



**Marilyn Lee Unleashed**

**Presents**

**Loving Large-Yours, Only**

**And Always**

**By**

**Marilyn Lee**

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*Don't despair. When you least expect it, the hurt from Sam will dissolve and you'll fall head over heels in love again. It could happen at any time in any place. Just make sure you're ready to accept and embrace it when it happens.*

Autumn Walker's mother's words flashed into her mind the moment she walked into the condo association meeting and saw him.

The man who caught her attention was tall, with long legs, wide shoulders, a narrow waist, and a taut ass. He might have stepped right off the cover of one of the Native American capture romances she and her friends had devoured as teenagers. She could easily imagine him bare-chested with long, very dark, silky hair pulled back from his face and hanging down his back as he sat astride a horse without a saddle.

Two women, who she suspected were more interested in spending time in his bed than they were in discussing proposed changes in condo fees, commanded his attention.

She stared at him, feeling herself going wet. What woman wouldn't want to be up close and personal with a man so sexy just the sight of him generated capture fantasies?

What she wouldn't give for the courage to strut across the room and join the two women clambering for his attention. She sighed. If only she were tall and slender with mounds of flowing locks like the women vying to hold his interest. But the handsome, sexy male who looked as if he'd just finished posing for the cover of a romance novel wasn't likely to be impressed with her five-foot, five-inch plump body or her dark brown skin. He probably preferred the tall, slender, blue-eyed blondes gazing so adoringly up at him.

Almost as if he felt her eyes on him, he suddenly turned his head, glanced briefly in Autumn's direction, looked away, and then did a double take. He arched a brow and locked his gaze with hers.

Embarrassed at having been caught staring, Autumn still couldn't look away from his dark, sexy, probing gaze. Her heart raced and the erotic imagination she'd struggled to control since her divorce quickly flooded her mind with visions of standing naked before him while he ran his big hands all over her body. Her cheeks burned at the delicious thought of feeling his smooth palms spanking her naked, dark ass cheeks until they burned with heat.

Oh to feel him lubing her up before he gripped her hips and fucked her ass, slow and deep. She bit her lip, going wet as she mentally savored the thought of him cupping his hands over her breasts as he thrust in and out of her rear.

She wore a pretty pink dress with a skirt that ended just below her knees. He could easily push it up to expose a hot pink thong. Once he pushed that skimpy piece of fluff aside he'd have easy access to both her ass and her pussy.

He arched a brow while the corners of his sensual lips slowly curved upward into an appreciative smile. His gaze shifted down to her breasts for several long moments before he looked into her eyes again.

Autumn caught her breath. Was she imaging things or did she detect a hint of interest in his gaze? He had definitely checked out her breasts.

Both blondes glanced at Autumn. One then touched his arm. The other placed a hand against his chest.

*I guess they're telling you he's off limits. As if you need that warning.*

The object of all three women's' desire turned his attention back to the women at his side.

Autumn released a sigh of disappointment, still unable to tear her gaze away from him. He was so sexy.

He spoke briefly to the two women before turning his attention back to Autumn.

She swallowed and stared into his almost hypnotic eyes. He must be interested in her.

The women spoke to him again, seemingly determined to reclaim his attention.

Briefly turning his gaze back to the women, he flashed a smile and spoke to them.

Autumn watched in amazement as he then quickly strolled towards her, ignoring the women's efforts to keep him at their sides.

She swallowed and moistened her lips while her heart hammered against her ribcage.

He stopped a foot or so in front of her. He extended his hand. "Hello." He had a deep, sexy voice.

"Hi."

"I'm Seneka Elkhorn."

Seneka Elkhorn. Nice name. Nice voice. Nice body. Sexy as hell man.

She held out her hand.

A shiver of anticipation danced down her spine when his fingers closed over hers. She imagined him whispering sweet

nothings in her ear in that deep, velvety voice as he caressed her bare skin with the big warm hand cradling hers.

“And you are?”

She blinked. “I’m sorry. What?”

“What’s your name? Mine’s Seneka Elkhorn.”

*Get a grip, woman and stop gawking as if you’ve never met a drop-dead gorgeous hunk.* “Autumn Walker.”

His eyes lingered on her bare left hand. “Autumn is my favorite time of the year.”

“Oh...is it?”

“Oh yes.” He smiled. “I see you’re not wearing a ring, but is there a Mr. ‘She’s All Mine So Back Off’ lurking somewhere?”

She’d never been happier to be divorced and commitment free. She shook her head. “Not anymore.”

His smile widened. “No? This must be my lucky night.”

His lucky night? Lost in a haze of erotic fantasies, she racked her brain for some witty remark that would titillate and entertain him while making him want to get to know her.

She stole a glance at his left hand. Bare. Thank God.

The association president went to the podium. “Good evening, everyone. We have a number of issues on the agenda so please find seats so we can begin.”

Autumn stifled a groan. Why did the blasted meeting have to start on time? She reluctantly withdrew her hand from his. “I guess I’d better find a seat.”

He slipped a hand under her elbow. “Yes. Let’s do that.”

His fingers on her bare skin sent a tingle through her. She turned back to face him, hoping she'd managed to conceal her emotional turmoil from him. "I see a seat—"

"A seat?" He nodded toward two empty seats on the other side of the room. "There are two over there. Join me?"

She hesitated. Contemplating flirting with him as they waited for the meeting to start was one thing. Sitting with him might be too close to a line she'd never crossed before. Her divorce from Sam still stung. The reason he'd divorced her hadn't changed enough to make a difference in her life.

"Autumn," his fingers tightened on her elbow. He leaned down until his lips were a breath away from her ear. "I won't hurt you," he promised softly.

She stared up into his dark eyes and felt almost as if he'd read her mind and knew of her hurt. "What?"

"You can trust me, Autumn."

Trust didn't come easy. Sam had broken her heart, injured her pride, and damaged her self-esteem. When Sam left her, she'd decided lost love hurt and that love in general was overrated. Since then she had managed to remain romantically unscathed by channeling all her time and energy into preparing her students for careers in math and science.

Some of her students had done very well. She found satisfaction in celebrating their triumphs with them. Her life wasn't exciting. It was safe. Safety was important.

He caressed her elbow. "You can trust me, Autumn."

Her desire to accept his word and trust him gave her pause. She knew nothing about him except that she found him more sexually

exciting than any man she'd ever met. He seemed to want to spend at least an hour or so in her company. An hour wouldn't make much difference to him but it might act as a balm to her wounded ego.

She smiled up at him. "Okay."

"Great." He gave her a slow, warm smile before he led her over to the two empty chairs on the other side of the room. Once she was seated he sat so close to her, his thigh pressed against hers.

She attempted to draw her thigh away from his.

He responded by shifting in his seat in a manner that allowed him to press his thigh against hers again.

She inhaled sharply and glanced at him.

He arched a brow and ensured she was even more aware of him by sliding an arm along the back of her chair. He leaned so close she felt his breath on her cheek. "Relax, Autumn. I don't bite — at least not in public."

She blushed and turned her attention back to the front of the room. If he touched her, she wasn't sure how she'd respond.

He didn't.

Nevertheless, she spent the entire meeting wondering if he were as aware of her as she was of him. His thigh pressing against hers seemed to indicate he was yet each time she stole a glance at him, his attention was on the podium. Later, she couldn't remember how she'd voted on the proposed condo fees.

After the meeting ended, he turned to look at her. "So you're all for increased condo fees?"

"What makes you think that?"

He shrugged. "You raised your hand when the president asked for a show of hands of those in favor of the higher fees."

"I did?"

His lips twitched. "You did."

"Oh...hell!"

He laughed. "It would probably have passed anyway. Now for a really important question, do you have any plans for the rest of the night?"

"No.

"Will you have a drink with me?"

The thought that she might somehow parlay the drink invitation into a night of wanton and uncommitted sex, excited her senses and helped relax her inhibitions. "I'd like that," she admitted.

"So would I." He smiled.

He smiled a lot and lord what a warm, intimate smile. He was so handsome it was difficult not to stare at him.

"Are you ready, Autumn?"

After three years of celibacy she was more than ready to subject herself to any situation that would increase the possibility of their ending up in bed for the night. As improbable as she'd thought it before the meeting started, she was now convinced he shared her sexual interest.

She nodded. "Yes, I'm ready."

"Great." He rose. "Do you have any objections to Patty's?"

Patty's was an upscale bar two blocks from their condo complex. She'd had drinks there twice with friends. "No, I don't."

"Do you mind walking?"

Walking would extend their time together. "It's a nice night for a walk."

He nodded. "It's a very nice night, Autumn."

The steady glance he gave her left her in no doubt that he felt her presence increased the beauty of the night. She smiled.

He extended his hand towards the exit. "Then let's go."

### III

They walked to Patty's without speaking. Surprisingly, she felt comfortable with him and with the silence.

At Patty's, he escorted her to an empty booth with a view to the entrance. He asked her what she wanted to drink before going to get their drinks.

She watched him walk to the bar. She's always had a thing for men with long legs and tight asses. Seneka Elkhorn had both. And he certainly looked good in a pair of tight jeans.

He returned to the table with a martini for her and bottled water for him.

"You're not drinking?"

He shook his head. "I need a clear head."

She, on the other hand, wanted help lowering her remaining inhibitions. "Why?"

"Because I find you incredibly...interesting."

Oh, hell, yes! She smiled and sipped her drink.

He propped his elbows on the table, a slow smile curving his firm, sensual lips. "How long have you lived at Oak Gardens, Autumn?"

"Just over a year. You?"

"I've lived here for the last two years. Why haven't I seen you at any of the other meetings?"

"I'm usually too busy grading papers to attend them."

"Grading papers? What do you do for a living, Autumn?"

His steady regard allowed her to return his scrutiny without embarrassment. "I teach math at Community College."

"At last! A woman I can talk numbers to and have her really understand. This is indeed my lucky night."

She laughed. "What a wonderful man you must be, Seneka Elkhorn."

His smile turned into a wide grin. "Discerning as well as pretty."

"Pretty?"

He nodded slowly, locking his gaze with hers. "Very, very pretty."

A warm glow spread through her. "Thank you."

"You're welcome. So you're discerning, very pretty, and modest. That's quite a heady combination in one woman, Autumn."

"And very full-figured." There. She'd stated the obvious. If he had a problem with her weight, she wanted to know upfront before she lost herself in his smiling gaze.

He frowned. "You make that sound like a bad thing."

She moistened her lips. "It is for some men."

He shrugged. "Different strokes for different folks."

She liked the turn the conversation had taken. "Oh?"

"I can't see how a woman having an ample amount of curves is anything but a plus." He grinned. "Besides, you're discerning enough to realize I'm rather wonderful. How did you know? Does it ooze through my pores?"

She smiled, feeling completely relaxed with him. "Only a natural born charmer could make the ability to understand numbers sound like a compliment or make being full-figured sound like a plus."

"Oh, but it is a plus to men who prefer women with lots of curves." He took a sip of his water. "I take it your ex didn't?"

She sucked in a breath and slowly shook her head. "No. He didn't."

He glanced at her left hand. "Were you married?"

"Yes, but I'd rather not talk about him."

"Okay. What would you like to talk about?"

"Seneca Elkhorn."

"Me? Dull subject."

She shook her head. "I doubt that."

"All right. What would you like to know, Autumn?"

She'd never liked her name, but he almost made it sound like an endearment. "Elkhorn...is that...?" She paused. How did one ask a Native American what tribe he was from?

"My parents were Cherokee."

"Your parents were Cherokee? That's a unique way of stating your heritage."

"I suppose it is."

"What about you? Aren't you Cherokee too?"

"Not so you'd notice."

"You look..."

"My brothers and I are mainstream American."

"Because of where you were born or for another reason?"

"At the time, our parents felt we'd do better if we strove to be Americans instead of highlighting the fact that we're Native Americans."

"Where are you from?"

"My parents were born in Oklahoma."

"Were you born there?"

"No. I was born in California."

"So you're Cherokee?"

His lips twitched. "Yes, Autumn, Cherokee. Were you hoping I was from more movie famous stock like Comanche or Apache?"

"No!"

"No?"

She bit her lip and then laughed, but quickly sobered. "I'm sorry, Seneka. I meant no offense."

His smile held no trace of offense. "None taken. My brothers and I have grown used to non-Native women who read...what do you call them? Capture romances and then went on to weave fantasies of becoming a sex slave of a Comanche or an Apache warrior."

Was he reading her mind?

He arched a brow. "Apparently such women suffer under the delusion that they make better captors and or lovers."

She sipped her drink before she responded. "Do they?"

"Hell, no." He grinned. "Anytime you'd like proof, I'd be delighted to take you captive and make you my sex slave."

The muscles in her stomach tightened and she swallowed hard. "Your sex slave?"

“My sex slave.” He shrugged. “Or maybe you’d like to turn the tables on me and I’d wind up being your sex slave.”

“My sex slave?”

He shrugged. “I’m a modern man—open to trying almost anything. Either way, count me in any time you’re in the mood to experiment.”

*Take him up on his offer before he changes his mind or one of those blondes find a way to recapture his attention.* She parted her lips. Did she really want a one-night stand with a man who lived in her complex that she’d have to worry about avoiding the day after?

*Why worry about that when you’ve never encountered him in over a year? Take a chance for once in your life.*

*No. Go slowly.*

She cleared her throat and tore her gaze from his. “What do you do for a living, Seneka?”

“Not feeling very adventurous tonight?”

Her cheeks burned. “I’ve never been particularly adventurous.”

“A certain level of reserve, like lush curves, can be a charming quality in a woman.”

Oh, damn, but he was smooth.

He gave her a reassuring smile. “But I don’t want you to be uncomfortable with me. I’m a CPA. My partner and I—”

“Your partner? Are you married or involved with anyone?”

He didn’t wear a ring, but then married men on the prowl often didn’t. The unasked question had plagued her from the moment she set eyes on him.

He shook his head slowly. "No. By partner I meant my business partner. We're both CPAs."

He appeared to be in his thirties, which was well past the time when most men married. "Why aren't you married, Seneka?"

"I haven't met anyone I want to marry."

"Never?"

He sighed, sitting back in his chair. "I was married."

"What happened?"

"I married my college sweetheart after graduation."

"You're divorced too?"

"No. I'm a widower." His Adam's apple bobbed and he raked a hand through his hair.

Hearing the pain in his voice she decided his loss must be recent. "Can you talk about her?"

He sighed again. "She died a little over two years ago of lung cancer. It felt so unfair. Hell, neither of us even smoked."

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Seneka."

His jaw clenched. "Thanks. She was the love of my life. It's been difficult trying to pick up the pieces without her, but she made me promise that's what I'd do. I've finally learned to accept her death and to be thankful for the time we had together."

"How long were you married?"

"Fourteen years." He shook his head. "That wasn't nearly long enough with her."

Autumn suppressed a surge of jealousy. It must have been wonderful to be so loved your partner still mourned your death two years later. "Do you have any children?"

He shook his head. "No. We married young and were so in love with each other we thought we'd wait until we were both established in our professions and some of the luster wore off our relationship."

"What happened?"

"The luster never wore off. I loved her even more the day she died than I did on our wedding day."

Damn. His wife had been a lucky woman.

"By the time we decided we were ready to have a family..." He paused, his Adam's apple bobbing again.

She reached across the table to brush her hand against the back of his clenched fist. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to raise what are clearly painful memories for you, Seneka."

He gripped her hand and inhaled slowly before he responded. "It's all right. When we were ready to start a family, we found out she had inoperable cancer."

"Oh...no."

"She wanted to try anyway, but I wasn't willing to share her for the time we had left. I'm no longer sure that was the right decision. I've always wanted kids and having a child might have made the last two years less lonely. And I would have had something that was a part of her."

"I'm so sorry. What was her name?"

"Kelli." He hesitated. "Would you like to see a picture of her?"

What a strange question to ask on what was hopefully a first date. "Yes."

He released her hand. "Yes?"

It was just as well to see the type of woman he liked. She nodded. "Yes."

He rose, removed his wallet from the back pocket of his jeans and sat down again. He opened his wallet before he passed it across the table to her.

Autumn stared down at a headshot of a gorgeous, green-eyed, smiling blonde.

"There's another one underneath."

She flipped the picture over. The second photo showed the blonde in a beautiful white lace and satin wedding gown that complimented her plus-sized figure so well it must have been made especially for her.

Yes. He liked blondes, but he also clearly liked full-figured women. She closed the wallet and handed it back to him. "She was beautiful."

"In body and spirit." He shook his head. "But gushing over Kelli is hardly the way to make a good impression on a first date."

"It's all right."

"No, it's not all right. My propensity to whip out pictures of her and get maudlin might explain why there's no one special in my life at the moment."

"How long have you been dating?"

"I was very happily married to Kelli. I miss her and I miss being married, but I'm not interested in casual relationships, Autumn."

So despite his talk of taking her captive and making her his sex slave, he wasn't interested in spending the night with her. Great. "Oh. Does that mean...what does that mean, Seneka?"

"I'm thirty-seven."

Thirty-seven was the perfect age for a nearly perfect man.  
"And?"

"And I still want to have kids so I don't have time to pursue casual relationships."

"How long have you been dating?"

"Including tonight?"

She nodded.

"One night," he said.

"One night?"

"You're the first woman I've asked out since I accepted the fact that it was time to move on with my life."

She tensed as the two blondes walked in and took seats at the bar. She briefly locked gazes with the more stunning of the two before turning her attention back to Seneka. "I am? What about the two women you were talking with tonight?"

"What about them?"

"They seemed interested in getting to know you and you didn't seem to mind. Are they friends?"

"No. We met tonight."

He must have made a hell of an impression. "Are they likely prospects?"

"The blondes?"

"Yes. The blondes."

"You're the one I asked out, Autumn."

She nodded. "I know, but they're stunning."

"You think so?"

"Don't you?"

"I suppose they're pretty enough."

"But?"

He shrugged. "But they're a little too slender for my personal preferences. I like women with lots of curves."

She moistened her lips. "Oh."

He arched a brow. "Oh? That's it? No more questions? You know, you can ask me anything you like."

She wanted to ask about her chances of spending the night with him, but couldn't muster the courage. Despite his stated preference for full-figured women, his wife had been a blonde with very fair skin like the two blondes staring in their direction. Autumn had dark skin. "Thanks, but I think one or both of the blondes are determined to get your attention."

"What makes you think that?"

"Because they're seated at the bar staring this way."

He turned to look towards the bar.

Both women smiled and waved.

He inclined his head and turned back to her. "They're persistent if nothing else, but I'm not interested in discussing them. Let's talk about you."

"You have questions?"

"Yes."

She smiled, pleased that he was interested enough to ask questions. "Shoot."

"I know it's very indelicate to ask, but how old are you?"

"I'm thirty."

"And very pretty, but I've already said that."

"So? You can say it as many times as you like."

He laughed. "Do you want kids?"

She nodded. "I'd like one or two."

"Tell me about your ex. What happened with him?"

Knowing he liked plus-sized women made her confession easier. "He wasn't happy with my weight."

"What?"

"I managed to lose some weight through diet and increased exercise, but it wasn't enough to please him."

"Were you so...deliciously shaped when you married?"

So deliciously shaped? "I've never been particularly slender, but when we married he called me voluptuous. By the time of our divorce, he considered me...he'd lost all sexual interest in me." She pushed her tongue against her teeth and glanced away from him.

He reached across the table to place his hand over hers.

She felt a shock of delight.

"I'm sure it must have hurt to have someone you love feel that way. You did love him?"

Bringing her gaze back to his, she nodded, willing herself not to cry. "Yes. I did."

"So you didn't want the divorce?"

"No. No, I didn't."

"I hope you can take comfort in the knowledge that there are men who will view his loss as their gain."

She sucked in a breath, recalling the many nights she'd cried herself to sleep after Sam refused to make love to her. "Are there? I haven't managed to meet any of them since my divorce."

"You have now."

## Chapter Two

She pressed her lips together. *Don't put too much stock in his sweet talk, Autumn.*

"My brothers and I are fond of women with real curves."

He was nothing if not sweet. She smiled. "Thanks."

He squeezed her hand before releasing it and sitting back against his seat. "No thanks necessary. We like our women with lots of curves."

"Why?"

"Why do we like full-figured women? Oh, I don't know. Maybe it's because we're all at least six feet. I'm the runt of the litter at 6 feet even. I weigh approximately two hundred ten or fifteen pounds. I have no desire to romance a woman who weighs ninety pounds wet who I'd have to be afraid of really kissing or who couldn't bear my weight."

Who couldn't bear his weight? That must mean..."So you like lying on a woman when you..."

"Oh, hell yeah."

The wealth of feeling in his voice left her in envy of the lucky woman who became his lover.

"Do you enjoy having your lover on top during sex, Autumn?"

The thought of him lying on top of her, between her legs made her hot and aroused. She moistened her lips, lowering her eyelids.

"It's not as if I could lie on top."

"Do you want to?"

"Sometimes," she admitted.

"I can't imagine any man worth the name not feeling lucky if you wanted to lie on him...maybe make love to him while you did."

Feeling her cheeks heating, she swallowed hard before she lifted her lids.

His warm gaze sent even more heat to her cheeks, but she didn't look away or lower her lids again. She liked the desire she saw in his dark eyes. "This is a strange conversation to have on a first date."

"Maybe or maybe we're just clicking really well."

She did feel surprisingly comfortable with him—even as he excited her desire. "I'd like that."

"So would I."

She took a quick breath. The way the conversation was going, she felt she had a good chance of eventually ending up in his bed—even if only for one night.

"How long have you been divorced, Autumn?"

"Two years."

"That's a long time to go without a man in your life or bed. Or am I jumping to conclusions?"

"You're not. It's been even longer than two years because we were separated a year before that." And it had been nearly four years since she'd had sex with a man who enjoyed having it with her.

"When did you start dating again?"

She shook her head. "I haven't actually started dating yet."

"Ah. So we're both almost dating virgins again."

"I guess we are."

"I have an idea. Why don't we agree to jump into the dating waters together so we can help keep each other afloat while we get the hang of being single again?"

Autumn swallowed hard. Had she misunderstood him? "You want me to hold your hand while you wade into dating again?" Probably with some plus-sized blonde or one of the two who had followed them to the bar.

"You can hold my hand and anything else I have," he said.

There was only one way to take that remark. Since he seemed to share her desire, it wasn't necessary to try to hussy her way into his bed on a first date. Maybe they could take the time to get to know each other a little before they wound up in bed.

Reassured, she relaxed. Then tensed as the prettier of the two blondes rose and walked towards their booth.

He frowned. "What's wrong?"

Before she could answer, the blonde stopped by their booth. "Hi, Seneca."

He glanced at the blonde and rose slowly. "Julie. It's Seneka, not Seneca."

"Excuse me? What's the difference?"

"The difference is in pronunciation. My name is pronounced Sa-neek-ca, not Sen-a-ca."

"Oh. Sorry." She placed a hand on his chest and smiled at him. "I was wondering if your friend would excuse us long enough for us to share a quick dance."

Autumn's inclination was to snap out a cold no. However, for all she knew he might have told them he'd be at Patty's. She shook her head. "Don't mind me."

The blonde flashed a quick smile in her direction. "Thanks. Dance, Seneka?"

"That's a charming invitation, Julie." He stepped back far enough for her hand to fall away from his chest. "But I'll have to pass."

"Why? Your friend doesn't mind."

"Because I always make it a point to restrict my dancing to the woman I'm with."

She glanced at Autumn. "That would make you the lucky woman—at least for the night."

Autumn nodded. "Yes, it would."

The blonde shrugged, turning back to look at Seneka. "Maybe another time?"

He smiled but remained silent. When she turned and walked away, he sat back down, his gaze narrowed and his lips compressed.

"What's wrong?"

"I'm an old-fashioned man. I like to do the chasing in a relationship." He smiled suddenly. "But we were talking about the possibility of wading into dating together."

Seated across from him she found her thoughts filled with lust and more lust. It was time to call it a night before she said or did something to reveal how lonely and horny she felt.

"I might just take you up on that offer, Seneka."

"I wish you would."

"I've enjoyed having a drink with you, but it's getting late. I'd better get back. I have an early class tomorrow."

"Then I'll walk you home."

She bit back disappointment at how quickly he'd accepted her decision. "Thanks."

He left a tip on the table. Near the entrance of the bar, he paused briefly to nod at the blondes.

Julie lifted her right hand, with her thumb and little finger extended and the other three bent towards her palm, to her ear. She mouthed the words, *Call me*.

Seneka didn't respond or smile. He urged Autumn towards the exit. Outside, he turned to look down at her.

"She seems to like you, Seneka."

"The feeling isn't mutual."

Thank God.

"I know you want to get home, but can you spare a few minutes to take the long way back?"

She smiled. "Sure."

"Great." He cupped a hand under her arm.

April nights in Philadelphia could be unpredictable. The walk there had been pleasant. Half a block from the bar, a wind whipped up. She shivered.

He took off his suit jacket and draped it over her shoulders. "Better?"

She liked the weight of his jacket and the faint smell of his cologne. She smiled and nodded. "Yes. Thanks."

They continued walking in silence.

Each time she stole a glance at him, she found him looking at her. Her cheeks burned.

He smiled but remained silent.

Inside their complex, he paused in the courtyard. "Which building do you live in?"

"The Gardiner."

"So do I. That must be a good sign."

"It must be."

They moved towards the entrance. He held the door open for her before following her inside to the elevator bank. He pushed the UP button. "Which floor?"

"Fifth."

On the fifth floor, he walked with her to her apartment.

She removed his jacket and handed it to him. "Thanks."

He accepted his jacket, inhaled deeply, and smiled at her. "I can smell your perfume."

"Oh...I'm sorry."

"Don't be. It's very nice." He slipped his jacket on and stood staring down at her in silence.

"I...well...it's late."

His firm lips twitched. "So you've already said."

She opened her condo door, moistened her lips, and turned to face him again.

He flashed a brief smile. "It was a pleasure to meet you, Autumn Walker."

"Same here, Seneka."

"Good night."

"Good night."

He turned and walked away.

She stood by her open door, staring after him. If it were such a pleasure to meet her, why hadn't he kissed her? Or suggested another

meeting or a real date? After the intimacy of their conversation, she'd expected at least a brief kiss.

He turned at the elevator bank. Finding her staring at him, he quickly walked back down the corridor to her.

"Did you forget something?" she asked.

"Yes."

He'd come back to ask her out! "What?"

"This." He placed a palm on the wall beside the door and bent his head.

Yes! Heart hammering, she placed her hands against his chest, closed her eyes, and lifted her face.

His warm lips gently brushed over hers in a caress so fleeting it was over before she even had time to part her lips. Surely he could do better than that. She opened her eyes and stared up at him.

He stared back, his lids lowered, concealing the expression in his eyes. He stepped back from her.

Why didn't he say something to give an indication of what he felt?

She spoke when he remained silent. "I...I'd better go in."

"I guess you'd better," he agreed.

Disappointed both by his response and his failure to engage her in a lip lock that would make her knees knock, she turned away.

"Autumn?"

She turned back. "Yes?"

He had his cell phone out. "I need your phone number."

"Home or work?"

"Both."

She gave him her numbers and watched him enter them into his phone.

“What’s your email addy?”

She gave him that as well.

“I’ll be in touch,” he promised.

*Make it soon, Seneka.* “Great.”

He put his phone away.

They stood staring at each other in silence.

