"We've done it often enough for her to be comfortable with it," Art said. He stopped petting her in front and shifted his attention to the puckered opening she was aching for him to touch. His fingertip glided over it, coating it with her lubrication, awakening sensitive nerve endings. "She enjoys anal combined with vibrator play. I think she'll like taking the two of us a lot."

"Hey." Gwen wiggled her backside to get Art's attention. "She has a voice. And an interest in this decision."

"We all do." Art caressed her behind while Lance pressed a fraction deeper, his head now buried in her slick flesh. "We all have to want this to make it work."

He meant more than just this act, Gwen understood. The three-way relationship was going to be a tricky dance that required more choreography, more commitment from all three of them. But if they all truly wanted it...

"Lube," Lance said. He gripped her hips and pushed all the way inside. Her flesh welcomed his, opening for him, closing tight around him. Gwen shuddered at the sensation of being possessed by him, taking him inside. He rolled onto his back and took her with him. Gwen sprawled on top of him, loving the feel of him under and inside her. His cock rode deeper with the shift in position.

Art went to retrieve a tube from their luggage, then came back to fondle Gwen's bare, upturned backside.

"You're taking another man's cock," he murmured. "Right in front of me. Your thighs are open for him and between them you're hot and wet for him. You love having his cock inside you. You can't get enough of it."

"Yes," Gwen admitted. She rocked on top of Lance, the slide of his flesh in hers a pleasure so intense she had to close her eyes. "I love it. I love him."

Art spanked her, the action so unexpected her eyes flew wide open and she reared up. Lance caught her and pulled her back down, hard and fast, thrusting into her so

fiercely that she gasped. Her bare butt tingled with heat from the contact and her inner muscles contracted sharply.

“What—”

The question was left unformed as Art’s palm descended again. She jerked in surprise, getting deeper penetration as a result as her inner muscles contracted again and heat spread through her.

“It makes you hot, doesn’t it?” He cupped her butt cheeks, soothing away the sting with caressing hands. “Stimulates blood flow to your sex organs.”

“You could’ve warned me,” Gwen said.

“You might’ve tensed up.” Art massaged her intimately while Lance moved inside her. “And sometimes it’s the unexpected that brings the most pleasure.”

“The element of surprise.” She smiled, relaxing further, feeling loved and desired and cared for. And happy. Something about the way Art had taken her fears of jealousy and made a sex game of it lightened her heart. And the knowledge that he’d done it to increase the pleasure she took from another man’s body made it an act of giving and sharing that soothed something deep inside her.

There was a cool, wet sensation as Art applied a generous amount of anal lubricant. “I’m not going to surprise you with this,” he promised. He touched her carefully, too carefully for what she wanted. She bit her lip in frustrated desire, feeling needy and urgent but knowing she’d be grateful to him later for taking it slow.

Art inserted first one finger, then two, sliding them in and out until she was ready to beg him to screw her from behind hard and fast. As if feeling her urgency, Art shifted to scissoring his fingers deep inside her, working her open in rhythm with Lance’s thrusts. “I won’t try to enter you until you’re ready. And any time it feels like too much, we’ll stop.”

“I’m ready. I don’t want you to stop,” Gwen protested, aching for more. More of him. More of both of them. She wanted to belong to both of them at the same time, to have the proof in her body that they could share themselves fully as lovers.

"I don't want you to be sorry you asked for this," Art answered. "I want it to be so good for you that you'll want it again and again."

Lance moved under her, penetrating her fully. The motion raised her up, impaling her on Art's fingers. She groaned at the sensation. "Art. Please. Now."

He withdrew his fingers then positioned himself to replace them with his cock. "Now," he agreed.

Lance stayed still, buried deep inside her, and Gwen focused on relaxing as the pressure of Art's head against her tight, well-lubricated aperture slowly gained him entry. He kept up steady pressure as her body opened to take first the head, then his shaft, inch by inch. When he was buried in her to the hilt, he paused.

"All right?"

"Oh yes," Gwen breathed. The sensation of having her body joined completely with both of theirs threatened to shatter her senses. "I want you both, so much."

"As much as we want you." Lance stroked her hair as he waited for her to adjust to their dual possession.

"I need you. I need both of you." She pressed her cheek against Lance's chest, listening to the thunder of his heart as her inner muscles gripped his shaft tighter. She rocked against him, felt what that movement did to Art's rear penetration of her, and groaned out loud. "More. Please, more."

"We'll give you more," Lance promised. They began to move together, and Gwen fell into the moment, into the love the two of them offered, until nothing else existed. There was only the hot slide of their bodies into hers, hands on her, male and strong and possessive, heat and need and passion that built in waves until the waves cascaded over her, through her, leaving her spent and panting as they all collapsed into each other.

"Wow," Gwen said finally when she could speak again.

"Wow is a good word for it," Lance agreed. His cock jerked deep inside her one final time. Gwen's inner muscles squeezed in reaction, and still inside her anal passage, Art let out a low groan as his shaft throbbed in shared pleasure.