*Kiss me – a real kiss this time.* Even as she sent the silent plea to him she struggled to keep her gaze from lingering on the lips she really wanted to feel and taste.

After a brief but pointed glance at her breasts, he raked a hand through his short dark hair. “Good night, Autumn.”

*No real kiss for you, girl.* “Good night.” After a slight hesitation, she went inside, took a shower, and put on her pajamas. Then she sat in the living room with her notebook on her lap thinking of Seneka Elkhorn. Two hours later, she went to bed without having done any work.

### III

Seneka stood outside her door listening for the sound of her locks engaging before he turned away. He ran a hand through his hair and walked to the elevator. Although he lived ten floors above, he pressed the Down button. He felt horny as hell, but since she’d already been hurt, he’d have to be careful not to rush her into a sexual relationship. After a drink, he’d need a cool shower before bed.

He rode down to the street level floor and walked into Martie’s – the small bar/cafe there. As soon as he entered he saw the

two blondes he'd first met that night. What the hell. Were they going to turn into stalkers?

Julie waved him over.

He smiled, shook his head, and walked to the other end of the bar. "A whiskey, please."

As the bartender sat it in front of him, Julie slipped on the seat beside him. "I'm surprised to see you."

He took a sip of his whiskey before turning to look at her. "The feeling is mutual."

"Is your woman of the night joining you?"

"No," he said shortly.

"Then how about that dance now that you're alone?"

"Thanks, but I'm really not in the mood to dance."

"Is that your way of telling me you're not interested?"

"I wish you'd allow me to be gracious, Julie."

"So you're not interested in me but you're interested in her? Does a woman have to be overweight to catch your attention?"

Her thinly veiled reference to Autumn removed any desire to spare her feelings. He narrowed his gaze. "You're too damned pushy," he told her coldly. "And apparently too dense to know when a man has zero interest in your skinny, flat ass."

She blushed and swung her hand at his face. "Bastard!"

He caught her wrist before her hand could touch his face. "Maybe so, but you don't get to slap me," he said. After giving her a long, cold stare, he released her wrist.

She gasped and rose.

He watched her walk back to join her friend before he finished his drink, put a tip on the bar, and left.

At home, standing in his shower with his eyes closed, he tried to imagine Autumn sharing the shower with him. She was pretty with large breasts, long legs, full lips, dark eyes, and a lovely round ass his youngest brother would call bootylicious. Thoughts of the water beading on her warm, dark naked flesh rather defeated the purpose of taking a cool shower.

Damn, he needed to get laid. Reaching for the soap, he lathered up his cock. He thought of Autumn's hands on him...cupping his balls...pumping him...bringing him to the point of orgasm, and then parting her legs to welcome him inside her.

His balls tightened, his stomach muscles clenched, and he groaned as he jacked off. Coming provided a small measure of relief. After his shower, he made a call, and then went to bed. He glanced at the picture of Kelli smiling at him from his nightstand before he closed his eyes. Would he ever fully recover from losing the one love of his life? With a picture of Kelli imprinted on his eyelids, it took longer than normal for him to fall asleep. During the night, he woke and lay sleepless for over half an hour before he finally fell asleep again.

Seneka woke the next morning with blue balls. After a cup of coffee, he went down to the complex gym for his morning workout. He found Karen, Julie's friend waiting in the corridor when he finished. Damn. What the hell was wrong with those two? If Karen was about to try her hand at seduction, she'd get as cool a reception as her friend had. He nodded and walked pass her.

"Do you have a few moments, Seneka?"

He kept walking. "I'm pressed for time."

She half ran to keep up with him as he strolled towards the bank of elevators. "This won't take long."

He pushed the UP button and turned to look at her. "What can I do for you, Karen?"

"I just wanted to apologize for last night."

"Why? You're not the one who —"

"She didn't mean any harm."

"Didn't she? Well, I'm really not interested in what she did or didn't mean." The elevator doors opened. He stepped inside and barely contained an annoyed sigh when she joined him.

"We're friends, but I don't want to be tarred with the same brush as her. I'm not the one who said anything unkind about her or made a nuisance of myself with you."

"What do you want from me?"

"To buy you a drink and show you we're different."

She was a little taller and possessed more curves than her friend. Still, they paled in comparison with Autumn's. "And?"

"And to maybe show you that you might not want to write knowing me off so quickly. I'm not as curvy as you might like, but I do know how to please a man, Seneka. And I don't mind one-night stands. I'm rather an expert at helping a man work out the kinks."

He gave her a long, considering look. "A one-night stand?"

She shrugged. "Men enjoy them all the time. Why shouldn't we?"

Fair enough question. "And you're an expert at removing sexual kinks?"

"I'd love to show you just how much of an expert I am at it tonight."

"I have plans for tonight," he told her.

She took a card from her purse and extended it to him. "Call me when you're free — day or night."

After a moment of indecision, he took it.

### III

The phone rang as Autumn was about to leave for work the next morning. She glanced at the caller I.D. screen of the phone on the table near the condo entrance. The number was unfamiliar. Shrugging, she opened the door, frowned, closed the door, and picked up the phone. "Hello?"

"Good morning, Autumn."

She smiled. "Seneka. Good morning."

"I won't keep you as I'm sure you're busy but I wanted to ask if you'd have dinner with me."

"When?"

"Tomorrow night."

"I'd love to."

"Great. What time can I pick you up?"

"Six-thirty."

"We're kind of limited in where we can get reservations on such short notice, but what are your culinary preferences? American? French? Italian?"

"I like them all. Surprise me."

"Do you like surprises?"

"Sometimes."

"I'll keep that in mind, Autumn."

That must mean he envisioned more than one date. Her smile widened. "I'd better go or I'll be late for work."

“I’m looking forward to tomorrow night.”

“So am I. I’ll see you then.” She hung up and pumped her fist in the air. “Yes!”

She smiled all the way to work and arrived in a great mood. She decided calling her older sister and best friend might jinx things with Seneka. Instead, she spent the day struggling to keep her mind on her classes during what felt like an endless day.

After work, she changed into sweats and took a mile and a half walk around one of the tracks in their apartment complex’s gym. She was tired after a mile but thoughts of Seneka and looking her best when they ended up in bed provided the needed incentive to continue walking.

## Chapter Three

When she returned to her condo, she had two messages. She sat in the chair in the small entrance hall to listen to them.

"Hey Autumn Walker, you know who this is and why I'm calling."

She smiled at the sound of her sister's voice. "Jack is missing you again. God only knows why," she intoned the last sentence in what Autumn thought of as her give-me-strength-to-deal-with-nutty-sisters voice.

Autumn laughed. She hadn't had dinner with Spring and Jack for several weeks.

"So come to dinner tomorrow night. Jack's already thawed out a rack of lamb and you know what that costs so neither of us will be in any mood to take no for an answer. I'll see you around six-thirty."

Still smiling, Autumn listened to the next message.

"Hi, Autumn. This is Seneka. I have reservations for tomorrow night and wanted to give you a heads up without removing the element of surprise. Wear something that's sort of...dressy casual. I'm looking forward to seeing you tomorrow night. Bye."

Damn. She'd only missed his call by twenty minutes.

She dialed Spring's number. "Hey there, gorgeous," a warm male voice answered.

She smiled. "Hi, Jack. Is Spring there?"

"No. She has meetings scheduled with parents' tonight. What time can I pick you up for dinner tomorrow?"

"I'm going to need a rain check."

“Ahhh. Is there anything you want me to tell her about him?  
Or will you tell her yourself?”

She frowned. “Will I tell her what?”

“About the guy you have a date with.”

“I didn’t say I had a date.”

“Like, Spring, you’re prettier than sin. Of course you have a date.”

She grinned. “You are too sweet Jack Morgan.”

“Is he any one we know?”

“No. I met him last night.”

“Obviously he knows a good thing when he sees it.”

“You’re an awful flirt, Jack.”

He laughed. “Does he have a brother or friend for any of Spring’s unmarried friends?”

“Jack!”

“Hey. I’m only priming you for Spring when she learns you have a date who might have brothers.”

She laughed. “Too true.”

“Does he?”

“Have brothers? Yes but I don’t know how many or if they’re married or otherwise committed. Tell her I’ll call her tomorrow night. I don’t want to jinx things by talking about him too soon.”

“Then I won’t tell her you’re not coming until tomorrow.”

“Oh, Jack! Thanks. Wish me luck?”

“Just be yourself and you won’t need luck.”

“Oh, Jack. You are such a sweetie.”

“Sweetie? What kind of compliment is that to give a grown man?”

"You're sweet and handsome. How's that?"

"Much better. Have a good a time, Autumn."

"Thanks. Good night."

"Good night."

She took a shower, had dinner, and then spent the rest of the evening trying to decide what she'd wear for her first date with Seneka.

### III

Seneka showered and changed at his Center City office before leaving for the day. On the way home, he stopped at a florist and a wine shop. Recalling how Kelli had hated his arriving early for a date, he went up to his condo and paced for fifteen minutes before he took the elevator down to the fifth floor.

His racing heartbeat surprised him. He hadn't been this nervous since high school. He took a slow deep breath and rang her bell.

"Yes?"

"It's Seneka," he said, keeping his voice level. *Get a grip, Elkhorn and stop behaving like a teenager picking up his first date. You like her. She appears to like you. There's no reason to be nervous. She's already agreed to have dinner with you.*

He heard her disengaging the locks. Moments later the door opened.

He caught his breath. She wore a ruby colored pantsuit with a bodice that clung to her large breasts. The open matching jacket ended mid-thigh and was decorated with a sort of cream-colored

beading that matched the dangling pearl earrings that adorned her ears. She looked so sexy his cock stirred.

She smiled. "Hi, Seneka."

"Damn!"

She touched her short, dark hair. "I hope that's a good damn."

He nodded. "I assure you it is."

"Good. Are those for me?"

"What? Oh. Yes. Sorry." He gave her the flowers, the chocolates, and the bottle of wine.

She accepted them with a warm smile. "Roses, champagne, and luscious chocolates? Thank you." She stepped back. "Come in."

He entered and leaned against the closed door, staring at her. "Damn," he said again.

Her eyes sparkled. "The living room is on the right. Go make yourself comfortable while I take care of these."

He stood where he was, watching her walk away. She wore cream-colored heels that showcased her long, shapely legs. Jacking off was not going to be enough to cool his ardor after spending a few hours with her.

She seemed surprised to find him still leaning against her entrance door when she returned. "Did someone glue you there?"

He laughed, pushing himself away from the door. "You look lovely, but I guess you've already figured that out."

Smiling, she twirled around. "You like?"

He caught her hand and turned her to face him. "Yes. I do."

He watched her moisten her top lip with the tip of her tongue. He'd love to bend his head and suck her tongue into his mouth.

"I'm glad."

He lifted her hand to his lips. "I think we'd better go now."

She nodded, picked up a dark jacket from the chair, and flashed a quick smile at him. "I'm ready."

So was he—to kiss her until both of them were gasping for breath. *Wining and dining first, Neka. Then maybe kissing later.*

They discussed books on the drive to dinner. He was surprised to find that she enjoyed reading thrillers and watching action movies. Both themes kept them occupied until he drove into the parking lot of a popular jazz club on the waterfront.

"I hope you like jazz," he said, stopping the car and turning to face her. "It's been a few months since I've been here but each time I come the music is great and the food is excellent."

"I love Tommy's Place," she told him, smiling.

"I'm glad to hear it." Resisting the urge to lean over and kiss her, he got out of his car, and walked around to open the passenger door.

The interior lighting provided a romantic ambience. He ate without tasting his food, finding it difficult to keep his gaze from shifting from her breasts to her lips. Listening to her voice with that sexy hint of huskiness, he wondered how any man could find her anything but sexually exciting.

"You're staring, Seneka."

"I know but it's difficult not to. You're a very pretty woman."

She smiled. "I think I'm going to like you, Seneka Elkhorn."

"I'm counting on that." He glanced towards the dance floor. "Would you like to dance?"

"I'd love to."

Seneka didn't touch her until they were on the dance floor. When she turned into his arms, he closed his eyes and drew her closer.

She settled against him, placing her hands on his chest.

He hadn't had intercourse in over two years. Holding her heightened his need for sex. Still, he kept his hands on her waist, although he longed to slide his palms down to caress her enticing ass.

As they danced slow and close together, her perfume filled his nostrils. He felt her breasts against his chest. He concentrated on ensuring he didn't hold her too tightly or too closely. Even as he enjoyed the two dances they shared in silence, his level of sexual frustration increased.

They returned to their table. "Would you like another drink?"

She shook her head. "No. Thanks. I've had my limit for a week night."

"I'm curious. What happens if you have more than your limit?"

She shrugged. "Oh, I don't know...I might leap over the table onto your lap or something crazy like that."

"Then by all means, have another one," he said, laughing.

She shook her head. "Believe me I'm tempted."

He reached across the table to place his hand over hers. "You can trust me not to hurt you or take advantage of you, Autumn."

"I need a little time, Seneka."

Oh, damn. "I understand."

"Do you?"

He squeezed her hand gently. "Yes."

She smiled.

"Tell me about Autumn Walker."

"I was born and raised in Philly. I'm one of two kids. I have an older sister named Spring."

"Spring and Autumn? I prefer Autumn."

She smiled.

"What about your parents?"

"My father is dead. My mom retired to Florida. I was married and now I'm divorced."

"Can you talk about it?"

"I don't really want...yes. What would you like to know, Seneka?"

"How long were you married?"

"A little over three years."

"Were you happy with him?"

"I...I loved him. So yes, I was happy with him."

Thank God he hadn't been happy with her. "Do you still see him?"

"No. He wasn't very kind the last time I saw him."

"What happened? What did he say or do?"

She shook her head. "I don't want to talk about it."

"What would you like to talk about instead?"

"You. You mentioned brothers. Do you have any sisters?"

"No."

"How many brothers do you have?"

"I have three brothers. One older and two younger. My father is dead. My mom and my brothers live outside L.A."

"How did you wind up living here?"

"I came here to go to Temple to be near Kelli. We met on the beach the summer before our junior year in high school. I knew the moment I saw her, she was going to be very special. I was hoping to convince her to move to L.A. after graduation, but she loved Philly. I wanted her to be happy so we settled here."

"And you're still here...what? Some eighteen years later?"

"I still miss L.A. sometimes, but Philly is where I lived and loved with Kelli. Staying here feels like being close to her. Have you ever been to L.A.?"

"No."

He smiled. "Then staying here was the smart move. If I had returned to L.A., I wouldn't have met you."

He watched a slow, sweet smile spread across her pretty face. "I'm glad you're still here."

"So am I." He glanced at his watch. "Would you like anything else?"

"No. Thanks."

"Since we both have to work tomorrow, I guess we should think about heading home. Are you sure you don't want another drink?" He patted his lap. "I work out regularly and won't complain if you can't control the urge to leap onto my lap." *Oh, hell. You didn't just say that, Elkhorn.*

To his relief, she laughed. "I think I'm going to like you far too much for my own good."

"Yeah, but do you ever plan to wind up in my lap?"

"Probably."

"I can hardly wait."

After dancing with Seneka and having him flirt with her, Autumn felt a sense of anticipation on the drive home. The soft jazz filling the car's interior made the silence between them even more comfortable. She spent the majority of the forty-minute drive wondering how warm his goodnight kiss would be.

Yet, at her condo door, he listened to her thanks for the evening in silence before he pressed a quick kiss against her cheek. "Good night."

She struggled to conceal her surprise and disappointment. Had he misunderstood her request for time to mean she didn't want any intimacy? *Nice going Autumn.* "Good night, Seneka." She turned away.

His arm shot around her waist. "Autumn."

Surprised, she turned back to face him. "Yes?"

"You can trust me, but..."

"But what?"

"But I could really use a kiss. A real kiss."

"Oh..."

"Is that a no?"

She shook her head. "No. It's not."

"Is it a yes?"

"Yes. It is." She went wet at the desire she saw in his dark gaze moments before he swept her body against his.

"Seneka—"

He brushed his lips against her forehead. "I like the way you say my name."

"You do?"

"I do." He lifted his head to stare at her mouth. "I like you."

"I like you too."

"Let's see how much you do." He cupped his free hand over the back of her head.

She closed her eyes and lifted her face with the tip of her tongue extended. *French me.*

He rained moist kisses against her forehead and cheeks.

It felt so good to be held again, she shivered and leaned against him. *Please God, don't let this be a dream.*

In response, he slipped his other hand down from her hair to rest on her ass.

She tightened her hands on his shoulders. She loved having her ass touched, kissed, and spanked.

The first sweet touch of his mouth on hers flooded her pussy and made her ache with desire. She slipped her arms around his neck.

Warm, firm lips nibbled at her mouth before he clutched her ass and seared the taste and feel of his lips on hers.

A surge of electricity singed down her spine. She sucked at his tongue, hungry for a greater level of intimacy with him. She longed to feel his big warm hands on her naked flesh...to feel his hard cock sliding into her aching, neglected pussy.

He squeezed and massaged her ass.

She moaned, raking her fingers through his hair. "Yes," she encouraged.

He pressed another series of hot, demanding kisses on her lips in response.

She rubbed her hardened nipples against his chest.

He made a small sound. His tongue swept into her mouth and his hands tightened on her ass.

She shuddered as he kissed her until she burned with the need to surrender completely to him. About the time she realized she was humping against him, she became aware of his cock hardening.

*Oh, yes. Get that big bad boy nice and hard for me, baby.* She longed to reach between their bodies to palm him. The rational part of her brain insisted she was not going to sleep with him on a second date.

*Get a grip, Autumn.* She gasped and dragged her mouth away from his plundering lips.

With his hands still on her rear, he trailed his lips across her cheek to press a warm kiss behind her ear. "No?"

"No." She shook her head and pushed her hands against his chest.

He released her and took a step back. "Are you sure?"

She wasn't, but she doubted men thought highly of women who gave it up on the second date. "Yes."

He blew out a breath. "I guess it's obvious I'm feeling a little horny, but that was so juvenile. I'm sorry. I don't usually grope on a second date."

"But?"

He shrugged, locking his gaze on her mouth. "But your luscious lips have been daring me to taste them all night."

"Don't apologize. I was hoping you'd kiss me."

"Were you?"

"Yes."

He brushed the back of his fingers against her cheek. "That's very good to know."

She turned her head to kiss his hand.

He tore his gaze away from her mouth and glanced at his watch. He dropped his hand to his side. "If kissing is all you're interested in, I'd better say good night."

She waited a few seconds hoping he'd ask her out or kiss her again. When he did neither, she nodded and went inside.

She leaned against the closed door, taking slow deep breaths. Why hadn't he asked her out or at least suggested they meet for another drink? *Because he only plans to date women he'd like to get serious about. That clearly leaves you out in the cold, Autumn. He would have slept with you, but he doesn't want to date you. Since you were too foolish to sleep with him, get over it.*

### III

Seneka returned to the condo he'd bought two years earlier when he'd realized he could no longer bear living in the home he and Kelli had brought with such high hopes. Although the condo was more than comfortable, it had never really felt like home.

Hearing soft music coming from the living room, he strolled down the hall, pausing in the doorway.

One of his brothers sat on his sofa with a notebook computer open on his lap.

"Bray! I didn't expect you and Ray until tomorrow night."

Braden, two years his senior and six inches taller, looked up, smiled, placed the computer on the sofa, and rose. "Ray will be flying

in from L.A. tomorrow night but I came ahead." He strolled across the room.

The two brothers embraced.

Braden stepped away, but clasped a hand on the back of Seneka's neck. "How the hell are you, Neka?"

"Fine."

Braden looked into his eyes. "Yeah?"

Seneka knew his family feared Kelli's death had sent him into a deep depression. "Yes." He turned away and walked over to the bar along one wall. "Would you like a drink?"

"No. Thanks. Are you dating yet, Neka?"

Seneka poured himself a whiskey before he turned to face Braden who had resumed his seat on the sofa. "As a matter of fact, I am."

"You've met someone?"

He nodded, smiling.

He watched a look of relief fill Braden's eyes. "When?"

"I saw her tonight for the second time."

Braden grimaced. "Damn. Am I in the way?" He rose. "I'll go to a hotel or call one of the Grayhawks."

He shook his head. "Don't bother. I just left her and came home to take a cool shower."

"Ahhh. Tell me about her."

Seneka drank his whiskey and placed the glass on the bar top. "She's not Cherokee," he said.

Braden's lids lowered. He shrugged. "Who said she had to be?"

"You and Mom."

Braden laughed. "Maybe Mom but not me. What's her name?"

"Autumn. She's 30 and teaches at CCP."

"CCP?"

"Community College of Philadelphia."

"Ah. Do you still plan to restrict yourself to dating women you view as a potential wife?"

He nodded. "Yes."

"Then you must –"

"Like her a lot?" He shrugged. "I don't know her, but I'm sure as hell physically attracted to her."

"Tell me something about her background."

He was feeling too sexually frustrated to beat around the bush. He knew what Braden really wanted to know. "She's Afro-American, Bray."

"I see. Well, I'm pleased for you, Neka."

"Why do I doubt that, Bray?"

Braden sighed and ran a hand through his hair. "I have no idea."

Seneka shook his head. "I know you think I should marry a Cherokee or some other Native woman."

"It's not my place to tell you who to marry, Neka."

"But?"

"No buts. You and the others are free to marry whoever you fall in love with."

"I share your concern for preserving our heritage, Bray, but after having been happily married, I'm not about to remarry for any reason but love."

"And you think you can fall in love with this...I'm sorry. What's her name again?"

"Autumn. Do I think I can fall in love with her?" He shrugged. "I don't know, but I do know she's got me hornier than I've been for years."

"Just sex?"

"No. It's not just sex. What I know of her, I like a lot." He pushed himself away from the bar and moved towards the door. "I'd better go take a shower."

"Neka?"

He turned. "Yes?"

Braden rose and crossed the room to place a palm on the back of his neck. "I'll admit it would have been nice if your Autumn was Cherokee or Native, but I really am happy and pleased you've met someone who's made you want to date again."

"Thanks, Bray."

"So? Is she pretty?"

Seneka grinned. "She's miles beyond pretty. She has the sweetest lips, warmest brown eyes, smoothest dark skin, and curves in all the right places, an ass that was made for spanking and other things, and a sexy swell to her stomach."

"A big ass and a sexy stomach? Hell, you're making me horny."

"Tell me about it. I got a hard-on the moment I saw her."

Braden grimaced and slapped the back of Seneka's neck. "TMI, Neka. You keep this up and you'll make me jealous enough to go track her down and ask her out myself."

“Don’t even think about it. If you’re feeling horny, you find your own woman.” He frowned. “Have you found a woman, Bray?”

“No one special.”

“Haven’t you ever felt the need to settle down and have kids, Bray?”

He nodded. “Yes, but I don’t have the freedom to marry just for love—unless the circumstances are right.”

By that Seneka knew Braden still felt he had an obligation to marry a Native woman—even if he didn’t love her. “Given your preference, how are the circumstances ever going to be right for you to marry for love, Bray?”

“Are you suggesting I’m incapable of loving a Native woman, Neka?”

“I’m suggesting given your preference for full-figured black women, it’s highly unlikely.”

Braden shrugged. “We’re talking about you. Not me. Why are you here alone when she made such an impression on you?”

“Her ex-husband was a dickhead who left her because of her weight. Thankfully he didn’t know the difference between fat and sinfully voluptuous.”

“Isn’t that all the more reason to let her know she’s so sexy you had to bed her right away?”

“Maybe, but I don’t want her to think my interest is strictly sexual.”

“Commendable.”

“Yeah and besides she said no.”

Braden laughed.

Seneka arched a brow. "I'm glad you're amused. I'm in agony here."

"Better luck next time."

"I hope so or my balls will be permanently blue."

"You do have other options, Neka."

He thought of Karen and numerous other women who'd made no secret of their interest in him. "I know but I'm just not interested in sex without some of the emotional attachment I shared with Kelli."

"And you felt some of that with Autumn?"

He shrugged. "I'm not saying that."

"Then what are you saying?" Braden studied his face. "Are you thinking in terms of calling her wy Janet?"

Seneka sucked in a breath, feeling a rush of excitement tinged with sorrow. Although wy Janet roughly translated to mean legendary beauty, the Elkhorn men used it as an endearment for the special women in their lives.

Even though he expected to fall in love again and marry, he doubted he'd ever want to use the endearment with another woman. Kelli had been and always would be his Wy Janet. Yet he felt none of the repulsion he would have expected to feel at Braden's question.

He sighed and shook his head. "I'll let you know when I do. Now I need a shower." He left the living room before Braden could ask any more questions he wasn't prepared to answer. In his bedroom, he undressed and walked naked into the master bathroom. As he lathered his body, he closed his eyes and imagined the hands on his skin were Autumn's instead of his own.

But that just made him hornier. Damn! He ached for sex with Autumn. He wouldn't give up so easily after their next date. In no mood to pleasure himself after the steamy kisses they'd exchange, he turned on the cool water.

After his shower he put on a pair of pajama bottoms and returned to the living room. Braden turned off his laptop and set it aside. "Feeling better?"

"Not really, but I'll be okay. How are things with you, Bray?"

"It's going to take a lot of work, but Raven is fairly certain we can come to terms on the merger and —"

"How are things in your personal life, Bray? Are you seeing anyone special?"

"You're getting senile, Neka." He smiled. "The answer hasn't changed since you asked it twenty minutes ago. Not at the moment. I want to get the merger out of the way before I think about a serious relationship with anyone."

"And then?"

"And then I want to find someone to marry."

"Someone Cherokee?"

Braden narrowed his gaze. "Yes. Someone Cherokee or at least Native. What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing...if you don't care about love."

"I know you loved Kelli, but I've begun to think romantic love is overrated."

He shook his head. "Oh, no it's not, Bray. Even the best sex you ever had doesn't compare to falling in love with someone who loves you back. I wouldn't trade my time with Kelli for any amount of hot sex with anyone else. Not even the last days when I...when I

knew it was just a matter of days. I cherished every moment with her and there's no feeling in the world like knowing she felt the exact same way."

Braden arched a brow. "I'll have to take your word for that."

"Only until you fall in love with someone who loves you like that in return."

"I'm not sure that's ever going to happen for me, Neka."

"What about Kania?" He asked of Braden's long-time assistant.

Braden shrugged. "What about her?"

So he still didn't want to discuss her. "How is she?"

"She's fine."

"And still as single as you?"

"Last time I checked? Yes."

"You'll love like that, Bray." Hopefully with Kania.

"I'm not so sure I want to love like that, Neka. After watching your devastation when Kelli died...I don't know that I want to open myself to the possibility of hurting like that."

"If you didn't, you would miss the most extraordinary experience a man and a woman can share. Losing the woman you love hurts like hell, but I'd marry her again—even if I knew I'd lose her so soon. The love we shared outweighed the pain I felt...still feel."

Braden sighed. "You almost convince me, Neka...almost."

"You're a hard sell, Bray."

"Maybe so but I like owning my own heart and having it in one piece."

Later lying in bed unable to sleep, Seneka's thoughts turned to Autumn. It was difficult to remember that he'd started the week unaware of her existence. Now thoughts of her kept him awake.

He rolled onto his back, staring up at the dark ceiling. He was eager to make love to her ASAP, but he also wanted to romance her. Balancing his dual desires would prove difficult during the coming weeks. Damn he hoped he hadn't overestimated her interest in him.

Even if her interest ran as deeply as his did, how likely was lightning to strike a second time for him in such a short time? If he didn't stop thinking with his cock and slow down he would set himself up for failure or worse—heartbreak. He thought of his earlier call to the florist. Had he been too hasty?

## Chapter Four

Autumn spent the night tossing and turning. She slept through her alarm the next morning. She refused to allow her thoughts to dwell on Seneka during her quick shower. Pressed for time, she skipped breakfast and made do with a cup of coffee to make it to work on time.

Her spirits soared when she saw the roses on her desk. She rushed across the small office she shared with another instructor to read the card.

*You made last night very special for me. Seneka.*

She sank into her chair, a smile curving her lips. *As you did for me, Seneka.*

Eager to discuss Seneka with Spring, she glanced at her watch and sighed. Spring taught middle school and would already be with her class. Her glance returned to the roses. In the meantime, she'd enjoy the delight of receiving her second dozen red roses in days.

She called Spring after her third class.

"I'm dying to hear about this Seneka of yours."

Autumn smiled. "I'm dying to tell you about him."

"Good. Then let's meet for a drink after work. Five o'clock okay?"

"Yes."

"Let's meet at Patty's," Spring suggested.

If she were lucky, Seneka might be there. "Sure. I'll see you then."

Spring arrived ten minutes after Autumn. Five years Autumn's senior, Spring was tall with warm dark eyes, a beguiling

smile, and long, light brown hair. Spring listened in rapt silence as Autumn told her of her date with Seneka. She'd been happily married to Jack for ten years.

Spring had been Autumn's rock through her separation and divorce from Sam. During Autumn's darkest moments of depression, Spring had remained positive, insisting that her Mr. Right would soon ride into her life.

Spring gave her a smug smile. "Didn't I tell you there was a hunk waiting to meet and adore a lovely plus-sized woman who just happens to have curves like yours?"

"Yes you did, but you're getting ahead of yourself, Spring. Yes he sent roses, but he hasn't asked me out again."

Spring waved a hand in dismissal. "He kissed you and ground against you until steam came out of your nether regions, so let's not get bogged down with minor technicalities."

Autumn's cheeks burned. "I didn't say he ground against me."

"You didn't have to and I'll bet you have fingerprints on your ass from him gripping it."

"Spring!"

"Don't try to tell me a man his size didn't hold your ass cause I'm not buying it."

Still blushing, Autumn cast her gaze upward, as if appealing to God for help. "What am I going to do with you?"

"Never mind trying to throw me off the scent. What do you know about his brothers?"

"Besides the fact that he has them? Nothing."

"How many does he have?"

"Three."

"Nice. How many of them are single?"

"I have no idea."

"What are the chances of introducing one of them to some of our single friends?"

Autumn shook her head. "I know he has three brothers. I don't know anything about their marital status."

"Well, find out as soon as you can. Our single friends need men."

"Spring, I don't even have one myself."

"You would have him if you'd given him a taste of brown sugar."

Autumn gave an exasperated sigh. "You're impossible, Spring."

Spring grinned and shrugged. "Probably so, but I'm also very happily married."

She smiled. "I know."

"That's what I want for you too. It's what you deserve."

Autumn nodded. "I know, but we've only known each other for two days."

"So?"

"So it's too early to get too excited or—"

"He kissed you didn't he?" Spring interrupted.

"I didn't say he kissed me."

"You didn't have to. Your eyes are sparkling and you're practically glowing. I know he kissed you and I'll bet he did it with enough gusto to make your toes curl."

"Spring!"

“Okay, so you don’t want to talk about how good a kisser he is. But he kissed you and he sent you a dozen roses—twice. Not to mention champagne and expensive chocolates. I think we get the picture.”

Aside from a few heated kisses, she wasn’t sure there was any picture to get, but she could see Spring was determined to make more of her one date with Seneka than circumstances warranted.

They sat over their drinks for another twenty minutes before Spring glanced at her watch. “I have to get home to make Jack’s dinner. Did you drive or do you want a ride home, Autumn?”

“I left my car at home so I do need a ride.”

Fifteen minutes later, she entered her apartment and kicked off her heels on her way to check her answering machine for messages. She was disappointed there was no message from Seneka.

Oh, well. At least he knew where she lived. Even though the evening passed without his contacting her, she remained confident that she’d hear from him soon.

The euphoria created by Seneka’s roses quickly dissipated when he didn’t make any effort to contact her. Autumn, who’d practically sat by her phone for a week hoping he’d call, chided herself for being silly and reluctantly admonished herself to forget him. There would be no more getting up half an hour early to experiment with different makeup and no more rushing home after work in expectation of his calling.

To get her mind off him, Autumn decided to have dinner at Martie’s. Stepping off the elevator, her heartbeat quickened when she saw Seneka walking towards the bar/cafe. She quickened her step to catch up with him. On the verge of calling his name, she realized he

wasn't alone. One of the blondes from the condo association meeting slipped her arm through his and they went inside together.

Autumn turned and walked back to the elevator. She stabbed a finger at the button, blinking rapidly to keep her eyes tear free. When the elevator arrived, she walked in and went up to her condo. Inside, she poured herself a drink and then sank onto her loveseat. She took several long, deep breaths. Then she sipped her drink until the urge to cry passed.

They'd had one date and a few heated kisses. He'd obviously moved on. It was time for her to do the same – without tears. She had another drink while she baked a potato and tossed a salad. After eating half of each, she filled the tub with hot water and her favorite bath salts, poured herself a glass of champagne, placed her bath sheet on the warmer, and sank into the bath.

She allowed herself a few sniffles, drank the champagne, and closed her eyes. The cooling water woke her. Climbing out of the bath, she wrapped the warm bath sheet around her body and went into her bedroom.

Resisting the urge to have another drink, she dried off, and went to bed naked. Lying in the dark, she allowed herself to think of Seneka again. Recalling the taste of his lips and tongue and the feel of his cock hardening against her, she pinched her nipples. She ached for sexual intimacy. As long as she unwound a little, it would happen sooner or later. It would have been very nice to have Seneka as a lover – if only for one night.

The thought that he was probably having sex with the blonde after all his meaningless innuendos, helped her wrench her thoughts away from him. She was not going to lie there thinking about him.

Turning onto her belly, she struggled to keep her thoughts off him until she finally fell asleep.

In the middle of the night she woke and decided she'd been too hasty. Just because he'd taken the blonde out didn't mean he'd slept with her. And even if he had, Autumn had no business feeling betrayed. Yes, he'd implied he might be interested in a serious relationship with her. And yes, she'd poured out her heart to him and exposed her deepest hurt. But he'd also made it clear he wanted to date. He was dating and so should she. The next time a handsome man turned her head, she wouldn't be so quick to confide in him.

### III

Seneka found Braden and one of his younger brothers Raven seated in his living room when he returned from Karen's condo just after twelve a.m.

"We didn't expect to see you until sometime tomorrow, Neka," Braden said.

He shrugged, poured himself a whiskey, and sank onto the loveseat.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Braden asked.

He shook his head. "No."

"That's not like you, Neka," Raven said.

"There's nothing to talk about. She's not my type."

"Then why waste time with her instead of asking Autumn out?"

"That's not a question I expected from you, Bray," he said.

Braden frowned. "You can't think I want you to marry a Native woman so much I'd try to discourage you from seeing her when she clearly moves you in a way no woman since Kelli has."

"I didn't mean to imply that, Bray."

"So why aren't you seeing her?" Raven asked.

"The moment I saw her, I felt almost as if I'd been struck by lightning."

He watched Braden and Raven exchange a quick look.

"That's what you said about Kelli," Raven said.

"I know and how often does lightning strike twice?" He gulped down his whiskey and rose. "I need a very cold shower."

"Or you need to see your Autumn," Raven said.

"I do plan to see her. I just need a little more time to process how she makes me feel."

"Have you talked to her since your date?"

"No."

Raven arched a brow. "You think that's wise?"

"Why wouldn't it be?"

Raven shrugged. "When you're seeing two women in the same complex, the biggest complex shrinks to the size of a doghouse—which is probably where you're going to be when she learns you're seeing Karen but not her."

He stared at Raven. "I have no plans to tell her."

Raven rose and placed a hand on his shoulder. "Trust me, Neka, she's going to find out. Once she does it's going to be more difficult to establish a relationship with her. Besides, why are you seeing Karen instead of her?"

"She's already been hurt and I don't want to risk trying to rush her into a sexual relationship she's not ready for."

"Commendable, but I doubt she's going to see it that way."

"That will be her problem."

"It's going to be yours when she finds out. Unless you're saying you don't care how she feels."

"No. I'm not saying that."

"Then I suggest you use your hands and make some contact with her. Call her. Email her. Send her flowers. Give her some indication you haven't decided she's not worth knowing."

"I can't see how she could possibly reach that conclusion."

"You'd be surprised what intelligent, usually sensible women can think when their hearts are involved," Raven said.

"I'm not flattering myself enough to think she's in love with me."

"Fine. Her affections then. Whatever you choose to call whatever impulse led her to go out with you. If you really like her, you need to give her motivation some serious consideration."

Seneka raked a hand through his hair. Even though Raven was three years his junior, he had far more experience with women. Raven had dated a multitude of women during Seneka's fourteen-year marriage of happy monogamy.

He nodded and left the living room. In his bedroom, he lay staring at Kelli's picture while thinking of Autumn.

### III

After walking two miles along the complex's in-door track on Saturday morning, Autumn returned to her apartment to shower

before she headed to Martie's for breakfast. She was sipping a second cup of coffee and reading the paper when she heard Seneka's name.

"So he's a great kisser?"

Autumn glanced up. The two blondes sat two tables away. The one who'd asked him to dance at Patty's glanced up and gave Autumn a knowing smile before turning back to her friend.

"Oh, yeah, but damn is he well-hung. After a few kisses, his cock was so hard, I thought he would split me open. Clearly, he hadn't had a decent fuck in ages. Before I showed him the advantages of fucking a woman who keeps in shape, I made him eat me. He had me screaming and clawing at him in no time. He'll be wearing my brand for weeks."

Even as Autumn told herself the blonde was being spiteful and probably trying to bait her, she felt her cheeks burning. Uncaring what satisfaction she might give them, she rose, leaving a tip on the table. She heard amused laughter as she left Martie's.

When she got back to her apartment, a dozen roses sat outside her door. She opened the door before she bent to pick them up. Inside she read the accompanying card.

*SE.*

In the face of his weeklong silence, the roses left her unmoved. She tossed them in the trash.

Later that morning while standing in the checkout line at the market, she felt a tingling sensation along the back of her neck. She glanced around.

Seneka smiled at her from two checkout aisles away.

Her heartbeat increased, but she gave him what she hoped was a casual smile and looked away. This time his fake smile wouldn't move her.

Moments later, he guided his cart through other shoppers to get in line behind her. "Hi, Autumn."

She half-turned to face him. "Hi."

"How have you been?"

"Busy. You?"

He hesitated. "This is a busy time at the office."

And in the bedroom. She flashed a cool smile and turned to stare ahead. "Well don't let me keep you."

"If you don't have any plans for the rest of the day or night —"

Recalling the wasted week spent waiting and hoping he'd call while he bedded one of the blondes, she swung around to face him. "Why do you assume I have no plans for the day?"

His eyes widened. "I didn't say that —"

"But you clearly think it."

"Autumn —"

"I have plans."

"What about tomorrow?"

"I'm going to be busy then too and any other day or night you suggest."

He ran a hand through his hair. "You're clearly upset. Why don't I give you a few days and then call —"

"Don't call me, Seneka and don't send anymore flowers or I'll just toss them in the trash with the ones you sent today."

He narrowed his gaze. "Fine. I won't call or send flowers."

"Fine." She turned away, blinking rapidly to keep her eyes tear free. She sucked in a breath when he wheeled his cart away.

### III

Back in her apartment, Autumn slammed can goods around as she put her food away. Why had she been so unguarded with him? Had getting her to open up amused him?

Her apartment bell rang. She slammed the cabinet closed and went to the door. She was surprised to see Seneka through her peephole. After a moment of indecision, she opened the door.

"I can see from the look on your face you're still angry, but I need to talk to you, Autumn."

"About what?"

"I need to know what went wrong."

"You're asking me what went wrong? I'm not the one who..."

"Who what? What do you think I've done?"

"I know what you did and I don't want to talk about it or to you!"

He caught her hand as she started to turn away from him. "I'm only asking for a few minutes of your time."

She tugged at her hand.

He tightened his grip. "Please."

She met his gaze. What the hell was wrong with her that made her want to listen to more lies? "Fine." She tugged at her hand again.

He released it.

She stepped back.

He quickly entered and closed the door. "The last time we saw each other, I thought...you led me to believe you wanted to see me again."

"That was two weeks ago—before I found out what you've been doing."

"What I've been..." He leaned against the door. "What do you think I've been doing?"

"I saw you with one of the blondes so I'm not sure what you're doing here. Are they too busy to accommodate you?"

He stared at her. "I didn't have intercourse with her."

She shook her head. "I don't understand why you're here."

"I'm here because I want to see you."

"Why? They're too busy? Or did you lose interest once you got what you wanted?"

"I told you we didn't have intercourse."

"And I might have believed you if I hadn't heard them talking about what a...stud you are."

He narrowed his gaze. "Are you calling me a liar?"

"I'm telling you I heard them discussing how hard your...cock was...she said you...gave her oral sex before she pleased you and showed you the advantage of having a physically fit woman as a lover. She said you'd bear her claw marks for weeks."

"And you believe her because...?"

"Because I know you've been out with her."

"I've been out with you too, but the last time I checked, we'd never had sex," he pointed out.

"So you admit you've been dating her?"

"I've been out with her twice. That doesn't constitute dating as far as I'm concerned."

"I don't care what you call it, Seneka. You fed me a line of bull, ignored me for two weeks while you slept with her —"

"There's a reason I kept my distance."

"Well don't expect me to care what it was. And don't expect me to be happy to see you."

"I was hoping you'd be glad to see me and I did not sleep with her."

"I don't care! You've had your few minutes, Seneka."

"Isn't there anything I can say to —"

"The only thing I want to hear you say is goodbye."

"Fine. Goodbye." He jerked the door open and slammed it shut behind him.

She leaned her forehead against the door but suppressed the urge to cry.

### III

Rage knotted the muscles in Seneka's gut. Instead of storming to Karen's apartment to tell her what he thought of her, he went home instead.

Braden was stretched out on the sofa watching a ballgame. He took one look at Seneka's face and sat up. "What's wrong, Neka?"

He shook his head, not trusting his voice.

Braden rose and crossed the room to him. "Enough with this I don't want to talk about it, shit, Neka! What's wrong?"

He took a deep breath and told Braden about his conversation with Autumn. "You don't have any nail marks on your body...do you?"

"No! Things got a little hot with Karen but neither one of us was even partially undressed and she sure as hell never got the chance to claw me."

"So? Go back and show Autumn you're nail free and then take advantage of who you are, Neka."

"What do you mean who I am?"

"We both know many women have captive fantasies about Native American males. Go back and give her a chance to live her fantasy. Treat her like she's yours to do with as you like."

"I don't want to treat her with anything less than respect, Bray."

"That's what landed your ass in trouble. You're a little rusty when it comes to dating. So trust me, Neka, they don't always want us to be a gentleman. They don't always want to be treated like a lady either. Go back and treat her like a woman who is so sexy and beautiful that you can't keep your hands off of her."

"In a moment you'll be suggesting I treat her like a movie depiction of a squaw."

Braden laughed and slapped his cheek. "I'm not advocating treating her disrespectfully. I'm suggesting you go back and fuck her senseless. Of course if you're not up to the challenge—"

"What the hell! How do you think I kept Kelli happy for fourteen years if I weren't up to the challenge?"

"Frankly, Neka, I really don't care how you did it, but I'm betting Autumn does. So go show her."

"You think I can't?"

"Oh, I know you can, Neka. Go show her why women love Elkhorn men."

"You sound conceited, Bray."

Braden shrugged. "As Will Sonnet used to say, 'No brag, just fact,'" he said of a character in an old western they watched as kids.

### iii

Autumn paced her living room, filled with conflicting emotions. Why was she so indecisive with Seneka Elkhorn? Part of her wanted to believe him. Another part didn't care if he had actually slept with the blonde. Her sense of independence insisted she never see him again.

Her apartment bell rang and she knew it was him even before she walked to the door to look out the peep-hole. "I don't have anything to say to you," she said through the door.

"Well, I have plenty to say to you. Open the door."

"I'm not going to —"

"Open the door!"

She blinked. Who the hell did he think he was talking to? "If you think you can —"

"Open the goddamn door now, Autumn!"

The air pulsed with the words *or else*. The unspoken words should have pissed her off. They excited her instead. She unlocked the door.

He stepped inside, slamming the door behind him.

She sucked in an angry breath. "Why the hell do you keep slamming my damn door?"

"I'm going to tell you for the last time that I didn't sleep with Karen."

She believed him. If he had, why would he keep coming back to her? But maybe it was time to play a little hard to get. "It doesn't matter how many ways you say it, Seneka, I know what I heard."

"Then know what you see as well." He pushed away from the door and surprised her by taking off his jacket and tossing it on the floor. His shirt and undershirt followed.

Oh, God, what a beautiful torso. A narrow waist danced up to ripped abs and wide shoulders. He could easily pose for Ripped Magazine.

He lifted his arms and turned slowly. "Do you see any damned nail marks on me?"

She moistened her lips. "No, but then she said the marks were on your ass," she said, amazed at how easily the lie passed her lips.

"She said that?"

Autumn nodded. "She said every time she dug her nails in your ass, you...dug your cock deeper in her."

"My cock wasn't anywhere near her damned pussy."

"And I'm supposed to take your word over hers?"

He kicked off his shoes and unzipped his pants.

Her heart raced as she watched him pull off his trousers.

He wore boxer briefs that clung to his muscular thighs and did nothing to conceal his erection. Lord, he looked big and thick—just as the damned blonde had said.

"Satisfied?"

"How can I be? Your ass is still covered."

"Are you sure it's my ass you want to see, Autumn?"

Her cheeks burned. She shrugged. "If you have something to hide or to be ashamed of..."

"There's nothing under here I need to be ashamed of."

"No?"

Locking his gaze with hers, he took off his briefs.

## Chapter Five

His cock, long and thick with a big head sprung out, revealing a slight upward tilt that would make hitting her G-spot that much easier.

His balls were big and looked heavy. Her pussy flooded and she couldn't look away.

He turned, exposing a perfect body with a tight, firm ass. Thank God it bore no marks. He turned back to face her.

She forced her gaze away from his cock. "Just the thought of her has you erect – gloriously so."

"You know, Autumn, I'm sick of your shit! I think you know damn well I didn't sleep with her skinny ass."

"If you find her so unattractive, why were you with her?"

"Because I was horny as hell and she was willing while you weren't."

"You *were* horny?"

"As you can see, I still am. So no more games." He closed the distance between them, put an arm around her waist, and jerked her against him.

Feeling his cock pulsing against her body, she shivered.

He stared down into her eyes. "She doesn't need to be a problem between us," he said.

She swallowed and struggled to resist the urge to ground herself against his cock. "Why not?"

He brushed his lips against her forehead. "Because the only nail marks that will ever adorn my ass again will be yours," he told her.

She sucked in a breath and jerked away from him. "You're assuming a lot," she said and turned away.

He caught her hand and swung her back around to face him. "The only thing I'm assuming is that I'm about to fuck you!"

Oh, God. At last. "Seneka!"

"I'm tired of playing games with you."

"Playing games? I'm not—"

He caressed her cheek. "Be quiet and get your ass against the door!"

"If you think caveman behavior turns me on—"

"Oh, you're about to be turned on." He bit her ear. "Now get your big, round, beautiful ass against the door."

Big, round beautiful ass? Oh, yeah. Abandoning all pretense of not wanting to have sex with him, she positioned herself against the door.

He moved to stand in front of her with his hands pressed on the door beside her.

She closed her eyes as he bent his head. "Seneka...?"

Instead of kissing her lips, he touched his mouth to her forehead. "Yes?"

"I've never had a one night stand."

"And you're not having one now," he said in a soft voice.

"I'm not?"

He dragged his tongue along the side of her ear. "You can't think I only want one night with you."

"You want more?"

He raised his head to smile down at her. "Oh, hell yeah."

She stroked her hand over his ass. "I want to give you more."

“Then we’re on the same page, honey.”

She closed her eyes and parted her lips.

He rained kisses on her neck until she put her arms around him. He turned his head and pressed a warm, gentle kiss against her mouth.

She leaned into him, longing for more.

He deepened his kiss, sweeping his tongue into her mouth.

Autumn trembled, slipping her arms around him.

They kissed until her nipples hardened and she felt hot all over.

When he dragged his lips from hers, he pushed up her top. For a moment, he struggled with her front fastening bra, then he unclasped it.

Her breasts spilled out.

He cupped his hands over them and bent to tongue her nipples before sucking her right breast into his mouth.

The feel of his mouth and tongue on her nipple sent her senses into overdrive. She moaned, releasing him long enough to cup her hands over his head. “Oh...oh...God...Seneka...yes...yes...” She arched her back.

Trailing a wet path of biting kisses against her skin, he sucked her other breast between his lips.

He kissed, bit, and sucked her breasts with a growing hunger.

Then when she burned for him, he slid his hands down her belly to push her sweat bottoms down.

She gripped his wrists. “I...I don’t have...I’m not wearing any panties.”

“Good. That’s one less item I’ll have to remove.”

Near the end of their relationship, Sam insisted she keep her clothes on during sex. "I'm not undressing."

He lifted his head and stared down at her. "Why not?"

She looked away from him. "Isn't it obvious why not?"

He cupped her face between his palms. "I've already told you I prefer full-figured women, Autumn. It's not as if I expect or want to see a pole-thin body when you disrobe."

If only she dared believe him. "I want to keep my clothes on."

"Autumn —"

"Pushing up my top and pulling down my bottoms will give you all the access you need, but I don't want to be naked, Seneka."

"You don't trust me?"

"It's not about a lack of trust in you."

"Then what is it about?"

"Please, Seneka. You can have access to my pussy without my being naked."

"You think all I want from you is pussy?"

"Right now? Yes. I think that's all you want and I want to give it to you — on my terms."

He released her and leaned against the wall beside her. "Think again, Autumn."

She glanced at his groin. He was still erect. She reached out to close her fingers over his cock. "After my experience with Sam I need time to —"

He turned to face her. "I'm not going to pay for what some idiot said or did to you. I don't share his view of your body."

She squeezed his cock. "Please."

His jaw clenched as he peeled her fingers away from his shaft. He strolled over to his pants, pulled a condom from his wallet, and then walked back to her. After quickly applying the condom, he jerked her sweats down below her ass.

Uncertain of his mood, she bit her lip. "Seneka?"

"You think all I want is pussy? Fine!" He pushed against her, sinking balls deep with one, hard, angry thrust.

The exquisite feel of a long, thick cock stretching her filled her with delight. She gasped. "Oh...God."

Without giving her even a moment to fully savor the joy of having a cock inside her body for the first time in nearly four long years, he gripped her ass and fucked her hard and fast.

Even as her body responded, her mind screamed in protest. He didn't kiss or caress her. He just kept pushing and pulling his cock in and out of her without doing anything to keep her aroused.

She pressed her hands against his shoulders. "Seneka...not like this...please..."

"I don't want to talk," he spoke in a cold, angry tone. "I want to fuck."

Damn him. Why couldn't he understand her need to ease into full nudity in front of a man who had a ripped body without an ounce of fat? "Fine." She dropped her hands to her side, clenching them into fists. "Fuck!"

"I will!"

And he did. He gripped her waist and pummeled her pussy so deeply, within minutes of his entrance, her ass slammed against the door. Despite his lack of tenderness, her stomach muscles rippled and she was close to coming from the sheer power of his firm, rhythmic

movements when he suddenly dug his fingers into her ass, slammed his cock up into her, groaned, shuddered against her, and came.

For a moment after he stopped shuddering and leaned against her, she was shocked. Then she shoved against his shoulders. "You selfish bastard!"

He placed his forehead against hers, withdrawing halfway from her. "Forgive me," he said. "It won't happen again."

"You're damn right it won't because now that you've gotten what you wanted, you can take your selfish ass home!"

"I didn't get what I wanted."

"You got a hell of a lot more out of it than I did."

"I wanted you to enjoy it too."

"Then you should have done something besides rut into me like you were with a paid hooker!"

He lifted his head to look down at her. "I'll make it up to you."

"Not interested. Get out."

He brushed his lips against her neck. "I'm sorry."

She shivered.

"Let me make it up to you."

*Make him go now before you lose your resolve.* It was difficult to think clearly with him still inside her. "How?"

"Like this." He pushed her top up as he eased out of her.

Pushing him away and insisting he get the hell out of her life was the way to go. Standing there with her belly on display while he played with her nipples would only pull her in deeper.

She didn't move. She couldn't...didn't want to.

He rained kisses on her breasts.

"Oh...God..." Why did that feel so good?

He stroked his palms over her stomach.

His lips and tongue created havoc with her senses but she didn't want to want him. She clenched her hands into fists.  
"Seneka...I—"

"I promise that won't ever happen again, honey."

She shook her head. "Seneka..."

"Forgive me."

She closed her eyes.

Giving each nipple a final nip, he kissed his way down her body to her mid- section.

She tensed.

"It's all right, honey...it's all right. I find you sexy." He rubbed his cheek against her stomach in a slow, sensual fashion that made nonsense of any lingering desire to do anything but offer him her total surrender.

She felt his fingers sliding down below her waist. "Oh..."

He rubbed her clit.

"Oh..." She rotated her hips. *More. Please. More.*

His fingers probed her slit before slipping inside her.

"Seneka."

He lowered his head to brush his lips against her pubic hair before he licked her slit while finger fucking her.

She moaned and gripped his hair, pulling his face closer against her body. It had been so long since she'd been loved.  
"Oh...God...Seneka...eat me."

He withdrew his fingers from inside her.

"Don't stop," she pleaded.

His big palms slid around her body to cup her ass. He massaged, caressed, and slapped her cheeks until they stung.

She rubbed herself against his face.

In response, he swept his tongue into her pussy.

He had fucked her without much consideration for her pleasure or ultimate satisfaction but he atoned for that by feasting on her pussy and clit with a slow deliberation that touched her deepest emotions even as it set her on fire.

Under the insistent pressure from his tongue and lips, her climax built slowly. It spread out from her pussy to send the blood raging through her entire body. She curled her fingers in his hair, grinding herself against his face. "Oh, God. Oh...God!"

He sucked her clit.

She shuddered and sobbed as her orgasm crashed over her like a giant wave, dragging her under its sweet wetness. Her knees buckled.

He rose and put his arms around her, keeping her on her feet. "I have you, honey. I'll always have you."

"Seneka..." She put her head on his shoulder, clutching him close as she shuddered in his arms.

He kissed the top of her head. "Am I forgiven?"

Autumn nodded. "Yes...oh, yes."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes!"

He took one of her hands from his back and placed it between their bodies. "Touch me."

She sucked in a breath and lifted her head. "You're still hard?"

“Not still. Again. Eating your sweet pussy got me hot all over. I love the taste, aroma, and feel of you.”