"Wow is right." Art withdrew, slowly and carefully, then lowered himself beside Lance and Gwen. He caressed her lower back and kissed the side of her neck. "Gwen. My heart. My love. Have we convinced you yet, or is this going to take all night?"

She felt a silly smile spread over her face. "It might take all night." She made herself move, turning her head so she could kiss Art full on the lips. "It might take the rest of our lives."

"That might be long enough," Lance said. Then he claimed a kiss of his own.

* * * * *

It was a long night, followed by a very late morning. They left the bed long enough to shower, began something there that ended back in bed, and then required another shower. It was late in the day when they finally dressed and took a limo to the county building that granted marriage licenses.

"There's a one-day waiting period," Gwen said in a demure voice as the three of them left together. "However will we spend the time?"

"We'll think of something," Art said. Lance gave her a wicked look that promised she'd enjoy it. Carnal visions danced in her head.

But instead of going back to the hotel, they took her shopping.

The first stop was a dress shop. She modeled floor-length satin first that made her look regal, then a frothy white ankle-length gown that made her think of dew-drenched gardens and mornings bright with promise.

"That one." Two male voices spoke in unison.

Gwen grinned. "I'm so glad we all agree."

They chose white tuxes to complement her gown and arranged to have everything delivered. Flowers came next. Peach rosebuds for the men matched her bouquet, a

blush of color to contrast against the white they'd wear. Gwen almost floated out, still breathing the heady perfume.

"One last thing," Lance murmured. The final stop was a jeweler's, where he chose a sapphire necklace that stole her breath. "It's not a ring, but it is a circle. You'll wear it always, won't you?"

"Always."

He fastened it around her neck and stroked the stone as it settled beneath the hollow of her throat. His eyes gleamed with possessive triumph. "You belong to both of us now."

She always had, but in the past that had meant pain. Not the joy that threatened to shatter her soul now because it was too big for her to contain.

The next day they had a simple service in the hotel's chapel that was presided over by a gray-haired minister who managed to look benevolent and stern at the same time. He had Gwen and Art repeat their vows while Lance witnessed, his voice resonating as if the words had power. When it was over, Arthur kissed her and she blinked at him as if waking from a dream.

"That's funny," Gwen said after they'd signed the certificate that made everything official and walked out with her arms wound through each of theirs.

"What's funny?"

"That minister. What names did he call us?"

"He called me Arthur. And he called you..."

"Guinevere," Art and Lance murmured together.

They all stopped and turned back to look. The chapel stood empty, the officiant vanished. But Gwen thought she saw an owl swoop high overhead.

* * * * *

Merlin made a gesture with his long fingers as he walked toward the cage. A bridal bouquet materialized there, blushing roses and delicate star-shaped *Stephanotis* tied

with a white silk bow. He tossed it to Morgana, who caught it out of reflex. Shock warred with fury as she stared at the flowers she held. From her expression, he might as well have tossed her a live grenade.

She finally looked from the flowers to him, eyes narrowed. "I'm not a gracious loser."

"I expected nothing else."

She glowered. "It still won't last. They're mortal."

"There is a world beyond this one. Flesh may be temporary, but spirits are eternal."

Her fingers tightened on the stems she held. "You believe love is eternal?"

"I do."

"Passion does not last."

"Doesn't it?"

Morgana looked back down at the flowers. Raised them to inhale the bouquet. "Like these flowers, passion has its moment and then it's spent. The blossom fades and withers. The perfume becomes nothing but a memory."

"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust? No, Morgana. Energy and matter can never be destroyed. They simply change from one form to another, making themselves new. Living on."

The witch regarded the flowers as if they held the mysteries of the universe. Finally she chanted something under her breath. The star-shaped flowers gleamed like stars. The bouquet became a glittering constellation that hung in the air, still holding the shape of the form he'd given it but now transformed into something else. "You see the world with different eyes."

"Don't we all?"

Morgana nodded slowly. "You've made me see what you wanted me to see, wizard. Will you keep me here, or am I free to go?"

"You're free to go." Merlin gestured again and the cage dissolved. "Or to stay, if you choose."

"Stay." She gave him a fathomless look. Then looked again at the bouquet of stars that shone softly. "Why?"

"Passion. Perhaps something more."

"I've opposed you for centuries."

"We had a great deal in common once."

"You really believe in all of it. Might for right. Love conquers all. The heart is eternal."

"I don't believe. I know." His quiet statement unsettled her more than any show of magic could have. Merlin watched and waited. And when she took the first step toward him, he offered his hand. She hesitated before placing hers in it. Then she came to him, walking through the glimmer of a new constellation that blazed brighter as their magic joined.

About the Author

Charlene Teglia writes romance with humor and speculative fiction elements. She can't imagine any better life than making up stories about hunky Alpha heroes who meet their match and live happily ever after, whether it happens right next door, in outer space or the outer limits of imagination. When she's not writing, she can be found hiking around the Olympic Peninsula with her family or opening and closing doors for cats.

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

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