She closed her fingers around his cock, enjoying its girth and width. Looking into his dark eyes, she started to jerk him off.

He shook his head. “That’s nice, Autumn—”

“But?”

“It’s not what I want.”

Did he want a blowjob? “What do you want?”

He walked over to his pants for his wallet.

Her heartbeat, which was slowly resuming its normal beat, sped up when he removed a condom.

*Yes! He wanted to be back inside her.* She pulled up her sweats.

“Oh, don’t do that, honey. Not yet.” He walked back to her and handed her the condom.

Smiling, she took it. “It’s almost a shame to cover this big, beautiful, bad boy.”

He bent his head to nip at her ear. “Then don’t.”

“What?”

“I’m game to go raw inside you.”

She drew away from his mouth. “Well, I’m not.” Without waiting for his response, she ripped open the foil package and slowly slipped the rubber over his cock.

He leaned down to kiss the side of her neck. “Push them back down for me.”

She obeyed.

He fingered her. “You’re wet and ready for me?”

She’d been ready for him from the moment she saw him. “Yes...yes.”

He rubbed against her, kissing her ear. "Put me inside where we both want me to be."

She pressed him to her entrance.

"Take me inside, honey," he whispered, his voice brusque with desire.

She pushed her hips forward. She sank her teeth in her bottom lip as she felt him slowly sliding inside her. "Oh, God. It's been so long, Seneka...so long."

He palmed her ass, fucking her with slow, deep strokes. "I'm sorry I didn't make our first time special for you."

"That's over." She slipped her arms around his neck. "Just make this time special, Seneka. Fuck me deep but don't rush. Do it so I can savor each stroke."

"I will," he promised.

He made love to her slowly. Each touch and caress of his big, warm hands made her hotter and greedier for him. She loved the feel of his mouth on her breasts and when he finally kissed her, the taste of his tongue and lips.

He sucked on her tongue and reached between their bodies to rub his thumb against her clit while sliding his thick cock slowly in and out of her.

Burning with the need to experience her first cock-induced orgasm in years, she tightened her vaginal muscles around him.

He groaned and tore his mouth away from hers. "God, you're so sweet and tight you make me rock hard."

"That's how I like you — rock hard and pounding inside me."

He kissed her neck, behind her ear. "You want it harder?"

"Yes...and faster until you almost hurt me."

"I don't hurt my lovers, Autumn."

She tightened her fingers in his ass. "There's a fine line between pain and exquisite pleasure, Seneka."

"Remember that when I want to paddle your ass."

"You can paddle anything I have."

"Yeah?"

"Oh, yes!"

He laughed and thrust his cock deep into her.

She shuddered with pleasure and humped herself on him.

"Oh...God...I'm so close...so close..." she whispered.

He trailed his lips down to her cleavage. As he took her right nipple between his lips, he paddled her ass cheeks.

"Oh...oh...yes...yes..." She arched her body into his, tossing her head back as her climax built in her belly.

His hard palm rained sharp slaps against her ass until each cheek stung and she was a breath away from coming.

"Seneka...Seneka..." she moaned, digging her nails into his ass.

He kissed his way up from her breasts to her neck and finally devoured her lips.

Then, when her thighs shook and her pussy burned, he parted her cheeks and pushed his finger into her ass.

Her knees buckled and she exploded into a million happy pieces.

He gripped her hips and kept her on her feet while he continued to pound her pussy.

She moaned, leaning against him. "Oh...Seneka." Too limp and sexually sated to help him achieve his orgasm, she stroked her

hands over his shoulders. She wanted to continue fucking him back until he came, but couldn't muster the energy.

"I'm almost there...squeeze me, honey."

She tightened herself around him.

"Holy shit!" He groaned, shuddered, and then his cock jerked in her several times before he crushed her against the door.

She bore his weight for as long as she could before she pushed against his shoulders. "Seneka...you're crushing me."

He eased out of her and leaned against the wall. "Damn!"

"Is that a good damn?"

He turned his head to look at her. "Hell, yeah."

Feeling her juices trickling from her pussy, she blushed, and pulled up her sweat bottoms.

"Damn, you've worn me out. I need a nap."

"I know just the place you can have one." She took his hand in hers and they walked towards her bedroom.

He looked around. "Bathroom?"

She paused outside the bathroom door. "Guests first," she said, stepping away from the door.

He looked inside. "Looks big enough in there for us both," he said, turning to look at her.

"I'm not going to use the bathroom with you in there," she said. "You go first."

He laughed, slapped her ass, and went inside.

When he came out, she pointed down the hall. "The bedroom is on the left."

He nodded.

She watched him walk down the hall before she went into the bathroom. She took a five minute shower, brushed her hair and teeth, and slipped on a pair of silk pajamas from her linen closet.

Taking a deep calming breath, she looked into the bedroom.

He lay on the bed with the covers pushed down to his shins. He patted the bed. "Come join me. I do bite, but I promise not to draw blood."

She walked into the room, stopping by his side of the bed. "I feel a little strange. It's been so long since I've been with...I have to get used to this again...walking in here and finding a man...a naked man on my bed waiting for me."

He took her hand in his and kissed her fingers. "I'm hoping to be the only naked man you allow in here."

She shrugged. "We'll see."

He tugged at her hand.

She turned off the lamp and got into the bed beside him. After a moment, she turned onto her side.

He pulled the covers up and put an arm around her waist, curling his body against hers. Warm lips nibbled at her ear.

"Hey, you. I thought you said you needed a nap."

He slipped his hand inside her bottoms to palm her. "I've changed my mind. I need some more pussy."

Smiling, she removed his hand from her pajamas. "Well, you've had all you're getting tonight."

"My balls are blue."

She kissed his hand before she placed it on her belly. "You'll live."

"Who knew such a pretty woman could be so unfeeling?"

She laughed, snuggled against him, and fell asleep.

### iii

The smell of food woke Autumn a few hours later. Sitting up in bed, she looked around her moonlit bedroom. She was alone. But Seneka's clothes were draped over the lone chair in her bedroom. She got up and went into the living room.

Seneka, dressed in briefs, stood at the French doors staring out onto her small balcony. He turned, smiled at her, and walked across the room to put an arm around her waist.

She lifted her face.

He kissed the corner of her mouth. "I hope I didn't wake you."

She rubbed her cheek against his shoulder. "The smell of food woke me. What do I smell?"

"Something I hope you'll enjoy."

She slipped her arm around his waist, looking up at him. "You can cook?"

"As a matter of fact I can cook, but I didn't cook this meal." He transferred his arm to her shoulders and walked her to the kitchen. "I thought you might be hungry." He pulled several fancy take-out containers from the range's warming tray.

"I am." She removed the covers.

He leaned over her shoulder. "That's grilled pepper steak."

She inhaled. "Smells scrumptious. What's this dish?"

"That's grilled flank steak in red wine sauce. And that's whipped sweet potatoes, and that's a green bean casserole. There's also garlic bread and a strawberry cheesecake. And this..." He walked over to her refrigerator and came back with a bottle of

champagne. "Is to help get you high so I can have my wicked way with you again."

She outlined her lips with the tip of her tongue. "I like a handsome man who knows what he wants."

"Oh, I knew what I wanted the moment I saw you."

She smiled. "Where did this come from?"

"I ordered it."

"And had it delivered in the middle of the night?"

"Not exactly. Two of my brothers are here on business from L.A. Delmarco's is open until four am on the weekends. I called in the order and they picked it up for me. See anything you like?"

She turned to place her hands on his bare chest. "Everything looks good...especially you."

He lifted her hands to his lips. "I'm still horny as hell. Don't start anything you're not prepared to finish right now, Autumn."

"Wasn't twice enough?"

"Tonight was the first time I'd had intercourse in nearly thirty months. No, twice isn't enough."

"It was even longer for me, Seneka."

He put his arms around her. "Then let's go to bed and do it again."

She leaned close and kissed his lips. "I don't know about you, but I'm starving and I don't mean for you."

"Oh, now, Autumn, that's just cold."

She laughed and stepped away from him. "Have you eaten anything?"

"No. I waited for you and this is the thanks I get?"

“Whining is unbecoming in a six foot tall, gorgeous hunk,” she teased.

He smiled and took plates from the cabinet.

They chose their food and sat across from each other at the dining room table.

The fact that she felt comfortable with silence between them pleased her. Each time she looked up, she found his gaze locked on her.

“You know I didn’t sleep with her or anyone else, don’t you?”

“Why did you take her out, Seneka?”

He shrugged. “For sex. I’d been horny for a few months, but once we met, I felt as if my balls were permanently blue. I knew you weren’t ready for sex so I asked her out.”

“And?”

“Things got a little hot, but never went pass the heavy petting stage because I decided I wanted my first time in years to be special. I knew I wanted it to be with you, so I stopped and went home to take yet another cold shower.”

He reached across the table to hold her hand. “I’m sorry our first time wasn’t special for you, Autumn.”

She shook her head, squeezing his hand. “You don’t need to keep apologizing, Seneka.”

“Do you believe me?”

“That you didn’t have sex with her? Yes,” she admitted.

“Thank God!” He released her hand and sat back against his seat. “Why haven’t you dated before, Autumn?”

She shrugged. “It’s not like there’s been a succession of men beating a path to my door for the privilege.”

“Really? I’m very glad to hear it.”

“What?”

He grinned. “Less competition for your time and affection suits me just fine.”

She stared at him. What would he say if she admitted she couldn’t envision any man being able to turn her head after meeting him? “How much do I have for yours, Seneka?”

“None.”

“There must be any number of women who’d kill for an opportunity to go out with you.”

“The feeling isn’t mutual. I believe I’ve already told you I want to marry again and have a couple of kids. I’m thirty-seven. It’s not like I have time to waste on meaningless relationships, Autumn.”

She moistened her lips. Listening to him she almost believed he was about to talk of love at first sight.

He locked his gaze on her. “I think I knew the moment I saw you—”

She held up her hand, shaking her head. “Be careful what you say or imply, Seneka.”

“Why?”

“Why? Because we’ve known each other for a few weeks and this is only our third time...God I can’t believe I slept with you on a third...hell, this wasn’t even a date!”

“So?” He recaptured her hand. “Doesn’t that tell you something about you and me and how well we mesh together?”

“We were both horny, Seneka. I’m not sure either one of us should read any more into this than that.”

He released her hand, his gaze narrowing. "So you think we're just two horny people who needed a fuck?"

He practically spat the word fuck out, making it sound like something they should be ashamed of wanting to share. One look into his dark eyes and she knew she'd managed to piss him off.

She sighed. "You have a temper."

"What the hell makes you say that, Autumn?"

"The only time you've cursed in my presence was when you were angry – like now and earlier tonight when you demanded I open the door or else."

"I never said anything about or else."

She tilted her head to look at him. "What would you have done if I hadn't opened the door? Would you have tried to kick it in?"

His lashes swept down. "Why do I get the feeling that no matter what I say I'll be in the dog house? If I say yes, you'll think I'm a caveman. If I say no, you'll think if he wanted to see me badly enough he'd kick it in."

Her lips twitched. "So what's your answer?"

"You didn't answer my question."

"Which question is that?"

"Do you think we clicked the night we met because we were two horny people in need of a fuck?"

She took a sip of champagne. "I don't know about you but I was horny." She laughed.

He compressed his lips and gave her a cool look.

She put her glass down. "Seneka –"

"Save it."

"What?"

"I'm not in the mood to hear any shit from you." He rose and walked out of the kitchen.

She followed him to her bedroom. She stood in the door watching him pull on his pants before she spoke. "What are you doing?"

He answered without turning to face her. "I'm going home."

She glanced at the clock. "It's nearly four in the morning."

He shrugged and put on his shirt.

"Why are you going?"

He put his socks in his jacket pocket and slipped on his shoes. "Clearly we don't want the same thing in a relationship and I've already told you I don't have the time or the inclination for meaningless relationships. If all you're interested in are meaningless fucks, share them with someone else." He walked across the room to stand in front of her. "Excuse me."

"You're not being fair, Seneka. We've only known each other—"

"I'm a big boy, Autumn. I know what I want and need. What I don't want or need is a lecture from you on how long we've known each other," he said in a cool voice. "Now excuse me."

She stepped away from the bedroom door.

He walked past her and headed for the entrance door.

She followed him. "Seneka? Are you...will you call me?"

He started to shake his head, but shrugged instead. "I don't know."

"Seneka. Wait...please."

He unlocked the door. "I really need to go." He opened the door and left.

Autumn sucked in a breath and leaned against the closed door. What the hell had just happened? And why hadn't she said something to keep him there? What if he went to another woman? *What were you thinking, Autumn?*

## Chapter Six

Both Braden and Raven were in the living room playing cards when Seneka walked in.

Although they exchanged a quick glance, neither one of them spoke.

He ran a hand through his hair. "I'm going to go to bed."

Braden rose and crossed the room to look at him. "Are you all right, Neka?"

"I...ah..." He pressed his tongue against his cheek. "I think I'm in trouble, Bray."

Braden put an arm around his shoulders and walked him over to the sofa where Raven sat. "What's wrong?"

"She...all she feels for me is...lust."

"She said that?"

"Not in so many words, but that's the gist of how she feels about me."

"Why do you say that?" Raven asked.

He repeated their conversation.

"She's been hurt, Neka. It's understandable that she's a little leery of talk of kids and marriage after only a few weeks," Raven said.

"Are you in love with her?" Braden asked.

He shrugged. "I don't know," he admitted.

"Then allow her the same uncertainty, Neka," Braden said. "Give her time to get to know you well enough to know that she can trust you when you do tell her you love her."

"You think I overreacted?"

"In a word? Yes."

He glanced at Raven.

Raven arched a brow. "What's more important, she probably thought you were allowing your dick to do your talking. You know many of them think that's what we use in place of a brain."

Seneka stared at him. Then all three brothers laughed so hard, they fell back against the sofa.

Braden sobered first. "Was it your dick talking, Neka?"

He shook his head. "No."

"What are the chances we'll get you to move back to L.A. now?"

"Slim to none. Philly's in my blood now."

"Philly? Or Philly women?"

"Kelli and Autumn were both born and raised here so I guess I'd say both."

"Fuck! Oh, well. Since that's the case, make sure you give her a little space and try again."

"But don't wear your heart on your sleeve the next time," Raven suggested.

### III

"How like a man to let his third leg do his talking."

Autumn, pacing her living room several hours later, swung around to frown at Spring, seated on her sofa. "It wasn't his cock talking!"

Spring tossed her hair. "I know you're upset, Autumn, but surely you don't think he was serious."

"He was serious!"

"You do know that today's Sunday and that I like to spend Sunday mornings with my legs and arms wrapped around my handsome, naked hubby?"

"That's how you like to spend every morning."

Spring shrugged. "So sue me, I'm more in love with him now than I was the day we married. But my point is if he's talking exclusiveness after seeing you three times and you believe him and he's your fantasy man, I'm not seeing the problem, Autumn. Why'd you run him away?"

She frowned. "I didn't run him away!"

"No? Well, he's not here and I am. What's the problem?"

Autumn sighed. "He's a widower."

"And?"

"And how am I supposed to compete?"

"With what?"

"She was so lucky. He really loved her. I think he might still be in love with her."

"His wife?"

She nodded.

Spring sighed. "That's why you kicked his tight ass to the curb? Because you *think* you should be jealous of a dead woman?"

"I asked him to stay. He left anyway! And I don't just think...he gets this look in his eyes and his voice changes when he talks about her."

"So make him feel that way about you, Autumn. Obviously you can do it if you have him practically proposing after one night in your arms. That must be some hot pussy you've been letting go to waste!"

Autumn's cheeks burned. "Spring!"

Spring gave her an unrepentant grin. "He did practically propose. Didn't he?"

"No! He...he was horny."

"So it *was* his dick talking. Speaking of dicks...what's he packing?"

"I'm not going to talk about his cock."

"Hmmm. Too good to even risk discussing with yours truly, huh?"

"Spring!"

Spring tossed her hands in the air. "Fine. We won't talk about his cock. Let's have dinner tonight?"

"Thanks, but I'm not really in the mood to be good company."

"So? I wasn't in the mood to leave Jack naked and alone in bed first thing this morning, but here I am."

Autumn sighed. "I shouldn't have called —"

Spring exploded from her seat to cross the room and embraced her. "Oh, yes, you should have! That's what sisters are for. I'm just having a hard time understanding why you're creating problems where none exist, Autumn."

"I told you why! He showed me her picture the night we met."

"So?"

"Yes. So. You knew that and still went out with him. So why complain now?"

"He's still in love with her."

Spring kissed her cheek and released her. "So make him love you too. Maybe it's time you stopped playing nice."

"I don't want to play games with him, Spring."

"I know and I'm not suggesting you do. I'm just thinking you saw him with his bimbo wanna-be. Let him see you with a big, tall, dark, pussy-pleasing hunk with miles of smooth dark skin. Then maybe he'll keep his pictures to himself the next time."

"I don't happen to have one lying around and even if I did...I don't want to make him jealous. I just want some time to figure out how he feels...how I feel. I need some time to discover if what we both seem to feel is real."

"Why shouldn't it be real? You've both been married and you're both old enough to know the difference between lust and the real thing. Sometimes, life can be good, Autumn and you can meet that special someone when you least expect it."

That's pretty much what their mother had promised. It was also pretty much what had happened. "I want to believe that, but we've known each other...Hell, Spring, we don't even really know each other. And he wants to imply he wants to marry me and..."

"Well, maybe you've cured him of that madness."

She touched the tip to her tongue to the top of her lip. "What?"

"I'm sure he's feeling as if his pride has been injured. If he doesn't make it so easy from here on out, don't get discouraged. Promise?"

"So you think I should settle in for another round of silence and possible sightings of him with other women?"

"I don't know anything except that I think you should try to relax and let it happen. So Sam was...is a jerk. That doesn't mean your handsome brave can't mean everything he says and implies. And it doesn't mean you can't make him go all gooey eyed over you

too. From his reaction tonight, it sounds like he's more than halfway there already."

Autumn smiled. "Yes. It does. Doesn't it?"

Spring grinned. "That's the spirit. Now about dinner. I know you're not feeling up to a big to-do so Jack and I will join you at the restaurant in the lobby tonight. And before you shake your head, we'll be here at six-thirty."

"Okay. It'll be good to see *Jack* again."

Spring rose, shaking her head. "One of these days I'm going to wash my hands of you."

"Fat chance of that happening."

Spring laughed and they embraced. "You deserve to have a man who loves you and second time's the charm, Autumn. Just let it happen." She released her. "And be ready for dinner tonight. Shall we come pick you up?"

She shook her head. "No. I'll meet you at Martie's at six-thirty."

### III

After Spring left Autumn put on her sweats and decided to go walking around the track. As she crossed the lobby to the gym, a man emerged. Her heart raced. For a moment she thought he was Seneka. A second male who resembled him came out. Finally, Seneka exited the gym.

All three men were laughing. The first two walked past her with a casual nod. Seneka stopped. "Hi, Autumn."

She would have to encounter him when her face was bare of all but lipstick and foundation and she wore baggy sweats. Was it her imagination or did his smile lack warmth? She smiled at him. "Hi."

"How are you?"

"I'm not sure, Seneka."

"I know the feeling." He cast a quick glance behind her. "My brothers are flying back to L.A. tonight. Can I introduce you to them?"

Thank God he wanted her to meet them. "I'd like that."

He looked past her again. "Bray? Ray?"

The two males, both taller than Seneka, walked over to join them.

He nodded towards the taller of the two men. "This is my oldest brother, Braden. Bray, this is Autumn Walker."

Braden Elkhorn smiled and extended his hand. "Nice to meet you, Autumn."

"Same here."

They shook hands briefly before Seneka turned to the other male. "And this is Raven. Ray, Autumn."

Raven's smile was warm and his dark gaze friendly. When she extended her hand, he enclosed it in both of his. "So you're Autumn. I can see why Neka's so charmed."

She cast a quick look at Seneka, whose unsmiling gaze hardly gave the appearance of being charmed. She turned back to Raven. "You're too kind."

"Not at all," he released her hand. "I'm going up to shower," he said to Seneka. He gave her a quick smile. "It was very nice to meet you, Autumn."

"Thank you."

He walked away.

Braden Elkhorn remained. "Do you have plans for lunch, Autumn?"

She blinked. "Excuse me?"

"I know it's short notice and cheeky of me, but I hope you'll consider having lunch with me."

"Lunch with you? I..." She glanced at Seneka who looked at his brother with an inscrutable expression in his dark eyes. "I—"

"Or maybe we could have a drink if you have plans for lunch."

"I don't know what to say," she admitted.

He smiled suddenly. "A simple yes or no will suffice."

"I need a shower. I'll see you upstairs, Bray," Seneka said suddenly and walked away.

She hesitated, gave Braden Elkhorn a confused look, and then went after Seneka. "Seneka?"

He turned at the elevator. "Yes?"

"Can we talk about last night?"

"I'll call you, Autumn." He glanced over her shoulder. "You'll like Braden."

"I like you."

"I'm very glad to hear that." The elevator to his right opened. Raven stepped in. "I'll call you. Hold that, Ray," he said and stepped inside. The doors closed.

Great. She moistened her lips and turned to find Braden Elkhorn at her elbow.

"Lunch? A drink?"

"Why?"

He smiled. "You mean other than the fact that you're an attractive woman?"

Despite her mood, the compliment elicited a smile. "Yes. Other than that."

He shrugged. "As I'm sure Neka's already admitted, you're the first woman to spark his interest in years. Raven and I are returning home to L.A. tonight so this is my one chance to get to know you a little."

Seneka must have shown sufficient interest in her to generate such a wish to get to know her on his brother's part. "What time are you leaving for the airport?"

"We're leaving at eight tonight. Would you like to have an early dinner instead?"

"I have plans for dinner. How about a pre-dinner drink around six?"

"Works for me. In Martie's? Or would you prefer somewhere else?"

"I'm having dinner there so Martie's will be fine."

"Great. I'll see you at six."

She nodded and walked towards the gym.

### III

"She has a date tonight, Neka."

Seneka, his hair still damp from his shower, sank down onto the loveseat next to Braden and closed his eyes. "With you?"

"No. We're having a drink at Martie's before she has dinner there," Braden said.

He leaned his head on the cushioned sofa back. "What time?"

"We're having a drink at six. Are you going to call her before then?"

He sighed and shook his head. "No."

"I think she wants more than sex, Neka."

"I'm not so sure of that."

"I am."

Seneka opened his eyes as Raven walked into the living room and stretched out on the sofa. "What makes you think that, Ray?"

"The way she looked at you. She might be confused and or uncertain about what's going on between you two, but I don't think it's all about sex for her anymore than it is for you, Neka."

"A little patience and a lot of romance should get you what you want from her, Neka."

"I'm running a little short on patience," he said. "If she wants to date other men—"

"Is that what she wants?"

He frowned. "Apparently or she wouldn't be having a drink with Bray and a date with another man not even twenty-fours after we..." He trailed off, reluctant to give either of his brothers the impression he thought her promiscuous.

"Do you have a problem with my having a drink with her, Neka?"

He turned his head to look at Braden. Like, Raven, Braden possessed far more experience with woman than he did. While Seneka was financially secure, Braden was taller, more polished, and wealthier. What would prevent her from falling for him?

"Why did you ask her out, Bray?"

Braden narrowed his gaze. "You don't trust me, Neka?"

"Of course I do."

"Why *did* you ask her out?" Raven asked.

"Actually, I expected you to object, Neka or for her to refuse."

"I have no right to object."

"Which doesn't answer the question of why you asked her out, Bray," Raven said.

"I'd be very surprised if Neka isn't calling her wyanet the next time we return to Philly and I just wanted to get to know her a little. You know mother is going to have questions when she learns we've met the woman Neka's dating." Braden turned to look at him. "Call her or send her flowers or candy or wine...give her a reminder that you're interested before her date tonight."

All trying to be too open about his feelings had netted him was what she considered meaningless sex. He shook his head. "No." He got up and walked out of the room, surprised but relieved that neither of his brothers made any effort to stop him. He stretched out on his back on his bed. After several moments of recalling the hours he and Autumn had spent together, he turned on his side to stare at the smiling picture of Kelli that sat on his nightstand.

He felt a surge of guilt that the ache he'd felt at losing her had abated somewhat. He closed his eyes. Thoughts of their last good day together filled his memory. He could almost feel her arms holding him while she tried to soothe him as he cried uncontrollably because he knew their time together was so depressingly finite.

*Promise me you won't spend too much time grieving, Neka. I love you and I want your promise you'll find someone else to love and have kids with. Promise me you won't get lost in grief. Promise me, Neka. If you promise, it will make leaving you easier.*

He had promised, but only to give her a measure of comfort. He hadn't actually expected to even want to love anyone else again. Until recently, he had been relatively content. Now he wanted more with a woman who only seemed to want sex from him.

Lightning would not strike again. He needed to decide how much or how little he was willing to settle for from Autumn or move on.

He fell asleep, thoughts of Kelli and Autumn chasing each other around in his mind.

Raven woke him just after five. "I'm starving. Grab a shower and let's go somewhere for dinner."

He sat up. "Somewhere?"

Raven grinned. "Okay. Let's go to Martie's."

"Thanks but I think I'll pass."

"Really? Well I'm going to scope out your competition. Are you coming or are you going to trust your wyanet alone with a strange man whose sole goal might be to get her in bed?"

He shook his head. "She doesn't need or want us there."

"Granted she could probably do without me and Bray, but why would she have told him where she'd be eating if she didn't want him to tell you?"

"We share a family resemblance, Ray. Maybe she wanted him to know and not me."

Raven narrowed his gaze. "She walked away from him to follow you, Neka."

"She's going out with him."

"They're having a drink," he countered.

"She's his ideal woman."

"He knows how you feel. Has he ever done anything to earn your distrust?"

"Of course not."

"Then?"

"She's just the type he prefers."

"And does it follow she'll feel the same?"

"If she likes me, why wouldn't she like him?"

"*Because* she likes you. So get a grip, Neka and get your ass out of bed."

### III

Autumn sat across from Braden Elkhorn, sipping her drink, and wishing he were Seneka. "Are you married, Braden?"

"No. I'm not."

"Have you ever been married?"

"No, but Neka has."

"I know." She looked down into her drink. "She was beautiful."

"He described Kelli to you?"

"No. I saw a few pictures of her."

"A few? Kelli made him promise not to turn their home into a shrine."

She looked up. "She must have been an exceptional woman as well as a beautiful one."

He nodded. "She was."

"That's probably why he's still in love with her."

"She's dead, Autumn."

"That doesn't mean he's not still in love with her."

"If you're thinking his condo is filled with pictures of her, it's not. There's only one picture of her in his bedroom. The rest are in L.A. with our mother."

"He has two in his wallet."

He gave her a curious look. "How do you know that?"

"He showed them to me."

"He did? When?"

"The night we met."

"The hell he did!" He shook his head. "So that's why you think he's still in love with her?"

"Isn't he?"

"She's dead, Autumn. He's alive and so are you. Don't think you have to compete with her memory. She wanted him to be happy with someone else. Neka married right out of college and he's spent most of his adult life very happily married so he's a little rusty when it comes to dating. But he's made his choice. I hope you can be patient with him. I can assure you he's well worth the effort."

Aside from his flashes of temper she didn't doubt that. "I don't know what you want me to say."

"Saying you'll be patient with him and you're not interested in dating other men would really go over well with me."

She stared at him and then laughed. "I don't want to date other men."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm very sure."

He sighed. "Oh, God, I'm so glad to hear that. Now let's discuss this other guy you're seeing tonight."

"There isn't any other man. I was having dinner with my sister and her husband but I canceled."

"So have dinner with Neka instead."

His behavior during their earlier encounter left her in the dark about his feelings. "I don't think he's interested."

"No?"

"No." She glanced at her watch. "Thanks for the drink and the talk, but now I think I just want to go home and have a long bath." And think about Seneka.

"I'm sure he'd love to have dinner with you."

"Well maybe I don't want to have it with him." She rose and walked away.

### III

After a rather irritating lecture from Braden and Raven before they left for the airport, Seneka stepped off the elevator onto Autumn's floor. He walked down the corridor to her door and rang the bell.

"Yes?"

"It's Seneka," he said.

He heard the chain's removal and the sound of the locks releasing before she opened the door.

"Seneka! Hi!"

She wore a silky looking, loose pants suit in a mauve color that complemented her milk-chocolate skin tone. Her thick, dark hair touched her shoulders. She sounded pleased and her smile was warm. Some of the tension he'd felt since leaving her apartment in the early morning dissipated. "Hi. Can I come in?"

"Of course." She stepped away from the door.

He walked inside, closing and locking the door before he turned to find her still smiling at him.

Damn, she was pretty. "Can we talk?"

She nodded. "Let's go into the living room."

He followed her down the short passageway, his gaze locked on her. Recalling how warm and soft her bare ass felt against his palms, made him horny as hell.

She pointed to the loveseat. "Would you like a drink, Seneka?"

"No. Thanks." He sat on the loveseat.

She sat across from him on the sofa, still smiling.

"What did you think of Braden?"

"On a personal level?"

He nodded.

She shrugged. "I don't know. We spent the entire half hour we were together discussing you. He seems like a very supportive brother."

"He is." He raked a hand through his hair. "I owe you an apology for my behavior when I left."

She shook her head. "It's all...Seneka...I don't understand you. You didn't need to leave."

"Yes, I did. I wasn't...do you want to see other men, Autumn?"

"No."

"Do you want to sleep with other men?"

"No!" She gave him an angry look. "There's no need to make me sound as if I'm easy just because I made the mistake of sleeping with you!"

So now sleeping with him had been a mistake?

She bounded to her feet and walked over to him.

He looked up at her, half-expecting her to slap him.

She sat beside him instead. "Just because I'm not ready to believe everything you implied you feel doesn't mean I want to see or sleep with anyone but you, Seneka. I don't."

"Why is it so difficult for you to believe that I really do know what I want and feel?"

"Because you don't really know me. I don't know you. I know I like you but—"

"Like? You *like* me?"

"Okay, I more than like you, but I...I more than liked and trusted Sam and he crushed all my dreams and hopes because...romantic trust doesn't come easy for me these days, Seneka." She shrugged. "Besides, you have issues as well."

His only issue was her refusal to believe he meant what he said. "No, I don't."

"What about your wife?"

He swallowed hard, recalling his conversation with Braden. How long would it take him to live down showing her Kelli's picture the night they met? "I don't have a wife, Autumn."

"But you still love her."

"What do you want me to say to that?"

"Do you still love her?"

He narrowed his gaze. "Do you want to discuss your ex-husband and how you feel about him?"

"Why can't you just answer the question?"

“Why can’t you just accept the fact that I’m here now because I’m interested in building a relationship with you? You said you didn’t want to discuss your relationship with your ex and I respected that because I assumed it was a painful subject for you. Why can’t you afford me the same consideration?”

She shook her head and rose. “It’s not the same thing, Seneka!”

He caught her hand and tugged at it until she sank back down beside him. “What the hell do you want from me, Autumn? Do you expect me to pretend that Kelli didn’t keep me happy, content, and in love with her for most of my adult life?”

She rose again, tugging at her hand. “And just how the hell am I suppose to compete with that?”

He jerked her down onto his lap, slipping an arm around her waist. He placed his free palm on her cheek. “I’m not asking you to compete with her, honey. All I’m asking is that you give us a chance to build our own memories together.”

She sucked in a breath before she pressed her cheek against his shoulder. “I’m afraid,” she whispered.

“There’s no need.” He kissed her hair. “I’m not going to hurt you.”

She pulled away and rose. “I’m still trying.”

“Still trying what?”

She shrugged. “I go to the track to power walk as often as I can, but nothing’s really changed since Sam left me.”

“Oh, God, not that again.”

She sucked in an angry breath. “It might be old for you, but —

”

He rose and faced her. "You can lose weight if that's what you want to do. But you should know that your size and shape is what first attracted me, Autumn. I find you beautiful and sexy as hell. You don't have to worry about your weight with me."

"You look and sound so sincere."

"That's because I am."

She linked her arms around his waist. "You have such a perfect body."

He brushed the back of his hand along her cheek. "I happen to think your body is perfect too, honey."

"No, I—"

"Yes." He touched her breasts. "I love the size and shape of your breasts."

"They're large but they sag."

"So? They're natural. Natural breasts aren't always perky but they're almost always sexy. There's nothing like having a large, natural breast in your mouth."

She stared at him.

He stroked his palms down her body to rest on her ass. "You have a perfect ass—large, round, soft, and imminently suitable for kissing, caressing, spanking or fucking."

"It jiggles when...during sex."

He squeezed her ass, smiling at her. "There are few things sexier than an ass large and round enough to jiggle during intercourse."

"My stomach is—"

He slid his hands around her body to stroke over her stomach.  
“Aside from your delectable pussy, your stomach is so damned sexy, I almost got a hard on the first time I saw you.”

She frowned up at him. “It’s not flat.”

“So?”

“So, sometimes I feel as if I look like I’m in the beginning stages of pregnancy.”

“That’s what I like most about it. I’m one of those men who is turned on by a belly that looks as if my woman is carrying our baby.”

She blinked up at him. “Oh, Seneka. You’re serious.”

“Damn straight I am, Autumn. I’ve always preferred women with real curves and what some men might consider full-figured. I consider such women...you sexy.”

“I...I don’t know what to say, Seneka. Even in the early lusty days of our relationship, Sam never complimented my body with such...warmth.” She shrugged. “Just maybe he did me a favor when he left.”

“He certainly did me one by leaving.”

She smiled. “Oh, Seneka. That’s so sweet.”

He grinned. “I can be very sweet.”

She nodded. “So I see. Take me to bed and hold me.”

“Hold you? You want me to hold you?”

She nodded. “Will you?”

“You want me to just hold you?”

“For tonight? Yes.”

Damn.

“Can you do that, Seneka?”

Shit. He kissed her cheek and hugged her. “Of course I can.”

“Thank you. For tonight I need the comfort of your arms around me without any hint of sex.”

He ached for intercourse and she wanted comfort. It was going to be a very long night, he thought as he stripped down to his briefs and got into bed to wait for her. Suppressing a sigh was difficult when she emerged from the bathroom wearing a pair of baggy pajamas. Why did she insist on hiding her body from him? What would it take for her to believe that he found her attractive?

He smiled at her, patting the bed beside him. “I saved this spot just for you.”

“Are you sure you’re okay with the no sex?”

Hell, no he wasn’t okay with it. “Of course. Your spot’s getting cold.”

She slipped into bed, turning on her side with her back to him. He pulled the blanket up and curved his body along her back.

“Thank you for understanding, Seneka.”

“If you need to be held, I’m your man, honey,” he told her.

Sighing, she settled her ass against him.

He gritted his teeth. *Don’t even think about getting hard.* Although tired, he remained awake until she slept. Only then did he close his eyes and surrender to sleep.

## Chapter Seven

Autumn woke alone when her alarm went off the next morning. A folded note lay on the pillow where Seneka had slept. Yawning, she reached for it.

*I hope you slept well, Autumn. I have an important conference call this morning. I left breakfast in the warmer. I'll call you, Seneka.*

She retrieved the egg whites, wheat toast, and coffee he'd made before she crawled back into bed. Eating quickly, she reset her alarm, pulled the covers up, and pressed her cheek against the pillow scented with his cologne.

After the alarm went off again, she rose, showered, and dressed. Recalling their conversation and how tenderly he'd held her, she smiled on the drive to work. Just maybe he wasn't too good to be true. So he still had a thing for his wife. If fate were kind and fair, he just might develop one for her as well.

Envisioning a romance filled with roses, expensive chocolates, and champagne, she was a little disappointed not to find a bouquet from him on her desk when she arrived at work.

Maybe he was saving the roses and champagne for later that night. She finished a second cup of coffee and walked to her classroom to teach her first class of the day.

It wasn't until she arrived home that night and discovered he hadn't left a message that she felt uneasy. Where was he? Why hadn't he called or emailed her? For the first time she realized she had no way to contact him. She didn't know which apartment he lived in or his phone number.

Feeling a need to work off some of her growing agitation, she put on sweats and running shoes and went down to the track. Each step of the two miles she walked, she vowed not to waste the rest of the night thinking about him. It was times like these she wished she had a friend or two to share benefits with.

She had a light dinner, took a shower, and then got into bed with her ebook reader. She read for nearly two hours before she felt drowsy enough to turn off the lights and fall asleep.

In the morning, she woke to find an email from Seneka.

*Morning Autumn*

*My partner and I are in the middle of possible merger talks with a large CPA firm. We'll be putting in long days for the next few weeks. Unfortunately that won't leave much time for personal pursuits and will make planning to see you difficult. I'll contact you as soon as I can.*

*Seneka.*

Autumn read the message several times before she deleted it, put her Smart phone in her shoulder bag, and went to work. Since she'd decided not to teach summer classes that year when she left work that night three months of leisure stretched before her.

When Spring called and asked her to spend a week in Ocean City with her and Jack, she eagerly agreed.

"And just so you can't say I didn't warn you, one of Jack's friends will probably spend a few days with us as well."

Autumn frowned. "As long as we're not sharing a room, I can't see why that would bother me."

"Would you like to?"

"Would I like to what?"

“Share a room with him? His name is Dan and he’s a big, well-built hunk who’s refined enough to appreciate a woman with your charms.”

“No, I don’t want to share a room with him.”

“Why not? Has your errant brave called?”

“No, but then he warned me not to expect much contact with him. So I’m not ready to hop into bed with some stranger just because...no.”

“I think a meaningless fling with another man might be good for you, but if you want to save your goods for your ungrateful brave, so be it. Do you want us to pick you up or—”

“He’s not mine and I’ll drive down on Monday afternoon. I need to pack, wash, and just unwind for the weekend.”

“And give the old slacker a chance to call?”

Autumn shook her head. “I don’t understand him. First he’s in a fever to convince me he wants a serious relationship and then he downgrades our relationship.”

“Then downgrade his sorry ass and come have fun in the sun with us. We have a washer and dryer. Bring your clothes as is and come on down.”

She shook her head. “I know you’re right—”

“But?”

“But I just want to unwind this weekend.”

“But you’re coming on Monday? Promise?”

“Promise.”

“I’m going to hold you to that. If you need to talk before then, call me.”

“I will. Thanks, Spring.”

Two days later, Autumn packed her suitcase and drove down to Ocean City without having heard from Seneka. She listened to soft jazz and concentrated on not thinking about Seneka. If he was too busy to make time to spend a few hours with her after all his protestations of near love, he wasn't worth her time.

### III

"I can't get Braden or Raven to tell me anything about this new woman you're seeing, Neka. What kind of woman is she? Who are her parents? Does she have siblings? What does she do for a living? How old is she?"

Three days later, Seneka suppressed a sigh, closing his eyes. He'd avoided his weekly call to his mother for as long as possible because he knew she'd want to discuss Autumn. "We've only seen each other a few times. So there's really not much to tell, Mom."

"Then why don't you come home?"

"I'm coming to L.A. in September and again in December as I always do, but I consider Philly home now, Mom."

"Oh, Neka. I miss you so much and two visits a year isn't enough."

"You're always welcome here, Mom. You know that."

"I know but Philly is so...So you're not coming home to live."

"This is home for me."

She sighed. "Now that you're dating again, there are plenty of lovely Native women I can introduce you to."

"I'm really not interested in meeting anyone else. I want to see how things go with her."

"Then tell me about her. What's her name?"

"Autumn Walker."

"Is she...?"

"She's Afro-American, Mom."

"Oh."

He ran a hand through his hair. "Mom, I know you and Bray are concerned about keeping our culture strong. I understand and support that, but I'm not prepared to marry someone I don't love just because she's Native."

"Neither Bray nor I asked that of you, Neka. Even though your choice of wife was a surprise, we accepted Kelli as your wyanet."

After making her jump through hoops but there was little point in digging up painful memories. In the end they had accepted Kelli and she had forgiven his mother for the cool reception she'd received for the first few years of their marriage. "I didn't set out to marry a white woman, Mom. I just happened to fall in love with a woman who was white."

"And now you've fallen for one who is Black? Do you find Native women unattractive, Neka?"

"Of course not! I can't help who I love, Mom."

"But you love this Autumn?"

"I don't know. It's too early to say, but I'm not interested in meeting anyone else. I'm sorry if that disappoints you."

"Oh, Seneka. I want you to be happy, but I guess I just don't understand why you can't seem to fall for a Native woman."

How was he supposed to answer that? "Mom—"

"Oh, Seneka. Don't sound so discouraged. I don't mean to...when the time comes, I'll look forward to meeting your Autumn. I

promise I'll...even though I don't understand, I'll give her a much warmer welcome than I gave Wyanet. I promise."

"Thank you, Mom. If our relationship progresses to that point, I know she'd appreciate it and so would I."

"You know I love you, Neka."

"I know, Mom and I love you too."

She sighed. "Then I'll say goodbye until next week."

"Goodbye, Mom."

"Oh, Neka. Before you go. Braden is spending the day with me. He's having a swim. Let me call him to say hello."

"Sure."

Several minutes later, Braden picked up the phone. "Neka, how the hell are you?"

"A little tired. How are you?"

"I'm okay. Listen I'm sure Mom gave you a workout, but I didn't tell her anymore than you were seeing someone. I didn't give any details."

"Well, she wasn't very pleased when I told her Autumn is Afro-American."

"I wouldn't say she was displeased as much —"

"She's displeased, Bray. She asked me why I couldn't be attracted to a Native woman."

"Damn. I'm sorry, Neka, but —"

"It's not your fault. She had to know sooner or later. Sooner is probably better. Now she knows and I don't have to wonder how I'm going to tell her."

"How is Autumn?"

Seneka shrugged. "I suppose she's all right."

"You suppose? You stopped seeing her?"

"Of course not."

"Then why don't you know how she is, Neka?"

Seneka sighed, leaning his head against the back of his office chair. "These merger talks have taken up nearly all of my free time so I haven't seen her for nearly a week."

"But you've talked to her or exchanged emails, text messages, or something?"

"No."

"Please tell me, you're pulling my leg, Neka."

"I'm not."

"What?"

"I've been putting in fourteen-hour days."

"Don't you think she'll ask herself why you couldn't spend even one hour of the remaining ten with her?"

"Come on, Bray. I did email her to let her know I'd be busy for a few weeks and —"

"You emailed her to tell her you'd be too busy to see her for a few weeks and you expect her to do what? Just sit waiting for you to find time to see her? Neka! That doesn't work with women. Go see her and explain before you lose her to another man."

"You're overreacting, Bray. I asked her if she wanted to see or sleep with other men and she said no."

"That was before you told her you'd be too busy to make time to see her!"

"You're making it sound worse than it was, Bray. She's not going to go out with any other man."

Braden sighed. "I'm sure you're right, but don't leave it any longer, Neka. Make time to go see her tonight."

"Fine. I'll go see her."

"Good. Now I'm taking Mom shopping and then she's dragging me to a party where I know she plans to spring several Native women on me so I'd better go get fortified and dressed."

Seneka laughed. "Good luck fending them off."

"I'm not so sure I want to fend them off."

That surprised Seneka. "What will Kania say about that?" He'd often suspected Braden and Kania had been lovers.

"Kania and I are just friends these days."

So he had been right. "With benefits?"

"No. No benefits."

He wondered if he heard regret in Braden's voice. Kania was Afro-American, tall, plus-sized, and beautiful. In short, like Autumn, she was Braden's ideal woman. Why hadn't Braden married her?

"Give her my love."

"I will. Bye."

"Bye." After he ended the call, he sat at his desk frowning. Although he knew Braden was wrong about Autumn's reaction to his busy schedule, he decided five days was long enough to go without seeing her.

He looked up at the tap on his office door.

His partner and friend Charles Nardize, opened the door. "Ready for me?"

"Yes. Come on in."

They spent an hour crunching numbers and considering proposals and counter proposals before Seneka cut him off in the middle of a sentence.

"I've had enough, Chuck. I need a break and —"

"And you want to see the little woman?"

Seneka sat back in his chair in his office conference room and stared at Chuck Nardize. Newly single after a bitter, expensive divorce, Chuck held a low opinion of women.

He nodded. "Yes. It's been five days and I want to see her." He rose. "I'm going home to shower and to see if she's interested in spending the weekend with me."

Chuck nodded. "Fine. I can handle things from here. Good luck, Romeo."

"Fuck you," he grinned, grabbed his briefcase, and walked out.

Several hours later, he sat in his apartment wondering where Autumn was. She hadn't answered her phone, her door, his emails, or text messages. Had Braden been right after all? What if she was spending the night and possibly the weekend with another man?

He had all but concluded she was deliberately avoiding him when he returned from a long drive eight days later and noticed her entering their building accompanied by a tall, dark male who carried two suitcases.

He followed them into the lobby. At the elevator, she turned to smile up at the man. She looked relaxed and happy.

Seneka felt a surge of jealousy and rage consume him. He stalked across the lobby. "Autumn."

She glanced over her shoulder, her smile vanishing.

He watched her and the man exchange a quick look before she turned to face him. "Hi."

Hi? That's all she had to say to him? He gave the man a cool look. "Who the hell are you?"

The man put the suitcases down and slipped an arm around her shoulders. "Oh, Autumn and I are more than friends."

Seneka clenched his right hand into a fist. "Really?" He looked at her. "Where have you been?"

"I've been on vacation."

"Vacation? You went away without telling me?"

"Apparently so."

He sucked in an angry breath. "With him?"

She glanced at his clenched fist before she met his gaze. "I'm tired and I want to go shower. Call me tomorrow if you like."

The elevator doors opened.

The man picked up the suitcases and waited for her to step in. When she had, he stepped in behind her.

Moments before the door closed, Seneka slipped inside too. "We need to talk, Autumn."

"Call me tomorrow and we'll talk."

"No. Now. We need to talk now."

She shook her head. "I don't want to talk to you now. If I think about it long enough, I'm probably not going to want to talk to you tomorrow either. So don't push your luck."

"Autumn —"

The man set the suitcases down and turned to face him. "She said tomorrow, buddy."

He took a deep breath. "Get the fuck out of my face before I knock you on your ass!"

"Seneka!" She tugged at his arm. "What are you doing?"

"If I were you, I wouldn't start any shit I couldn't finish," the man said.

He sounded amused and it took all of Seneka's willpower not to smash his fist into the other male's face. "And if I were you and didn't want my ass kicked, I'd shut the fuck up!"

"You and what tribe is going to kick my ass, Chief?"

Furious at what he considered racial stereotyping from a black male who should know better, he stepped around Autumn to stare at the man. "I don't need any help kicking your ass...homeboy."

Autumn tugged at his hand until he half turned to face her.

"Stop it. He's just a friend, Seneka."

"With benefits?"

"Those are the best kind of friends," the man said.

She swung around to face the man as the elevator doors opened on her floor. "Stop trying to provoke him!" She stormed off the elevator.

After an amused smile, the man picked up the suitcases, and followed her.

Seneka sucked in a breath and stabbed the fifteenth floor button. In his apartment, he undressed and took a long, cool shower. It didn't help. He dressed and stormed out of his apartment and stalked to the elevator. When he alighted on the fifth floor, he took several deep breaths before he walked to Autumn's door and rang her bell.

"Go away and call me some time tomorrow, Seneka."

"No. I need to talk to you tonight. Open the door."

"No."

"Open the damned door, Autumn, before I kick it in!" The moment he uttered the words, he regretted them. God, help him, he was behaving like an unhinged stalker. Damn if he'd let her drag him down to that level. If she wanted to fuck other men, fine! He turned and quickly walked away from her door.

He was at the elevator when he heard her door open behind him. He hit the UP button with the side of his fist.

"Seneka?"

"Fuck you!" He said without turning.

"Fuck me? How charming, but isn't that what you're afraid someone else has been doing? Fucking the pussy you thought was your exclusive property?"

He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. It didn't help. He swung around and stormed back to her open apartment door. The urge to grab her and shake her in a jealous rage was so strong, he clenched both hands into fists and pressed them against his thighs. "God, I hate you, you bitch."

She looked down at his fists and then up at him. "Bitch?" She balled a hand into a fist and hit it against his chest. "You have no right to call me a bitch, Seneka!"

"I do when you behave like one. Now where the hell have you been?"

"That's none of your damned business." She unclenched her hand and swung it at his face.

He caught her wrist before she could slap him. "You don't get to slap me!"

“But you get to call me a bitch?”

He watched tears fill her dark eyes. Oh, God. He was out of control. He released her wrist and turned and stalked away.

“Seneka! If you leave now, don’t bother coming back!”

If he stayed, he’d say or do something for which she’d never forgive him. Yet, if he left, she’d probably be fucking her friend the moment she closed the door. He spun around and ran back to her.

He grabbed her arms and jerked her body against his.

“Seneka!” She struggled to pull away.

“Shut the fuck up, you cheating bitch!” He roared and then crushed his lips down on hers, silencing any further protests. He kissed her until his lungs felt as if they were about to burst. Then, ignoring her efforts to break free, he pulled her inside the condo.

“Seneka —”

“Shut up!” He unzipped his pants, freeing his cock.

She shook her head. “No! We have to talk!”

“I’ll let my dick do my talking,” he told her, jerking her dress up and her thong down. While she struggled to get free, he thrust his naked cock balls deep into her wet, hot pussy. Oh, God, absolute paradise.

He fucked her slowly, deeply, enjoying each stroke of the raw, sensual fuck. There was nothing sweeter than feeling a tight, delicious pussy caressing and massaging his bare cock.

“No, Seneka! No! Please! You don’t have to use force. You don’t!”

Seneka bolted awake with his heart racing. Sweat beaded on his face and bare chest. It took several moments before he realized he

was in his darkened bedroom alone. It had been a nightmare, thank God. He hadn't raped her.

Hell, he hadn't even had any contact with her for over a week and a half. Damn, he'd been a fool not to make time for her. Was she just getting even? Or was she with another man? The thought infuriated and scared him. He couldn't bear to lose her to another man. He couldn't.

Rolling onto his side, Seneka turned on his bedside lamp. Kelli smiled at him from his nightstand. *Promise me you'll remarry and be happy with some other lucky woman, Neka. Promise me.*

He'd known from the moment he saw her that he wanted Autumn to be that other woman. What was he going to do if she only wanted a casual relationship with him? Or worse, an occasional sexual one that left all of his emotional needs unfulfilled?

He closed his eyes and rolled onto his stomach. *Autumn. Where are you? Why don't you respond to any of my attempts to reach you? Give me another chance and I'll never give you reason to doubt me again.*

### III

"Your lovesick brave calling again?"

Reclining on a chaise lounge watching the setting sun on Spring and Jack's ocean front porch, Autumn turned off her cell phone and placed it on the cushion beside her.

She sighed and turned to look at Spring who lay on a lounge to her right. "Yes. That's the seventh time he's called in the last four days."

"And you're weakening and are on the verge of rushing back to Philly to be at his beck and call?"

She shrugged. "I'm not sure what to do. I have no desire to make him miserable, but I want him to know he can't ignore me for days and then expect to find me waiting when he finds time for me."

"So? Are you rushing back to Philly or are you going to stay and get to know Rasheed a little better?"

Rasheed Porter was a tall, attractive friend of Jack's. After withstanding four days of constant flirting, Autumn had succumbed and agreed to go out with him the previous night.

He'd been attentive and amusing. Within minutes of sitting down to dinner with him in Atlantic City, he'd begun to charm her. She had welcomed his warm, demanding kisses at the end of the evening. Thoughts of Seneka's reaction finally gave her the will to pull away when he caressed her breasts.

He and Jack were inside watching a fight.

She shook her head. "I think I know him as well as I want to."

"You didn't enjoy yourself last night?"

She remembered the feel of his hands on her breasts. "I did."

"Then why not stay and get to know him?"

"I'm already in a relationship with Seneka. I'm not interested in doing anything to endanger that."

"I'm curious, Autumn. Why is he allowed to let things get heated with another woman but you're not allowed to do the same thing with another man?"

"When that happened, we hadn't...that was before we discussed neither of us wanting to see or sleep with anyone else."

"You really have it bad for him. Don't you?"

She sighed. "He's...it's hard not to. He looks at me as if I'm the only woman in the world worth looking at."

"Are you in love with him?"

"I...like him so much I..."

"Yes?"

"I'm not sure of anything except that I'm not going to risk damaging our relationship."

"Are you ready to tell Mom about him?"

She shook her head. "You know she's not going to approve."

"Because he's not black?" Spring shrugged. "Maybe she would if you point out the bright side to her."

"What bright side?"

Spring grinned. "At least he's not white!"

The sisters dissolved into peals of laughter.

Spring sobered first. "So?"

"So." Autumn sat up. "I think he's had enough time to learn his lesson."

"Yeah?"

"I'm going home."

"To him?"

She nodded.

"What about his wife?"

"He's not married."

Spring smiled. "No, he's not but I have a feeling he might soon be as happily remarried as he was married. Right?"

"It's still too soon for that kind of talk, but I miss him. I want to see him and I'm going home."

"Okay, but don't make it too easy on him. He'll appreciate you more if you make him work for your affection. Give him your body

freely if that's what you want to do but make him work to earn your heart."

They went inside. Spring kept her company as she packed her suitcase. "Are you sure you don't want to wait until tomorrow to leave? If you leave now, you won't be home until after eleven."

"I can sleep late tomorrow. I want to go now and spend the night in my own bed."

Twenty minutes later, after having said her goodbyes, she was in her car heading home. She arrived just before twelve a.m. Tired after the three hour drive, she undressed and slipped into bed. She fell asleep within moments.

## Chapter Eight

Seneka woke from a restless sleep, longing to see Autumn. He glanced at his bedside clock. 1:33 a.m. Even if she were home, it was too late to call her. Too late? After two long weeks of no contact? Fuck it. If she were home, he had to talk to her. Rolling over onto his side, he reached for the cordless phone on his nightstand and pressed his fifth speed dial button.

He felt a wealth of relief and joy when she answered in a sleepy voice.

"Hello...?"

She was back. Thank God! "Autumn!"

"Seneka!"

His relief turned to anger. "Where the hell have you been? Why haven't you returned any of my calls? Who have you been —"

"I was asleep. Do you know what time it is?" She demanded.

Her refusal to answer any of his questions fueled his anger. He took a deep, calming breath before he responded. "I'm sorry to wake you, but I need to see you."

"Seneka...we haven't talked in two weeks —"

"And whose damned fault is that? I wasn't the one ignoring your calls."

"I think we both know who started this shit, Seneka. In case *you* don't, I'll give you a hint, it wasn't me."

"What the hell am I supposed to have done?"

"If you don't know, I'm not in the mood to discuss it in the middle of the night. I've had a long day —"

"Doing what with whom?"

"Listen, you jealous bastard —"

"Have you given me any reason to be jealous, Autumn?"

Was it his imagination or did she take a long time to answer?

"No more than you've given me, Seneka."

"I haven't been ignoring your calls for over a week, Autumn."

She sighed. "I don't want to argue with you. So let's cut to the chase, Seneka. There's only one reason for your middle of the night call. You want to make a booty call."

Dismay filled him. Is that what she thought of him? "No. I just want...I need to see you, honey."

"We have to talk."

"I'll get dressed and come —"

"You've waited this long, you can wait until morning. I'm not going to be just a booty call for you."

"I don't want sex —"

"You don't?"

He hesitated. She sounded annoyed. Did she want a booty call? "Well, I do," he said. "But that's not the only reason I want to see you now. No intercourse, honey. I promise. I just want to see you."

"I don't have any make-up on —"

"I'll be there in ten minutes."

"That won't give me enough time to —"

"I'm coming down."

"Don't."

"I'm coming and unless you want me to wake everyone on your floor, you'd better open the damned door when I arrive!" He hung up and got out of bed. Without bothering with underwear, he

pulled on a sweater and a pair of jeans. Then slipping on his shoes, he picked up his keys and went down to Autumn's apartment.

She opened the door immediately and pulled him inside, as if she were afraid her neighbors were peeking out their doors.

The moment he saw her, joy replaced his anger. Without giving her chance to protest, he engulfed her in a warm embrace, pressing his lips against her forehead. "Damn, I've missed you, honey."

She hugged him briefly before she pulled out of his arms. "Oh? That probably explains why I hadn't heard from you for three days before I went away. And your silence came after I woke up and found you gone—after I insisted on no intercourse."

Even without make-up, her hair in a careless braid, and wearing a pair of baggy pajamas, he got hard looking at her. But she didn't appear to be in the mood to be charmed. Braden was right. His ass was close to being toast. "I emailed you and told you it would be difficult to see you for a week or two."

She stared at him. "Are you serious?"

"You didn't get my email?"

"Yes, I got it but you can't seriously think that was sufficient to cover not hearing from you once you didn't get sex."

Shit! "I told you why I wasn't around, Autumn," he said wearily. "And it had nothing to do with sex."

"Didn't it? Isn't the lack of sex why you've downgraded your efforts to win me or do you think you've already done all you needed to do to win me?"

He raked a hand through his hair. He was really going to have to pay more attention to what Braden and Raven suggested since he

was clearly out of his league when it came to dating. "Downgraded my...I didn't downgrade anything." And if he'd been foolish enough to think he'd already won her, her refusal to answer any of his calls during the last week had cured him of that belief.

"Let's see, Seneka. You went from roses, candy, and champagne to showing up empty handed and only when you want sex. Sounds like a downgrade to me."

He shook his head. "We're in the middle of merger talks. I couldn't get away."

"Been at it twenty-four hours a day, Seneka?"

"No, but I..." He sighed. "I'm sorry I...I stopped sending the roses because I thought you wanted me to slow down. Every time I tried to tell you how I felt, you implied I was moving too fast for you."

She blinked at him. "You're serious?"

"I've clearly fucked up, Autumn, but I didn't—"

She surprised him by reaching up to stroke his cheek. "How can any man so handsome be so clueless when it comes to women?"

"I told you I needed help. I was twenty-one when I got married and that seems such a long time I go. I...I didn't intend to...I've never made any secret of my feelings for you, Autumn. I'm sorry if I've done anything to make you think all I want is sex. I—"

She squeezed his hand. "Oh, Seneka. You are such a contradiction. I'm sorry too. I'm also kind of rusty at this, but I know you're not just after sex."

"Oh, thank God!" He swept her into his arms again.

She rubbed her hands along his back. "We really have to talk, Seneka, but right now I'm so relieved to see you I just want you to take me to bed and hold me."

Oh, God, not that shit again when he was burning to taste her warm lips, feel her breasts against his chest, and slide deep inside her sweet, hot pussy.

"Can you handle that?"

Like he had a choice? He nodded.

She stepped away from him and took his hand.

He followed her down the short passage to her bedroom with his jaw clenched. It was going to be another damn, long night. But at least he'd be with her and there were other games they could play that didn't include intercourse.

She slipped into bed and watched in silence as he kicked off his shoes. He heard her catch her breath as he undressed. "You're naked."

"Yes, I know. I just undressed." He smiled and got into bed, curling his body against hers. He slipped an arm around her waist, pressing a warm kiss against her neck.

She trembled. "I can feel your cock!"

He put his hand under her top, stroking his palm over her stomach. "Would you really like to feel it?" he asked, pushing his other hand under her waistband.

She grabbed his wrist before he could palm her pussy. "Seneka! You promised."

"I promised no intercourse." Disengaging his hand, he tugged at her pajama bottoms until he managed to push them over her hips and down to her thighs.

She wore no underwear.

He pushed one leg of her pajamas off and stroked his fingers over her pretty pussy.

"Seneka!"

He urged her onto her back and slipped on top of her, sliding between her legs with his erect cock against her pussy.

She shuddered, but pushed against his shoulders. "No."

"No intercourse," he said. "I didn't say I wouldn't kiss you," he touched his mouth to her warm lips. "Or hump on you." He rubbed his erection against her.

Her lips parted and she clutched at his waist.

He reached between their bodies to place his cock lengthwise between her outer pussy lips. Damn that made him hotter but he was determined to keep to the letter of his word if not the spirit. "Touch me," he whispered, bending to flick his tongue against her right nipple.

"Oh, Seneka. Don't..."

"No intercourse, honey." Resting his weight on his extended arms, he slid his cock slowly along the length of her slit as he sucked her nipple.

She dug her nails into his waist. "Oh...oh...you're so thick and hard..."

He dragged his lips up her chest to kiss the corner of her mouth. "You keep me that way."

She slipped her hands down to cup his ass. "Condom?"

"We don't need one. We're not going to have intercourse," he told her as he continued to slide his cock along the length of her outer pussy lips.

She turned her head, pressing her open lips against his mouth.

Taking the hint, he sucked on her tongue while sliding his hands down the sides of her thighs.

Tearing her mouth away from his, she wrapped her legs around him and slid herself along his cock. "Oh, God, Seneka. You make me do things I shouldn't."

"That's because we're so good together," he whispered, licking the side of her neck. "I knew we would be the moment I saw you."

She gripped his ass and sucked the side of his neck.

Damn she made him so horny. Afraid he would come before she did, he rolled onto his side so he could reach a hand between their bodies to finger her pussy and clit.

"No...no. Lay on me and keep humping me...hump me, Seneka...want me...need me."

"Oh, honey, I do. I do." He felt the build up in the base of his cock. He tensed, wanting to postpone his climax but felt a shudder shake his body.

She kissed his lips and allowed her legs to fall away from his body. She pushed against his shoulders. "I want you to come on my pubes," she said.

"What?"

"Jack off on my pubes."

He lifted his head to look down at her. "You're not ready. I promised not to do that again and —"

She pressed her fingers against his lips. "I like a man determined to keep promises made to me, but I want you to do it just once more."

“No—”

“Yes. You’re ready to come and I’m ready to feel your cum on my pubic hair. Cum on me, Seneka.”

The sexy request pushed him over the edge. He rose to kneel between her thighs. He gripped his cock and rubbed it along her slit.

“Oh...yes, Seneka. Come on me...” She stroked her palms down his stomach to cup his balls.

He groaned, felt around her slit to expose her clit and jetted a stream of cum against it.

“Not in me. On my pubes.”

He jetted a second blast against her clit before lowering his cock to aim at her pubes. Watching his seed hit her dark pubic hair was so sexy he came more than he had in years. When the last of his cum splattered on her, she reached down to rub her fingers through it, spreading it over her thighs.

“Oh...shit.” He stretched out on top of her, rubbing his semi-erect cock against her belly. “What can I do for you?”

She slipped her arms around him. “I want to fall asleep lying on top of you.”

“That’s it? Do you want me to eat you?”

“Another time. I’m tired now and strangely sated. I want to fall asleep lying on top of you.”

He slipped an arm around her waist and rolled onto his back, parting his legs.

She reached down to struggle to put her other leg back in her pajama bottoms.

Enjoying the feel of her weight on him, he pulled the covers up over their bodies.

She kissed his shoulder. "Did you enjoy that?"

"Yes...oh, God...you have no idea how much."

"So did I," she said and settled against him with her pussy pressed against his cock.

"He must have been nuts not to like this," he whispered.

"Who?"

"Your ex."

"Well, in his defense, he's 5'7" and about 170 pounds so —"

"So you were too much woman for him." He massaged her ass. "But not for me, honey."

"Oh, Seneka...thank you."

"I mean it."

"I know and that's what makes it even more special."

His feeling of contentment left him in no doubt about how important she was to him. Still, he doubted if she were anymore ready to believe him now than she'd been two weeks earlier. He stroked his hands down her back. "You're so beautiful and sweet, ...you make me so happy, wy Janet."

"What? I haven't been on the net lately," she said sleepily.

He sighed. How would she react once she knew what wy Janet meant to him and his brothers?

### III

Big, warm hands caressing her breasts woke Autumn. She opened her eyes. In the pre-dawn light, she saw Seneka seated on the side of the bed. He was dressed.

"You're leaving?"

He cupped her breasts. "I'm sorry to wake you, honey, but I'm going down to the gym to work out. I didn't want to get locked out afterwards."

"Locked out?" She blinked up at him. "You forgot your key?"

"I don't have one to this apartment until you give me your spare."

"Until I give you my...you want my spare set of keys?"

He nodded. "How else am I going to get back in without waking you again?"

She parted her lips to ask for his spare set of keys, recalled his brother saying he had a picture of his late wife in his bedroom, and changed her mind. "The spare set is in the middle drawer in the kitchen."

"Who were you with, Autumn?"

"I spent a week with my sister and brother-in-law."

"But you went out with another man."

Damn. How did he know that? She moistened her lips. "What?"

"How far did things go with him? Do I need to be concerned about him?"

She sat up. After a moment of indecision, she decided to be honest. "I had one date with him."

"Did you...did he touch you?"

"If by touch, you mean did we sleep together, then no. I told you I didn't want to sleep with anyone else, Seneka."

"Then why did you go out with him instead of answering my calls?"

She touched his cheek. "I was hurt and angry because you let an entire week pass without calling me. We live in the same building, Seneka. You can't convince me you couldn't have found some time to call or see me if you'd wanted to!"

"So it's my fault you've been out with another man?"

"I had one date with him. Why are you behaving like a jealous lover?"

"Because I am a jealous lover!"

She stroked her fingers through his hair. "You have no reason to be, Seneka. As long as you want me, there's not another man alive who you need to be jealous of."

He touched her mouth. "You let him kiss you."

She narrowed her gaze. "How do you know any of that?"

"I had a dream...a nightmare of you coming back from vacation with a tall, black male. He is tall and black. Isn't he?"

She nodded. "Yes, but before you become delusional, I left him there and came home to you! We shared a few kisses. You shared a little more than that with your flat-assed blonde. I got over that. You get over this!"

"I'm not losing you to him or any other man. If he comes anywhere near you again or even thinks about touching you again, I'll kick his ass all over the city."

She curled her fingers in his hair. "The one date and few kisses we shared only served to reinforce my desire to be with you, Seneka. There's no need to issue threats—"

"It's not a threat. It's a promise. I hope you told him to get lost. If you didn't and he comes anywhere near you again, I'll tell him myself and kick his ass."

She decided he was serious. And to her shame, the idea pleased her. "I told him you were the only man I wanted in my life, Seneka."

"You're sure? Because I'm serious, Autumn. If he comes near you, his ass is going to end up in the hospital."

"I'm positive."

"I'm going to hold you to your word."

"That's not a problem. I know who I want, Seneka and that's you." She smiled and stretched out on the bed.

He leaned over and kissed her neck. "I'll see you when I get back."

She nodded and turned on her side. "I'll be here, Seneka. Waiting for you."

He massaged her ass and rose.

Moments before she heard the entrance door open, she sleepily thought she'd have to ask him why he'd asked her about the net the previous night.

She wanted to stay awake and consider the implication of having given him her key but drifted back to sleep instead. When she woke again, it was light and the aroma of coffee and food filled the air.

A vase of roses sat on the nightstand to her right. She rolled onto her other side. Another vase of roses adorned that nightstand. She smiled. He was a fast learner. A note lay beneath two keys.

Heart hammering, she picked up the note to read the message.

*Autumn,*

*Our father taught us a man has two sets of keys he should jealously guard from all but the most important people in his life. This set belongs to*

*my apartment, 1500. Use them as freely as you do your own. The other set are intangible and invisible and belong to my heart and to my affections. Those are yours as well and have been from the moment we met.*

*Yours, only and always,*

*Seneka*

Hers only and always? Oh, damn but he knew how to step it up several notches. Touched and pleased, Autumn picked up the keys and held them against her breasts. His freely giving her his keys would mean even more once he reached the point of being able to replace the word affection with the word love. Until then, she felt certain she had no further reason to worry about any other woman turning his handsome head. Too bad the keys to his heart weren't tangible. Nevertheless, he was hers. Yes!

Eager to see him, she got out of bed. She took a quick shower, and pulled a pair of her favorite baggy sweats over her nude body. After a brief hesitation, she applied foundation and brushed her hair out, allowing it to settle just above her shoulders. Spraying herself with her favorite scent, she walked toward the kitchen.

Seneka, dressed in jeans, running shoes, and a dark pullover stood at the stove.

Autumn paused to admire him. He had wide shoulders, a narrow waist, a nice ass and long runner's legs.

"Are you going to stand there staring at my ass or are you going to come give me a slow, hot good morning kiss?" He asked without turning around.

"It's a very nice ass," she said.

He turned to look at her.

She held up her right hand. His keys dangled from her fingers.  
“Did you lose these?”

He shook his head. “No. It’s the other set I lost. That happened the moment I saw you.”

Gazing into his dark eyes, any remaining doubts vanished.  
“You mean that.”

“I’ve always been a one-woman man and the moment I saw you, I knew I wanted you to be that woman.”

She rushed across the room to him.

He engulfed her in his arms, rubbing his cheek against hers.

“Mine only and always, Seneka?”

He tipped up her chin so he could gaze down into her eyes. He took her hand in his and placed it over his heart. “Yes. I know you think I have issues, but please don’t doubt my sincerity.”

“Oh, Seneka, that’s crazy talk after such a short acquaintance.” She caressed his cheek. “But I don’t doubt your word.”

He buried his face against her neck. “I know how I feel. My feelings for you have become stronger and more intense.”

She pressed a light kiss against his mouth. “This feels like a dream, Seneka.”

“Why?”

She touched his hair. “Because you’re the epitome of my fantasy man.”

“Isn’t that a good thing?”

“It is – unless this is a dream.”

“If it is, it’s one we’re sharing. Isn’t that what romance and relationships are all about? Let’s explore the dream together.”

“Okay. Let’s do that.”

“So we’re talking about an exclusive relationship that only encompasses you and me? There can’t be any other damned men whose asses I have to kick.”

“And no flat-assed blondes who wants what’s mine.”

“I’ve been yours for the taking from the moment we met, Autumn. Neither one of them or any other woman I’ve met posed any threat to you.”

She leaned against him. “Let’s eat and then I want a tour of your apartment. And then I want to spend some time on the balcony just sitting and looking at you.”

He laughed and slapped her ass. “We can do whatever you want. I’m just glad I haven’t lost you.”

“There wasn’t much chance of that happening, Seneka.”

“Good.” He nodded towards the table. “Sit down and we’ll eat.”

“And you’ll give me all your phone numbers and contact info?”

“Absolutely.”

### III

“After you.”

As he opened the door of one of only four apartments on the penthouse floor and stood aside, Autumn walked inside the foyer. He opened double doors to their right, revealing a large coat closet. To their left, he opened a door to a pantry. Beyond that was a large, modern kitchen with stainless steel appliances. The dining room to the left would easily seat ten people.

He touched her arm, leading her to the right, into a large living room with modern, overstuffed seating and a fireplace. One wall was covered with pictures. In the middle, at eye level was a picture of a smiling older couple with their arms around each other.

“Your parents?”

He nodded. “Yes.” He pointed to other pictures of his brothers.

When she turned away from the pictures, he led her to the balcony. After giving her a moment to enjoy the view, he led her back through the living room and down a short hallway to their left. There was a powder room and a laundry room.

“Wow. Just how much money do you make?”

He slipped his arms around her and kissed her neck. “Enough to give you most of the things you want.”

She turned in his arms. “I want you.”

“You have me.” He kissed her and released her.

She looked around. “How many rooms does this place have?”

“It has 8 rooms, which include 3 bedrooms, an office, four full baths, and one powder room.”

“Why so many rooms when you live alone? You do live alone. Don’t you?”

“Yes, but hopefully not for long. I need three bedrooms so when my brothers and my mom or other relatives come to Philly, they don’t have to stay at a hotel or with our friends the Grayhawks.” He pointed in front of him. “This way.”

Down another passageway he opened a door to a bedroom with a full bathroom, a walk-in closet, and a small balcony. Across from it was a second bedroom with another full bath. There was also

an office with a third full bath. Finally, he led her down a passageway and opened a set of double doors that lead to the master bedroom.

To the right was a walk-in closet filled with his clothes. To the left was another walk-in closet twice as big, but empty. He slapped her ass. "This one is waiting for you, honey."

She smiled. "Don't get ahead of yourself, Seneka." She reached behind her to remove his hand from her rear. "And keep your big, hot hands to yourself."

As she turned away, he slapped her ass again.

"Ouch!"

He laughed and nodded to a door leading to the balcony along one wall. A door in the opposite wall led to the master bathroom.

There was a large, walk-in shower, a whirlpool bath, double sinks, a linen closet, and an enclosed toilet room.

He closed the door to the master bathroom suite and urged her back into the bedroom. "What do you think? Can you imagine yourself sleeping here every night?"

Autumn glanced around. An 8" by 10" picture sat on his nightstand. Without responding, she walked across the room to pick up the picture.

A beautiful, confident blonde smiled up at her. The front of the picture bore the words: *To Neka, All my love always, Kelli.*

Seneka crossed the carpet to take the picture from her.

They stood staring at each other in silence. His lowered lids concealed his expression and Autumn wasn't sure what she felt. She'd known the picture was there, but to see it...If he wanted her to live with him, why hadn't he removed it? He couldn't expect her to sleep in a room with his late wife watching them.

She turned and walked out of the bedroom. It took her several moments to realize she needed to go to her right to return to the living room. She stood in the middle of the room trying to decide how to react. Should she leave? Should she demand to know why he hadn't removed the picture before giving her a tour?

"Autumn?"

She turned as he entered the room without the picture. Had he returned it to the place of honor beside his bed? She walked over to him. "Thanks for the tour." Reaching into her handbag, she took his keys out and placed them in his hand. "I want you to keep mine but it's obvious you're not quite ready for me to have yours."

"Autumn—"

She pressed her fingers against his lips. "You're not ready, Seneka. Thanks for the tour. I think I'm going to go shopping."

He caught her hand and turned her back to face him. "Please. Don't walk away from me."

"Seneka, I—"

"Please." He pushed the keys back into her hand. "You can't give them back. They belong to my heart."

Which his dead wife clearly still owned. But damn if she wouldn't win it. She rested her head against his shoulder and placed the keys back in her shoulder bag. Sighing, she drew away from him. "I need a shopping fix."

"I'll come with you."

She glanced over her shoulder. "Then you'd better bring your credit card, Seneka."

He tapped his back pocket. "Don't you worry. You want it? I'll buy it."

## Chapter Nine

Three hours later, he'd bought her a new designer handbag too tiny to be practical, but expensive as hell, a five-carat diamond tennis bracelet, and a pair of matching diamond studs.

"Since we're here and you're determined to bankrupt me, let's add a couple of gold rings, Autumn. One for me and a matching set for you."

The suggestion sent a chill of delight through her. She turned to look at him. "Seneka?"

He lifted her hand to his lips. "Marry me."

The soft voiced conversations in the jewelry store ceased.

Autumn sucked in a breath, her heart pounding. Her first inclination was to shout yes, but when she married again, it would be for love. She wouldn't marry him until he convinced her he was no longer in love with Kelli.

She smiled and stroked his cheek. "Oh, Seneka...ask me again in a few weeks?"

He nodded. "I will." He glanced at his watch. "If you're not going to marry me, let's go eat."

She rolled her eyes. "You're so romantic."

He laughed and kissed her.

She expected a quick peck. Instead, he pushed his tongue between her lips. She gasped and jerked away from him, her cheeks burning. "Seneka!"

He shrugged. "They heard me propose. They shouldn't be surprised to find I like kissing you."

"Let's go," she said.

"Are you sure? You haven't maxed out my credit card yet."

"Give me time," she threatened and walked away.

He laughed and followed her.

The rest of the day passed in a rosy glow for her. They returned to their individual units to shower and change. While she dressed she spoke to Spring on the speakerphone.

Spring screamed in delight when told of his proposal. "Oh, my God, Autumn. Why didn't you accept?"

She sighed and told her about the picture. "What if there's one where he vowed to love her always?"

Spring's reaction surprised her. "So what if there is? The fact that he promised to love her forever is a good thing."

She paused with one of her new studs halfway to her ear. "How?"

"It means when he tells you the same thing, you'll know he means it."

*Yours, only and always.*

"Don't overreact to her, Autumn. She's dead. Why waste time worrying about his feelings for her when you're alive and able to generate new and even more powerful feelings in him?"

She sighed and put the stud on her right ear. "You think I should keep his keys?"

"And use them. Move into his life, his unit, and his heart so effectively he doesn't have time to think of anyone but you and how much he loves you."

"He hasn't mentioned love."

"But you love him."

She nodded and slipped on her heels. "I do."

“Let him keep his warm, fuzzy memories of her and don’t make a fuss about her picture. Let him keep it while you’re secure in the knowledge that he’s now all yours.”

Autumn sighed. “Thanks, Spring.”

“Make sure you give him a really good fuck tonight.”

“You’re impossible,” she said and ended the call to the sound of Spring’s laughter.

Seneka took her to one of Philly’s ritziest restaurants for dinner.

She didn’t have much of an appetite. Each time she looked up, she found him smiling at her.

“So, how are the talks going?”

“What talks?”

“Work with me, Seneka. The merger talks.”

“Oh. Those. It’s difficult to think of anything but you when we’re together.”

“Oh, Seneka, you’re so sweet.”

He reached across the table to place his hand over hers. “Then why won’t you marry me and come live with me?”

“Maybe I will—once you romance me a little and convince me of your feelings. In the meantime, how are the talks going?”

He glanced at her lips. “Are we going to fuck tonight, honey?”

“Like breeding rabbits,” she said, her cheeks burning.

He squeezed her hand. “I’d love to fuck you raw and breed with you.”

The thought of his naked cock ejaculating deep in her unprotected pussy nearly made her squirm with unmitigated lust. “That’s not going to happen tonight, Seneka.”

“But it’s going to happen soon. You’re going to stop using whatever birth control you’re on and we’re going raw, honey.”

Her stomach muscles clenched and she moistened her top lip. “But not tonight, Seneka. Now what about the talks?”

He released her hand. “They’re stalled. Raven’s flying in tomorrow night to see if he can jump start them.”

“What does he do for a living?”

“He’s a corporate lawyer and he’s very good at what he does.”

She smiled. “You sound like a proud, older brother.”

He nodded. “I am. Raven is absolutely brilliant, but enough about him. Would you like to go dancing?”

“That depends.”

“On what?”

“On whether or not you can actually dance,” she teased.

“Oh, honey, I can dance.” He looked around for the maitre d’.

An hour later, she was delighted to discover that he could dance.

“Where’d you get your rhythm?” She asked as they slow danced after two fast dances.

“What kind of question is that? Do you think only black guys can actually dance?”

“I didn’t say that.”

He slapped her ass. “But you’re thinking it.”

She laughed, rubbing her breasts against his chest. “Let’s go home.”

During the drive back to the complex, they discussed politics and discovered they held vastly different views. “Why are otherwise intelligent but wealthy people Republicans?”

"I'm not Republican," he replied. "I'm independent."

"But you vote republican?"

"Depends on the issue. I've been known to vote in favor of democratic issues as well. So can we drop the subject since we clearly don't agree?"

"Fine, but don't expect me to attend any Republican fund-raisers with you."

"But you'll expect me to attend Democratic ones with you?"

"There's no point in having a man if I have to go to such functions alone."

"Typical," he said, sounding amused.

"Was Kelli Republican?"

"She was a die-hard Democrat to the core."

"Then you're used to being made to leave the dark side for your own good."

He laughed.

She glanced at his profile. "Tell me about her, Seneka."

His jaw clenched. "Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"She was warm, sweet, funny, kind, loving, and generous to a fault."

"And the love of your life?"

"Yes."

The one clipped word held a wealth of meaning. "You still miss her?"

He didn't respond, but she noted his hands tightening on the steering wheel.

She sighed and they lapsed into an uneasy silence.

He turned to face her in the complex lobby. "Spend the night with me, Autumn."

"I don't think —"

"I moved the picture."

Noting his jaw clenching, she decided not to ask where he'd moved it. "Why don't you put it back and spend the night with me instead?" she suggested. "That will allow you to move it when you're ready to and not because you feel you have to."

He shook his head. "I want you to spend the night with me."

She touched his arm. "But I don't want you to feel forced to move it. Considering your feelings for her, I'm sure moving it wasn't easy for you."

"It's what she would have insisted I do a long time ago. We discussed her...death and she made me promise to...she wanted me to move beyond grief and fall in love and remarry."

Autumn suppressed a sigh. The more she learned about his deceased wife, the more she dreaded the inevitable comparison. Besides, he hadn't once mentioned loving her. "Let's compromise. You spend the night with me and when your brother returns to L.A. we'll revisit my spending the night with you."

He pushed the UP button. When the elevator arrived he followed her inside, along with two other people. "Why don't you spend the night with me and when Raven arrives, we'll stay at your place?" He pushed the 5<sup>th</sup> floor button.

She cast a quick look at the two other men in the elevator before she nodded.

They got out on her floor. As soon as they were inside her unit, she frowned. "Seneka —"

He leaned against the door. "Go pack an overnight bag so you can sleep late tomorrow."

"Seneka, I—"

"You can't expect to win every disagreement, Autumn."

"We're disagreeing already?"

"It's what couples do."

"Are we a couple, Seneka?"

"Yes, we are and we need to discover if my unit suits you or if we'll have to redecorate or sell it."

She parted her lips.

He held up a hand. "If you're about to say I'm moving too fast, save your breath. I'm feeling horny as hell so take your big, beautiful ass in the bedroom and pack your bag."

She stared at him.

He silently returned her stare.

After deciding they were wasting time, she stalked down the passage to her bedroom to obey.

They only made it as far as the living room in his unit before he dropped her overnight bag and took her in his arms. "You're so beautiful and sexy and I feel lucky to be your man," he whispered before he rained kisses over her face and neck.

Her man. "That has such a nice ring to it," she said, stroking her fingers through his hair.

He tightened his arms around her before he kissed her with slow deliberation.

She moaned against his demanding lips, loving the assertive way he sucked her tongue into his mouth. His big hands cupped her ass, pulling her against his groin.

Her pussy flooded. She wanted him inside her immediately. She pulled away from him so she could reach between their bodies to unzip his pants and free his cock.

He groaned and shuddered. "Oh, damn, Autumn, I love the feel of your hands on me."

Smiling, she lifted her face with her lips parted and the tip of her tongue extended. "Show me how much, my handsome brave."

He recaptured her mouth and kissed her breathless while she pumped his cock and massaged his laden nuts.

Feeling him lengthen and thicken against her fingers sent another rush of moisture into her pussy. She released his genitals and dragged her mouth from his. "Oh, God, Seneka, I need you inside me."

He took her hand and led her over to the sofa. He sat, staring up at her with his big, gorgeous cock fully erect sticking out of his pants. "Strip for me."

She stood between his legs. "Strip for...you mean take off my clothes?"

He nodded, smiling. "That's generally what strip means."

"I'm not ready for that."

"You're not ready for what?"

"Taking all my clothes off in front of you."

"All right. I'll close my eyes."

"No...I meant I'm not ready to be completely naked in front of you yet."

"We should be pass that, Autumn—"

She pressed her fingers against his lips. "Which are you more interested in, Seneka? Arguing with me or fucking me?"

He slapped her ass. "I'll have you know I can do both at the same time."

She laughed. "I'll just bet you can, but let's just fuck now and leave the arguing for later."

He slid his arms around her, allowing his palms to come to rest on her ass. "We've made love, Autumn and I've already told you I love your body. Don't you believe me?"

"Yes."

"Then take off your clothes."

"I need to work my way up to that...slowly. In the meantime, does this work for you?" She unbuttoned her blouse and her breasts spilled out. She then lifted her skirt, revealing her bare pussy. While in her bedroom, she had removed her underwear.

He drew her close, so he could kiss and nibble at her nipples.

She sighed, cupping her hand over the back of his head. "Love me," she whispered.

He twirled his tongue around her right nipple while sliding one hand around her body to finger her clit.

"Love me," she said again.

He lifted his lips from her breasts and rose. "I'm going to." He stepped away from her and quickly took off his clothes. He removed a condom from his wallet and gave it to her.

She took it, tore it open, and then knelt in front of him.

"No," he reached down to lift her to her feet.

"Why not?"

"Because we're not having anymore of me coming before you and that's what's going to happen if you put your mouth anywhere near my cock."

"I'm prepared to take my chances," she said and knelt in front of him again.

"Well, I'm not." He lifted her to her feet, took the condom from her and rolled it over his cock. He lay on the sofa on his side and tugged at her hand. "Join me."

Pushing her skirt up over her ass, she lay facing him on the sofa.

He stroked her breasts. "How much longer do you think I'm going to put up with this shit, Autumn?"

"What shit?" She rubbed her breasts against his chest.

He probed her slit and pussy. "This shit of making love with your clothes on."

"Seneka —"

"I want you in my arms naked and unashamed of the body I love," he told.

"Just bear with me for a little longer, Seneka."

"No!"

"Please, honey," she begged. "Just a little longer." She closed her fingers around his cock and gently pumped him as she kissed him.

He rolled her onto her back and lay on top of her.

She closed her eyes and moaned softly as he ground his cock against her while he bit and nibbled at her neck. "Are you going to bite me or fuck me?"

"I'm going to do both," he said, easing his cock into her.

"Oh...oh...God, Seneka...yes...yes..." She clutched his waist.

"Oh, God, you feel so good inside me. Give me it all...every inch."

He slid nuts deep into her and then lay still on her with his lips against her ear.

“Fuck me. Please.”

He whispered something incoherent but it sounded delightful before he pulled out of her.

“No,” she protested.

He urged her onto her side and rained kisses on her neck and breasts. Then he slipped behind her. Lifting her top leg, he slowly pushed back into her pussy.

“Oh, yes. That’s what I want...that’s what I need, Seneka,” she whispered. “You...deep inside me.”

“Call me Neka.”

“Neka,” she repeated.

“Lower your leg, sweet,” he urged.

She blindly obeyed.

He buried his lips against her neck as he pushed slowly in and out of her.

She closed her eyes and rotated her hips against his groin, savoring each languid thrust of his hard, thick cock into the deepest depths of her pussy.

He pinched and massaged her breasts with one hand. The fingers of the other hand stroked her slit and rubbed against her clit, sending jolts of desire through her. She turned her head, hungry to feel his lips against hers.

He thrust his cock in deep and allowed his mouth to crash down on her lips. His tongue swept inside. He quickened his pace.

She shivered, tightening herself around him.

Within seconds he was pushing and pulling his tongue in and out of her mouth in sync with the furious motion of his cock. Combined with his thumb, his thrusting appendages quickly drove her to an exquisitely sweet and delicious orgasm.

He continued fucking her through her release, filling her ears with sweet words of lust and desire.

She squeezed her vaginal muscles around him. "Oh...Se...Neka..."

He tensed behind her and sucked her neck seconds before he pulled his cock out of her, yanked off the condom, and then blasted his seed against her belly.

"Oh..." She rolled onto her other side so that they faced each other. Slipping her arms around him, she kissed him while rubbing herself against his cock.

He shuddered, groaned, and then surprised her by rolling her onto her back, and thrusting his bare, still ejaculating cock into her pussy.

"Seneka!" She pushed against his shoulders. "What are you doing?"

He eased almost all the way out of her and then leisurely sank nuts deep back inside her.

She gasped.

He repeated the offense, pushing in deeper with more force the second time.

Autumn's pussy convulsed around his cock. "Oh..."

Holding her close, he rolled onto his back. "Going raw feels good doesn't it, honey?"

"Yes. Oh, God, yes!"

“Show me how good it feels.”

Placing her hands on his chest, she sat up and rode him slowly, savoring each downward thrust of her hips that drove his cock deep up into her flooded pussy.

He cupped her ass and started moving with her, pushing in deeper.

She tossed her head back and rotated her hips, riding him until her heart raced wildly and she came. She then collapsed on top of him, trembling. “I want you on top of me when you come again,” she told him.

He eased her onto her back, sliding quickly in and out of her.

Within minutes, he tensed and his body jerked.

Her eyes flew opened and she shoved against his shoulders. “What are you doing, Seneka?”

He kept her on her back with his weight. “Coming inside you,” he whispered.

“Seneka —”

“You want me to come in you. Don’t you, honey?”

“Yes,” she admitted, clenching her fingers in his tight buns. She closed her eyes and savored each involuntarily jerk of his hips that signaled another expulsion of his seed into her body.

When he stopped coming, he rolled them onto their sides. With his cock still inside her, they lay together on the sofa exchanging warm, sweet kisses until his erection deflated.

Then sanity returned.

“You shouldn’t have come in me, Seneka.”

He licked the side of her neck. “Relax, honey.”

“Relax? You come inside me without my permission and tell me to relax?”

“Yes. Relax. Let’s face it. You’re my woman and this big, beautiful body of yours belongs to me. You must have known, I was going to go raw in you sooner or later. When pussy is as sweet, tight, and hot as yours, it was always going to be sooner.”

She wanted to be angry, but she felt sated, content, and like she had been a bad girl. Deciding to enjoy the sensation, she closed her eyes. She dozed until he pinched her nipples and roused her.

“Let’s go to bed.” He climbed over her and stood up.

She nodded sleepily and rose.

He put his arm around her waist.

“My overnight bag, Seneka.”

He picked it up and walked her into the master bathroom. He walked into the toilet room, leaving the door open.

Feeling like a voyeur, she stood watching the steady stream of urine from his cock flow into the toilet. She found it sexy.

He flushed the toilet and glanced over his shoulder. “Your turn.” He stepped aside.

After a moment of hesitation, she walked into the enclosure, lifted her skirt, and sat down. Her cheeks burned while she urinated.

He reached down to pinch her nipples. “That’s it, sweet. No more forbidden anything between us.”

After they washed their hands, they went into the bedroom.

The first thing she noticed was the absence of Kelli’s picture on his nightstand.

He got in bed. “Take off your clothes,” he told her.

“Oh, Neka, we’ve already discussed that.” She picked up her overnight bag and went back into the bathroom. She quickly changed into a sheer, sleeveless silk nightgown that fell below her knees. She pulled on the matching robe that did nothing to conceal her body and returned to the bedroom.

Seneka slipped his arms around her when she joined him in bed. He slid his palm down her body to cup her bare pussy.

She shook her head. “Your hand feels very nice there, but I need a nap before tangling with your hot sausage again.”

“My hot sausage?” He laughed and nipped the side of her neck. “No more sex tonight, I just want to feel your bare, beautiful ass against me as we sleep.” He turned the bedside lamps off.

Smiling, she pushed her nightgown and robe above her waist.

He scooted behind her spoon fashion until she felt his cock.

“Oh that feels very nice.” She ground her ass against him.

He slapped her thigh. “Don’t start anything you’re not prepared to finish right now,” he warned.

Still smiling, she stopped moving. “But lying with you here like this feels better than nice,” she admitted.

“Lying together would feel even better if we were both naked.”

“I know, but I’m a big woman, Seneka.”

“Yes, honey, you are.” He spoke in a voice that left no doubt he liked her size before he gently sucked the side of her neck.

“You have a perfect, ripped body, Seneka.”

“I’m glad to like it, honey, but you should know, I like yours too.”

“And I’m glad you do. I just need a little time before I feel comfortable enough to be naked in front of you.”

“Your time has run out,” he warned.

She frowned. “I told you I don’t like caveman tactics.”

“Why don’t you concentrate on being the sexy, beautiful woman and allow me to be the man in this relationship?” He suggested in a cool voice.

She turned to stare at him. “Are you out of your cotton-picking mind?”

He grinned. “I was perfectly sane until you fucked me out of my mind.”

So he’d been joking. She laughed.

He shook his head. “I’m serious, Autumn.”

“You can’t be. This is two thousand —”

“I know what year it is. I also know the natural order between a man and his woman.”

“A man and his...my God, Seneka, you really do have a caveman mentality.”

He shifted her back onto her side. “What I have is you as my woman.”

His woman? The remaining protests died on her lips. What sane woman would object to belonging to Seneka Elkhorn?

He slid one hand down her nightgown to caress her breasts and the other one against her pussy. Then he sucked the side of her neck-hard.

She jerked away from his lips. “Not so hard, Seneka! You’ll leave a mark and everyone will know —”

“That you’re mine? Yes, that’s what I’m counting on,” he said. Shifting closer, he locked his lips on her neck again while stroking her pussy.

Oh, damn. Autumn closed her eyes and silently enjoyed the sexy sensation of knowing he was branding her.

Long after Seneka’s deep, even breathing assured her he was asleep, Autumn lay awake. She eased out of his embrace and turned him onto his back. She waited a moment to ensure he was still asleep before she turned on one of the bedside lamps.

Sitting up in bed, she pushed the cover away from his body so she could study him. He had a beautiful body. She trailed her nails down over his chest to his abs.

Her pussy flooded as she allowed her gaze to rest on his flaccid cock and his dark pubic hair. She bent her head and kissed his balls and licked his shaft.

He made a small sound.

She sighed, urged him back onto his side, turned off the lamp, and eased back into his arms. Asleep, she dreamed of being pregnant and happily married to Seneka...of having his baby at home while both their families gathered around to cheer her through an at home natural childbirth.

The moment Autumn woke she knew she was stark naked. She lay with her eyes closed, taking slow deep breaths. Although he wasn’t touching her, she knew Seneka was still in the big bed with her.

“You undressed me,” she said, clutching the cover over her naked body.

He rolled over until she felt his nude body pressed against her back. "Yes. I did."

The lack of remorse in his voice annoyed her. Her nipples felt sore. "And you touched me while I slept," she accused.

He kissed her neck. "Don't make it sound as if I had sex with you while you were asleep. I kissed and sucked your breasts, which is no different than your caressing me and kissing my cock and balls as you did last night," he told her.

She blushed. "You pretended to be asleep."

He kissed her ear and cupped her breasts in his palms. "I was asleep, until you started to molest me."

She pushed her elbow against his ribs. "I didn't molest you!"

"Nor did I you." He released her, turned on the bedside lamps, and urged her around to face him.

She clutched the cover to her naked body.

He tugged at it until she finally released it. Locking his gaze with hers, he pushed the cover away from her body.

She sank her teeth into her bottom lip.

He stroked his hands over her flesh. "We're adults who are more than sexually compatible. We don't need to pretend with each other. I love every inch of your beautiful, sexy body. There's no need for you to continue to try to hide it from me. And I sure as hell don't feel I need permission to undress or touch you when we both know you're my woman."

"Seneka —"

He slapped the side of her thigh. "Don't bother starting an argument you don't really want to win."

She blushed.

He embraced her. "There's no need to ever be embarrassed with me, Autumn. All the things you consider physical imperfections or flaws, I consider sexy as hell."

She knew he meant it. Some of her tension vanished. "Oh, Seneka..."

"Neka," he reminded her.

"Neka," she repeated.

"You're a beautiful woman with a body that gets me hard in record time. You've had all my attention from the moment we met. So please stop worrying about your sexy body and instead concentrate on when you're going to marry me."

"What did you do with her picture, Seneka?"

"It's on a shelf in my closet."

She turned in his arms. "Are you ever going to love me?"

## Chapter Ten

"That's not something you need to worry about because I already do, Autumn."

Then why didn't she believe him? And why didn't he say the words *I love you*? She believed he wanted to marry her and that she had no competition—at least from living women. But she knew he didn't yet love her. She wouldn't marry him until he did.

"Put the picture back on your nightstand."

He shook his head. "Does my having it in the closet bother you?"

"No."

He tipped up her chin. "Are you sure? Yesterday it bothered you."

"Well, it shouldn't have. I have to learn to accept that you still love her and probably always will."

He kissed her. "Don't worry about how I feel about her. Worry about how I feel about you, honey."

"And how is that?"

"I just told you."

She pulled out of his arms, turning her back to him.

He leaned over her. "What did I say wrong?"

It wasn't what he'd said. It was what he hadn't said. So he wasn't willing to say the actual words. He desired her and probably liked her, but he didn't love her. "It's not going to work for us, Seneka."

He gripped her arm and turned her onto her back. "You're trying your best to ensure it won't work! Knock yourself out trying,

Autumn, but I've already made up my mind. You're my woman and you're going to be my wife. And if you think I'm prepared to wait indefinitely, you'd better think again!"

He rolled off the bed and stalked out of the bedroom.

"It's not as if you can make me marry you!" She called after him and snatched the blanket up to cover her body.

He stormed back into the room to lean over her. "You want to bet?"

She stared up at him and felt a thrill at the determination she saw in the dark eyes blazing down at her.

"I always get what I want and need, Autumn. And I want and need you far more than you're ready to believe." He sat on the side of the bed and caressed her cheek. "We can do this the hard or the easy way, but in the end, you're going to be mine. So while you're plotting and planning to make our relationship far more difficult than it need be, I'm going down to the gym. Go back to sleep. When I return, I'll make breakfast and then we'll spend a few hours together, have lunch, and then go to the airport to pick up Raven."

"So what? You have my entire day planned for me?"

He grinned. "Yes. Get used to it." He leaned closer until his lips were just inches from hers.

After several moments, she parted her lips and lifted her head.

He pressed a warm, sweet kiss against her mouth.

She responded to the passion in his kiss, running her fingers through his hair.

He lifted his mouth from hers. "Kelli would have wanted me to be happy with you. It's what I want too and I know you do. So why

create problems, Autumn? Why can't you just accept that I knew the moment I saw you I was going to marry you?"

"You're going to the gym."

"So?"

"You have a perfect body and you work out to keep it that way."

He shrugged. "It's the way Kelli liked me. You like me this way too. Don't you?"

She nodded.

"But I wouldn't like you this way," he told her. "I don't want your legs thin and slender, your ass less round or your stomach flat. I love your body the way it is with warm, lush curves that feel as if they were made just to delight me."

"So I can't win. Sam left me because I gained too much weight and you'll leave me if I lose too much weight."

"Oh, for the love of God, Autumn! Will you cut the shit! I didn't say I'd leave you if you lost weight. If you want to lose weight—then do it. But only do it if that's what you want to do. I'm going to marry you. I prefer you just as you are, but I'll take you however you come. The only way I'll leave you is if you cheat on me and force me to kill your lover which lands me in jail."

She stared at him. "You almost sound like a sav..."

"Like a savage? Isn't that part of what draws women of other races to Native American men? The thought that no matter how civilized we appear, that just under the surface is a savage just waiting for an excuse to break free and wreak havoc?"

She shook her head. "Oh, Seneka, please don't think I think of you that way."

He stroked a hand down her cheek. "Yes you do. And you know what? I don't mind because if anyone tries to take you from me, I'll show him savage." He bent and pressed a hard, biting kiss against her mouth before he rose.

She turned onto her side, a smile curving her lips. Her very own savage brave. This relationship was going to get very interesting before she surrendered to the inevitable.

### III

After he finished his workout, Seneka sat in his car and called Braden.

"For the love of God, Neka, it's four in the morning here."

"I know but I need to talk to you, Bray. Are you alone?"

"No, but she's asleep. Give me a moment to go into the living room...what's happening with Autumn?"

Seneka didn't bother denying the obvious. "I'm not sure how to handle her and that scares me because I can't bear to lose her."

"What happened?"

He told Braden of their conversations during the last twenty-four hours.

"I obviously don't know her but from what you've told me, it sounds like she has a secret yen to be dominated. So dominate her. You appear to get more positive results when you lay down the law. As modern as women are, sometimes all they want is for us to be assertive. In any case, tell her to save a few hours for me during the week."

"For you?"

"Yes. I'm coming with Ray."

"Oh?"

Braden laughed. "Relax, Neka. I have no romantic interest in her whatsoever."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm positive. I just like her as a person. And, just so you know, Mom has her sights set on the perfect woman."

"Damn, Bray, you'd better put your running shoes on."

"The woman in question is intended for you."

"For me?"

"For you. She says you're the kind of man who shouldn't be without a woman in his life."

"I have one in my life."

"Apparently your failure to really talk about Autumn led her to think she's just a fling."

"She's no damned fling. I asked her to marry me."

"Damn, Neka, are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Did she accept?"

"No."

"Double damn!"

"But she will," he said.

"That's the spirit—I think. In any case, I'll have a talk with Mom and buy you some breathing space."

"Thanks, Bray."

"Now I'm going back to bed."

Seneka returned to his unit to find Autumn in the kitchen cooking breakfast. She wore another pair of sweats. With her there, this place might just one day feel like home.

He walked into the room to embrace her from behind.  
“Morning, honey.”

She leaned against him and turned her head for a quick kiss.  
“Hi.”

He kissed her neck and released her. “Want to go shopping?”

“Have you ever met a woman who didn’t?”

“What’s your favorite store?”

She named a high-end department store.

“Let’s go shopping after breakfast.”

She put two plates with egg whites and French toast on the breakfast nook. She added several stripes of bacon to his. “Are you trying to bribe me, Seneka?”

He shrugged. “There are advantages to marrying a man who doesn’t have to pinch pennies, Autumn.”

“When I marry, it will be for love, Seneka. Not money.”

“I’m already there.”

She turned to face him.

The look in her beautiful eyes assured him she didn’t believe him.

He suppressed an annoyed sigh. What did it take to convince her?

“So how much are you willing to spend, Seneka?”

“You can max out my personal cards if you like. I have two with a combined balance of about \$50,000.”

She blinked. “You’re telling me I can spend \$50,000?”

"I'd rather you didn't, but you can."

"Don't worry, Neka, I—"

"I'm not worried. I'm a practical man. If I couldn't afford it, I wouldn't offer them."

"I wouldn't dream of spending that kind of money." She touched his cheek. "And I've already let you buy all I intend to accept from you." She turned away.

He caught her hand and turned her back to face him. "Why?"

"Because I don't accept expensive gifts from men."

"I'm not men. I'm the man whose babies you're going to have."

"That hasn't been decided yet."

"The hell it hasn't." He eased her against the island and tugged down her sweat pants and her thong. While he devoured her lips, she fumbled between their bodies to slide down his zipper.

She shivered as he rubbed his cock against her slit. He eased a finger inside her and felt her pussy flooding. She was ready for him.

"Condom," she whispered.

He bent his knees and pushed against her.

She gasped as he eased his bare cock inside her. "Condom," she said again, pressing against his shoulders.

"Oh, no, honey. That ship has left the dock," he said, pushing in the rest of his cock. He tipped up her chin and stared down into her eyes.

"That's not a decision you should be making for both of us, Seneka."

"It's already made," he told her. "I'd prefer it if we were married before you end up pregnant, but if you want it this way, fine. You'll get pregnant first and then we'll get married."

She shook her head.

He kissed her into silence.

When she slipped her arms around him, he gripped her hips and fucked her hard and fast. He loved how tight and wet she felt and that the passion in her kiss rivaled his each time he touched his mouth to her warm lips. What he most enjoyed was the way she matched him stroke for stroke.

Determined not to come before her, he trailed his mouth down her neck to bite her nipples through her top and bra and rubbed his thumb against her clit.

She shuddered and moaned his name.

He felt the tension in her body. She was close to coming. He rubbed her clit harder and thrust deeper into her.

She shuddered, dug her nails into his ass, and came all over his cock.

Only then did he bury his lips against her neck and ejaculate inside her. He loved the way she held him as he came, stroking her fingers through his hair.

He remained inside her until she pushed against his shoulders. He kissed her and finally withdrew from her.

She pulled up her thong and sweats. "You can't force me to marry you by getting me pregnant, Seneka."

"Damn, you're not satisfied unless you're busting my balls, are you?"

"What?"

He pushed his cock back into his briefs and zipped up his pants. "I don't need this shit from you, Autumn. I won't propose again. If you're not interested in marrying me and having my babies, I'll just have to find someone who is. The ball's in your court." He turned and walked out.

### III

After eating some of the cooled breakfast, Autumn waited for over an hour before she realized Seneka wasn't going to return—at least not while she was there. She packed her overnight case, left his keys on the table in the foyer, and returned to her unit to call Spring.

"Well, honestly, Autumn, I don't blame him for being pissed. You can't have it both ways. You haven't told him you love him either but have the nerve to want him to express his feelings in a certain way."

Autumn stopped pacing her living room area in surprise. "You're taking his side?"

"I'm taking the fair side. He's already told you he loves you."

"His saying I'm already there *after* I said I'd only marry for love doesn't count."

"And why doesn't it? You clearly knew he was telling you he loved you."

"I know, but—"

"If you don't stop being so unreasonable, you're going to lose him. And before you get defensive, remember there are a lot of women who would love to be in your shoes. Don't drive him into their arms."

"I can't believe you're taking his side."

“Call it what you like, but give yourself an hour or so to come to your senses and then go find him.”

Autumn’s agitation after her conversation with Spring was so high, she decided she needed a walk. She put on a pair of sneakers and went down to the gym.

Both blondes were there. The thinner one walked along the track with Autumn.

“Trying to walk yourself into shape for your backwards brave or has he moved on to a woman he can actually pick up?”

Autumn took a deep breath before she gave the woman a cool smile. “If you ever make the mistake of getting in my personal space again, I’ll slap your skinny, flat-ass so hard, you’ll be wearing my fingerprints on your hateful face for a week.”

She sucked in a breath. “Are you threatening me?”

Autumn gave her a sweet smile. “Absolutely.”

The blonde blinked and stalked away to her friend.

As they whispered together, Autumn continued with her walk. If either one of them came anywhere near her, she decided she’d take delight in slapping them both into the following week. But they kept their distance and she spent the rest of her walk wondering how to handle her relationship with Seneka. Did they even have a relationship anymore? Would he insist she humiliate herself when they saw each other again?

She valued Spring’s opinion. Had she been unreasonable? If she’d fallen in love with him so quickly, why couldn’t he have done the same? *Because he started this relationship in love with his deceased wife. You weren’t in love with Sam.*

As soon as she entered her place, she noticed the keys on the table near the door. Her heart sank—until she realized they weren't her spare set but his. They were back on. "Seneka!" She rushed through her unit looking for him. He wasn't there and he didn't answer either his cell or landline.

Without taking the time to shower and change, she snatched up his keys and rushed up to the penthouse. He wasn't there and a second call to his cell phone went right to his voicemail.

She sank on the side of his bed. Where the hell was he? Why was he avoiding her after leaving his keys? What did he want or expect from her now?

Autumn waited an hour before she returned to her place to shower and change. She had lunch and then spent the rest of the day at a downtown museum. Enjoying the exhibits proved difficult because she found herself checking to make sure her cell phone's ringer was on every few minutes.

She had dinner alone at one of her favorite restaurants. She returned home after eight. There were still no messages from Seneka. Angry at his mixed messages, she stormed up to the penthouse.

Instead of ringing his bell, she used the keys and let herself in. She heard music. Damn him. He was home but hadn't bothered to call her. She stormed towards the living room.

"Seneka Elkhorn, if you think I'm going to put up with any shit from you—" She came to an abrupt halt in the living room doorway. None of the five men who rose at her entrance was Seneka.

She immediately recognized Braden and Raven. There was a third male who looked enough like them and must be Shane Elkhorn. The other two males appeared to be Native American also. One had a

hint of silver gracing his short dark hair. The other, who bore a marked resemblance to him, had long, dark, glossy hair spilling over broad shoulders.

"I beg your pardon," she stammered, her cheeks burning. "I thought...I was looking for Seneka."

"Neka's not here at the moment," Braden said. "But please come in."

"No. I'm so sorry." She backed away.

Braden crossed the room, caught her hand, and gave her an encouraging smile. "Allow me to introduce you."

"I can't. I'm too embarrassed," she admitted.

"You're among soon to be family and friends. You have no need to be embarrassed with us." He released her hand and put an arm around her shoulders. Ignoring her protests, he walked her across the room.

Raven smiled and inclined his head. "It's good to see you again, honey."

"You too," she murmured, mortified.

Braden gave her shoulders a reassuring squeeze. "Autumn, this handsome devil is our youngest brother, Shane. Chief, this is Autumn Walker."

Shane Elkhorn was drop-dead gorgeous with what Spring would call bedroom eyes.

He treated her to a charming smile, flashing what appeared to be perfectly even and sparkling white teeth at her. He clasped both of her hands between his. "I'm delighted to meet you, Wy Janet."

"Nice to meet you, Shane, but my name's Autumn."

To her surprise, all five men laughed.

“Neka’s been falling down on the job,” Shane said. “Everyone calls me Shay or Chief.”

Braden turned her to face the two remaining men in the room. “These are two of our good friends, Layton and Bancroft Grayhawk. Layton, this is Neka’s wyanet.”

Layton Grayhawk smiled as they shook hands. “It’s nice to meet you, Autumn.”

Bancroft Grayhawk gave her a charming smile. “Wyanet, indeed. Neka’s a very lucky man,” he said.

Autumn tore her gaze from his thick, glossy hair. “Thanks,” even as she spoke she wondered if Seneka would agree with him. She turned to face Braden. “I didn’t mean to interrupt—”

He shook his head. “There’s no question of your interrupting, Autumn. Join us.”

“Oh...no. No!” She pulled away from him. “It was nice meeting you gentlemen,” she said and turned and rushed from the room.

To her surprise, Braden followed her, placing a hand against the entrance door before she could open it.

She took a deep breath before she turned to face him.

He brushed the back of his hand against her cheek. “I know you and Neka had a disagreement—”

“He walked out and has ignored my calls all day.”

“He has a bit of a temper, but as I’m sure you must know by now, he loves you.”

“Does he?”

“Of course he does. You don’t think he gives his keys to just any woman, do you?”

"I don't know. Does he?"

"No. Our father taught us a man has two sets of keys that he should jealously guard. None of us give our keys to casual...acquaintances. I'm sure he's given you both sets of his."

"So he says but he's never actually said he loves me."

"Hasn't he?"

She shook her head.

"Are you sure?"

"He's hinted he does and talked around it, but he's never actually said the words."

"The words being *I love you*?"

She nodded.

"Do you love him, Autumn?"

"Yes."

"Unless I'm sadly misinformed you haven't told him you love him either."

"Well, I haven't, but it's not the same thing."

"Oh, honey, let's be fair! Why is it okay for you not to have told him how you feel about him while insisting he use specific terminology?"

"You're being impossible."

He laughed.

"Where is he?"

He glanced at his watch. "Probably on his way back from his office. He left some documents there Ray wanted to look over tonight for tomorrow's meeting. Why don't you come in and wait for him?"

"You have company."

"We've known the Grayhawks for over twenty years. They're more like extended family than company." He put his arm around her shoulders and walked her away from the door. "Come back into the living room. We're all having dinner with Layton and his wife on Wednesday night. You're invited, of course."

She blinked up at him. "I'm sure that was before Seneka and I—"

"Why won't you marry him?"

"He's still in love with Kelli."

"So? He's probably always going to love her. That doesn't mean he can't love you as much or even more."

"Even more?"

"Why not? He's older and now has a greater appreciation of how unpredictable life can be, which in turn, will increase his appreciation for you and the love you share. Trust me, honey, don't let the fact that he hasn't actually said *I love you* make you doubt that he does."

"Did he tell you he did?"

"Yes, but I already knew he did. Neka's happiest when he's in love and he is in love with you. He just needs a little more time to deal with falling in love again. Give him some wiggle room. You won't be sorry."

"Why did everyone keep calling me Wyanet? Autumn's not that hard to pronounce or remember."

"Some Native men have special terms for the special women in their lives. The Grayhawks use the word sheenea. We use wyanet. It's a term of deep love and eternal devotion that none of us use lightly."

“Although I’ve had numerous relationships with many women I was very fond of, I’ve never called any woman wyanet. However, I’m sure Neka has used the endearment with you.”

She sucked in a breath. “I think he has but I thought he was asking about the net.”

“Why would you think that?”

She blushed. “He’s only used it during...while we were...”

He grinned. “Ain’t sex fun?”

“He calls it making love.”

He caressed her cheek. “Why not since it’s actually what he’s doing. You have to be in love to make love.”

“That’s what he says.”

“It’s one of our father’s truisms.”

“He must have been a wise man and a loving father.”

Braden nodded. “He was both. And there’s no doubt Neka’s head over heels in love with you.”

“Thank you, Braden.” She slipped her arm around his waist and leaned up to kiss his cheek.

He engulfed her in a warm embrace. “You’re welcome, honey.” He released her suddenly.

She looked over her shoulder.

Seneka stood in the open door watching them with a cool look in his eyes. “Am I interrupting?”

Braden’s narrowed his gaze. “Yes. I was about to proposition her and spirit her off to spend the night with me at the nearest hotel.”

Seneka, carrying a briefcase, closed and locked the door before he replied. “I didn’t mean it like that, Bray.”

Braden walked over to the front door and slapped him on the cheek. "Yes, you did, but I'll make allowances for the fact that you're in love. Men in love always think every other man is out to take their woman from them." He took the briefcase from him. "I'll give this to Ray while you take care of your business." He smiled at Autumn and walked away.

"I'm surprised to see you, here, Autumn," Seneka said when they were alone in the foyer.

"You're surprised to see me because you've spent the day ignoring my calls?"

He sighed. "I'm not in the mood for an argument, Autumn. If that's what you want, do us both a favor and leave me the hell alone."

She swallowed hard before she trusted her voice not to crack when she spoke. "Fine. I won't waste your time or mine." She reached in her bag and slapped his keys on the foyer table. "These are yours."

He glanced at them but made no move to pick them up. "I'm not going to offer them again."

"Fine. You're not going to offer another half-ass proposal or your keys. What makes you think I want either one, Seneka?"

"What makes you think I care? There's a pretty, full-figured blonde paralegal at work I'm going to ask out. You can go out with whoever the hell you like." He reached in his pants pocket and held out her keys. "I won't need these anymore."

She felt as if he'd slapped her hard enough to knock the wind out of her. "So you didn't mean any of the...lies you told me?"

He shrugged.

She snatched her keys from him and jerked the door open. All the way to the elevator, she expected him to follow her. He didn't and she stumbled into her unit blinking back tears.

*Oh, God, Autumn. What have you done? Why didn't you show him how happy you were to see him? If you don't want to lose him, you'd better get your sorry behind back up there and apologize to him.*

Instead, she undressed and crawled into bed with tears streaming down her cheeks.

The ringing phone startled her. Her heart raced when she sat up and saw Seneka's phone number on her caller I.D. screen. "Hello?"

"Autumn, this is Braden. Are you all right?"

Disappointment washed over her like an angry wave. "Did he ask you to call me?"

"No. I'm calling because I want to make sure you understand he's going through a difficult time. I don't know what you two said to each other, but—"

"He told me he's going to ask a woman at work out. So I appreciate your calling, Braden, but—"

"He's upset."

"That makes two of us."

"Can I come down and buy you a drink?"

"Thanks, but—"

"I'll be there in ten minutes. Please don't confuse me with Neka and leave me in the hall knocking."

She laughed.

"That's better. I'm on my way, so dry your eyes and get ready to go for a drink."

He hung up without waiting for her response.

Half an hour later, they sat across from each other at Martie's. He listened in silence as she ranted about how unfair Seneka was before she stopped herself. "Oh, God, I'm sorry. The last thing you want to hear is me talking about him."

"It's not my favorite topic of discussion, but I understand that you're upset and want to vent. So vent."

She shook her head. "I've said enough considering he's your brother."

"He's also a good man, Autumn. He doesn't stray and when he's in love, he's in love for the duration. Not only is he the cream of the Elkhorn crop, but you can't possibly do any better than him."

"I don't want to do any better. I want him. I just want him to be more open about his feelings."

"He said you told him he was moving too quickly."

"I did say that, but..."

"Again, you really can't have it both ways, honey. Either you want him to be more expressive or he's moving too quickly."

"I should tell you now that I hate it when people try to get me to see reason when I'm not in the mood," she told him, frowning. "If you keep doing it, our budding friendship is going to suffer."

He laughed and squeezed her hand. "I like you."

"I like you too."

"You and I are going to be related very soon so it's just as well we like each other."

"I don't know if that's true, Braden."

"Call me Bray."

"Bray. What happened with Seneka?"

"What do you mean?"

“Bray, Ray, Shay, and Neka?”

He laughed. “Mom had an off day when she named him. Of course we could call him Nay, but he wasn’t feeling it.”

“How is she going to react to me?”

His smile vanished. “She’ll treat you as Neka’s wyagnet.”

“But?”

He sighed. “Please don’t take it personally if it takes her a little time to warm up to you.”

“Because I’m black?”

“No! Don’t misunderstand. She’s not prejudiced. She was just hoping Neka would marry a Native woman this time.”

“Oh. Well...that’s understandable. My mom expects me to marry another black man.”

“Is that part of the reason you’ve been telling Neka he’s moving too fast?”

“No. I said that because that’s what I felt. I’m confident my mom will love him.”

“Great.” He glanced at his watch. “Are you ready to go back upstairs?”

She nodded.

## Chapter Eleven

Autumn's eyes welled with tears when they stepped off the elevator on her floor. Seneka rose from the carpet outside her door.

She turned to look at Braden.

He smiled, gave her a gentle push, and stepped back into the elevator.

She walked across the hall to her door. "I'll bet you're sorry now you tossed my keys back at me."

He laughed.

She laughed too but then started to cry.

"Oh, no, honey. Don't cry," he said, putting his arm around her.

She leaned against him, pressing her cheek against his shoulder.

"Where are your keys?"

She pushed her shoulder bag at him.

He took it and found her keys. He opened the door, urged her inside, and then pulled her back in his arms.

He allowed her to cry for a few moments before he cupped his palms over her wet cheeks. "I don't want to make you cry. I just need to know what you want from me. You know that I want to marry you and have kids with you. I don't know what you want from me. You tell me I'm moving too fast, but then you tell Bray that I haven't said I love you when I have."

He hadn't actually said those all important words but pushing the issue didn't seem like a good idea when she just wanted to fall asleep in his arms.

"I want to marry you, but I want to marry for love, Seneka."

"Then where is the problem? I'm there. I think I have been since the night we met."

Again he'd passed on the chance to say the actual words. "Can we talk later? Tonight I just need you to hold me."

"Hold you? No intimacy?"

She didn't want to make love but clearly he did. She touched his cheek. "Hold me and love me."

"Are you sure? If you're not in the mood we can just cuddle."

She was sure he wanted sex. "Cuddling with you is always nice." She stroked her hands down his chest. "Having sex with you is even better."

He lifted her hands and kissed them. "Having sex is what two people do who don't care about each other. We're going to make love. That's what two people in love do, Autumn."

So he knew she loved him. "Does that mean we don't get to fuck anymore?"

He grinned. "Hell no. It just means we'll do it with love."

She smiled. "I like you, Seneka Elkhorn."

His smile vanished. "You said you liked Bray. Are we interchangeable?"

She stared at him. "You can't possibly be jealous of him."

"I'm not!"

"But?"

He shrugged. "He's taller, more attractive, has much more experience with women, and has far more money than I'll ever have."

"Really? Well, when you're 5' 5", a six-foot man is the ideal height. I've already told you I want to marry for love—not money. I

have no idea what you've been drinking that makes you think he's more attractive. He's not. He's cute. You're panty-wetting handsome and I'm glad you haven't bedded as many women as he probably has."

"Nowhere near."

She slipped her arms around his waist. "Now you might have to worry if we were discussing the drop-dead gorgeous Shane," she teased.

He stared at her and then laughed.

"What's so funny? Don't you think he's handsome?"

He nodded. "My brothers all outshine me. Bray is richer, Ray is far more intelligent than all of us put together, and Shay is undisputedly the most attractive male I've ever seen. And I generally find most men butt-ugly — like Bray who's nearly six-foot six-inches of bone ugly male."

Braden Elkhorn was nearly as attractive as Seneka, but she decided some things were better left unsaid. "Your brothers all outshine you — only in your fertile imagination. Not a single one of them can hold a candle to you as far as I'm concerned, Seneka."

"Since you're the only woman who counts, I feel better."

"Good. Now are you actually going to make love to me or do you plan to talk me to sleep?"

He laughed. Taking her hand in his, he led her to the living room where he quickly undressed and sat on the sofa. "Strip for me, honey."

"Strip for you?"

He nodded. "Yes. Strip for me."

"Okay, but turn down the lights first."

He shook his head. "I've already seen you nude and was totally enchanted. You're not ready to strip for me? Okay. Just undress."

"Aren't we going into the bedroom?"

"No. We're going to make love on the sofa."

"Unlike yours, my sofa is cloth. If we stain it —"

"We'll buy a new one. Now stop stalling and take your clothes off. Do it slowly."

She moistened her lips, reminded herself that he had seen her naked, and still wanted to marry her. She took a deep breath, tossed her head, sending her hair flying around her shoulders, and then slowly unbuttoned her blouse.

He sat with his legs open, massaging and gently pumping his cock.

The sight of him priming his cock to fuck her, excited her. She peeled off her blouse, dropped it on the carpet, and then swinging her hips side to side, she slowly removed her skirt.

When she stood in her bra and thong in front of him, the motion of his hand on his cock sped up. "Take those off too, honey."

Still rocking her hips from side to side, she reached back to unhook her bra. When her breasts spilled out, she had to check the urge to put an arm across them.

"Oh...shit. You make me so hard...now the thong," he said.

Hearing his voice thick with passion gave her added confidence. Smiling at him, she slowly stepped out her thong, and tossed it at him.

He caught it.

Watching him press it against his face and inhaling deeply turned her on.

He wrapped it around his cock and balls and massaged himself. "Oh, damn, Autumn. You have such a beautiful body...perfect in every way."

Oh, hell. If this handsome, buff hunk thought her body beautiful, she'd be a fool to be anything but proud. She sashayed over to the sofa to stand between his legs.

"Here, let me do that for you," she said, reaching down to his groin.

"No. Let me do something for you."

As he rose, she trembled at the feel of his fully erect cock brushing against her body.

He pressed a warm, lingering kiss on her parted lips before he nibbled a path down to her breasts. Holding her hips, he bit and sucked each of her nipples.

Only when they'd pebbled did he lick a wet trail to her stomach. While he kissed it, he slid his big hands over her thighs.

She caught her breath and widened her stance. "Eat me, Neka."

"Oh, honey, I'm going to."

The words had barely registered before he knelt in front of her.

Her stomach muscles clenched in anticipation.

He kissed her pussy and then rubbed his face against it.

"Oh, Neka." She closed her eyes, pinching her nipples.

He dragged his tongue along the length of her flooded slit.

"Hmm."

He pushed his tongue against her clit.

“Oooh...” She curled her fingers in his hair.

Cupping his hands over her ass, he pulled her pussy closer. He ate her with a leisurely hunger that left her shaking and moaning and in the grip of a powerful orgasm within minutes. She clutched his face against her. “Oh, God. Neka...Neka...”

He lapped at her pussy as she came, seeming to delight in the sampling of her fluids.

She leaned heavily against him, her legs shaking.

He rose, slipping his arms around her. “Now my turn,” he whispered, rubbing his cock against her.

“Oh...God...yes. Yes. Take me. Fuck me, Neka.”

He released her and lay on his side on the sofa. “Bring that sweet, hot pussy here, honey.”

She joined him on the sofa, lying on her side with her back to him.

He lifted her top leg, placing it over his and positioned his cock at her entrance.

She pushed her hips back. Closing her eyes, she licked her lips and savored the slow slide of his cock into her.

She quickly rediscovered the joys of the position. As he fucked her slowly, he alternated between French kissing her, biting and pinching her breasts and rubbing her belly and her clit.

Tasting her pussy on his lips, a riot of emotions overwhelmed her. She moaned, slamming her hips down to meet his upward lunges. Soon, they were moving together in a wild, greedy rhythm that sent chills gliding down her spine.

She arched back into him, her ears filled with his raw, sensual descriptions of how much he loved feeling his cock sinking deep inside her hot, tight pussy. He thrust into her, groaning how much he loved her perfect body and how happy she made him.

With his cock, lips, hands, and words, he made complete love to her body, mind, and soul. By the time they cried out and came within seconds of each other, he'd captured any part of her heart he didn't already own.

He withdrew his cock and rolled onto his back, pulling her half on top of him. They lay together in a tangle of arms and legs. The last thing she remembered before she dozed was his whispering the word, *wyanet*.

He woke her later and they went into the bathroom. They shared a quick shower fuck before they tumbled into bed to fall asleep in each other's arms.

She was surprised and pleased to find him still in bed with her in the morning. She glanced at the clock. It was just after five. "No work out today?"

He shook his head. "I have to go upstairs to get dressed soon for work but I wanted to talk to you before I left."

"What about?"

"About Braden."

She frowned. "What about him?"

"You really seem to like him."

"You missed your workout to tell me that? I already told you I like him."

He touched her cheek. "For me you wear baggy sweats that hide the body I love. For him you wear a beautiful outfit that highlights all your assets."

She rolled over and cupped her hand over his cock and balls. "Assets that belong exclusively to you."

"Oh, yeah?"

"Oh, yeah, baby. Only to you," she told him.

He pushed her on her side and rose over her. "Let's have a quickie."

She parted her legs. "This pussy is all yours, Neka."

"Just your pussy?"

"All of me belongs to you – including my heart."

"Mine is yours as well, honey."

"Make love to me."

He slipped between her thighs with his cock pressed against her pussy. "We need to discuss your stopping whatever birth control you're using."

"You're already coming in me, Seneka. We can discuss birth control later. Right now there are other things I'd rather do than talk."

"Don't you trust me, Autumn?"

"If I didn't you wouldn't be coming inside me." She stroked her hands down his back to cup his ass.

They kissed and ground their bodies together until she felt him hardening against her thigh. Then he lifted his hips enough to allow him to push inside her. They shared a fast, hard fuck before he curled his body against her back.

She elbowed him. "I like my men toned and buff. So get your tight ass in gear and go exercise."

He kissed her and got out of bed.

As he reached the door, she called out to him. "I'm off for the summer. I'll be here when you come home—unless of course I'm off with the rich, tall Braden or getting to know the handsome Shane."

He crossed the room to the bed, lifted the cover, and slapped each ass cheek hard.

"Ouch!"

He slapped each cheek again, even harder. "Stay the hell away from my brothers while I'm at work."

She rubbed her stinging cheeks. "I'll think about it. While you're gone, Seneka, chew on this. Braden has gone out of his way to be kind and considerate to me and of me. I like him a lot. You, I love."

"What?"

"I said I love you."

He sank on the side of the bed, a stunned look on his handsome face. "You do?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm old enough to know when I'm in love, Seneka. Yes I'm sure."

He stared at her.

She stared back. "Why are you staring at me like that? I thought you'd be pleased."

"If you're so in love with me, why haven't you accepted my proposal?"

"I told you why."

"And I told you—"

She pressed her fingers against his lips. "If we keep telling each other stuff you'll be storming out and I'll be in tears. I love you. Let's just leave it at that for now."

He sighed. "Speaking of storming out, I need your spare set of keys."

"The ones you tossed back at me?"

His lips twitched. "Yes. Those."

"Yes, well I'll consider giving them back later."

He slapped her ass cheeks so hard she gasped. "You were saying?"

"They're in the kitchen in the middle drawer."

"That's better." He stroked her belly. "Damn this is sexy."

She smiled.

He kissed her. "I'll see you later."

She caressed his cheek. "Don't take any full-figured blondes out to lunch."

"I don't know any but even if I did, my heart and my cock are your exclusive property."

Her smile turned into a grin.

He kissed her again.

She rolled onto her stomach and went back to sleep.

The ringing phone woke her later. Her stomach rumbled as she answered. "Hello?"

"Hi, honey. It's Braden. Shane and I were hoping you'd have lunch with us."

She glanced at the clock. 10:09. "I'd love to."

"Great. Where would you like to go?"

"I'm starving so let's make it Martie's."

“Starving? Neka wore you out last night?”

Although her cheeks burned, she laughed. “I don’t kiss and tell.”

“I’m thinking he did a lot more than just kiss you. He looked tired but extremely satisfied when he dragged himself down to the gym this morning, lucky bastard.”

“Braden!”

He laughed. “I’ll consider myself reprimanded. Shane and I will be down to pick you up at eleven-thirty?”

“Okay.”

He arrived with a beautiful bouquet of flowers and the keys to Seneka’s unit. “Neka asked me to give these to you.”

She accepted the flowers. “Are these from him?”

“No. They’re from me.”

Surprised and pleased, she leaned up to kiss his cheek.

“Thanks, Braden.”

“My pleasure, honey.”

Shane gave her an expensive bottle of champagne.

“I can’t accept this.”

“Of course you can. You can keep it chilled and open it when you finally decide to put Neka out of his misery. Think of it as an early wedding present.”

“You’re assuming—”

He shook his head. “I’m not assuming anything. Neka is one hell of a man. You’d be a fool to let him get away and you don’t look like a fool to me.”

She smiled. She liked the love fest the brothers seem to have going on between them. “Thank you, Shane.”

"Chief or Shay," he reminded her.

"Which do you prefer?"

He shrugged. "Some days I prefer Shay. Others days I prefer Chief."

Autumn enjoyed a leisurely lunch with Braden and Shane. Braden was charming and irreverent. Shane was charming and attentive.

After they left Martie's, Braden asked her to go help him pick out a present for Layton's wife.

"I've never met her and I have no idea what she might like, Braden."

"Maybe not but you can tell me if something is a definite no-no."

"Okay."

Shane left them in the building lobby saying he was going to spend the afternoon sightseeing before he had dinner with one of the Grayhawk brothers before allowing Benai Grayhawk to drag him to a girls' night out.

Braden put an arm around her shoulders and grinned down at her. "I thought we'd never get rid of him."

She laughed. "Alone at last?"

"Exactly. I have the keys to Neka's SUV so let's get out of here before he decides to join us."

"What's girls' night out?"

"The Grayhawk wives get together with their unmarried female friends and drag all the single males they know to a party. Men foolish enough to attend have to dance with any woman who asks them."

"And how many of these girls' nights out have you attended?"

"Just one. Believe me that was enough. Now, let's go shopping."

She nodded. "Yes. Let's."

They went to her favorite department store.

"Which department do you enjoy shopping in most?"

"The jewelry department."

"Great. Let's start there."

"Surely you're not going to buy jewelry for another man's wife, Braden."

"You consider that a no-no?"

"Yes."

"Then what's your next favorite department?"

"Shoes."

"Shoe department here we come."

As they wandered along the designer shoes, Autumn saw a pair of shoes that would go nicely with the tiny expensive bag Seneka had bought her.

Braden paused by her side. "Do you like these?"

She nodded. "They match this tiny bag Seneka bought me."

"Why didn't he buy these too?"

"We didn't come over here."

"So buy them now."

"I'm a teacher, Braden. I can't afford to spend four hundred dollars on a pair of shoes I can only wear once or twice a year if I'm lucky."

"Let's get them for Layton's wife."

"That's a lot of money to spend on a friend's wife."

"Layton's a very good friend and I can afford it." He smiled at her. "While we're here, let's buy you a present too."

"And how much are you going to spend on me?"

He shrugged. "A couple thousand."

"No, seriously."

"Not enough? How about five or six then?"

"Thousand?"

"Yes."

She blinked. "You're serious."

"Of course I'm serious. Do you want to go to the jewelry department to pick out something?"

"Just how much money do you have?"

"Enough to buy you anything you want within reason."

"But why would you?"

He grinned at her. "Like most men, I enjoy spending money on a pretty woman."

"You think I'm pretty?"

"Of course I do. So shall we go spend some money?"

She hesitated, uncertain how Seneka would react.

He arched a brow. "Problem?"

"No."

"Good. Then let's go pay for these."

He paid for the shoes before he led her to the jewelry department. "Pick out something you like but would never buy for yourself."

"Braden, I'm not —"

He raised a hand. "My brothers and I frequently buy each other's significant others presents. Do you have any idea how much the bottle of champagne Shay gave you cost?"

"I know it's extremely expensive."

"And yet you accepted it. I'm not taking no for an answer."

She capitulated, picking out a diamond choker that matched the bracelet Seneka had brought her.

Seneka called on the drive back to the complex.

"Ray has gotten the talks back on track. We're ordering in and talking through dinner."

"Oh." She bit her lip. She should be happy for him not selfishly disappointed because she wanted to see him. "Congrats."

"When I finish here, you and I are going to spend what's left of the night together."

"I'm looking forward to that, Neka."

The following pause provided a perfect opportunity for a heartfelt *I love you*. Instead he said, "I'll see you later, honey."

Oh well. Maybe he wasn't the romantic type. "I'll be waiting." She ended the call and glanced at Braden seated in the driver's seat. "That was Seneka. They're going to work through dinner."

"Great. I get to keep you to myself for a little while longer."

"You really know how to make a woman feel good." She briefly placed a hand on his thigh.

"Careful where you touch me, honey. You don't want to arouse me and get our jealous Neka so angry he kicks me out of his place. If that happens I'll have to bunk with you."

"But you're too tall to sleep on my sofa and I only have one bed," she teased.

"Then I guess we'd have to share that. Imagine how well that would go over with Neka."

She laughed.

After a moment he joined in.

"So where would you like to go for dinner, honey?"

"Are we having dinner together?"

"Absolutely. I feel like dancing. Let's go some place where we can dance."

"I know Seneka can dance, but can you?"

"Hey. I'm Native American. We've been dancing since the dawn of time. Of course I can dance."

"Then I would be delighted to have dinner with you."

As soon as they stepped off the elevator, Autumn smiled. Two dozen roses sat outside her door. "Oh, Braden, look." She glanced up at him. "They're not from you. Are they?"

He shook his head and picked them up.

She followed him inside. As he placed them and the two bags he carried on the foyer table, she plucked the card from them.

*To the most beautiful woman in the world.*

*With all my love, Seneka.*

She turned to smile at Braden. "They're from Seneka."

"Of course they are. I'll be back down in an hour to pick you up for dinner," he told her.

"Braden?"

He turned back. "Yes?"

"You're forgetting the shoes you bought for Layton's wife," she reminded him.

"Now why would I buy another man's wife shoes?" He caressed her cheek. "They're for you."

"For me?"

He nodded. "For you."

"But I can't let you buy them and the choker."

"They're already bought, honey. I'll see you in an hour."

"Braden! I can't accept them."

"What do you expect me to do with them if you don't? They're not my style or size."

"Braden—"

"We'll be family soon, honey and I make a lot of money. Please accept them in the spirit in which they were given."

"I...thanks."

He smiled. "My pleasure."

## Chapter Twelve

After Braden left, Autumn took a twenty minute soak in her favorite bath oil before she dressed in a black silk chiffon cocktail dress with a matching three-quarter jacket. She slipped on her new heels and placed the tiny matching bag on the bed.

She was brushing out her hair when Braden arrived.

"Damn, you look beautiful."

She smiled. "Thank you. You look pretty good yourself." She glanced past him into the corridor.

He closed the door. "Who are you looking for?"

"Shane."

He leaned against the door. "He wasn't invited. Besides, he's having dinner with one of the Grayhawks and then being heading to the girls' night out thingy."

"Oh. Right."

"So, it's just you and me."

She narrowed her gaze. "Should that concern me? Do you bite?"

He nodded. "Oh, I definitely bite."

"Do you plan to bite me?"

"I doubt Neka would approve of that." He extended his arm. "Shall we go?"

She nodded.

He took her to one of Philadelphia's premier restaurants where they served tiny portions for outrageous prices. "How did you manage to get reservations here on such short notice, Braden?"

“It pays to have friends who have money. It’s one of the standing reservations of one of the Grayhawk brothers you haven’t met yet. Since he and his wife weren’t using it, he was happy to allow us to.”

She glanced around. Most of the diners seemed to be couples who either held hands across the tables or gazed into each other’s eyes. “Why haven’t you ever been married, Braden?”

He answered after a slight pause. “I never met anyone I wanted to marry who also wanted to marry me.”

She found that difficult to believe. “Never?”

He shrugged. “I think you would have fit the bill if Neka hadn’t met you first.”

She stared at him.

He smiled.

She exhaled and sipped her drink. “For a moment I almost thought you were serious.”

He arched a brow.

“Is there a special woman in your life, Braden?”

“No.”

She paused before asking her next question. “But there are women in your life. Aren’t there?”

“I’m a normal male with a healthy sex drive. There are a lot of women who share my bed, which is what you’re really asking. Isn’t it?”

She blushed and shook her head. “Why would I care how many women share your bed?”

He stared into her eyes. “I don’t know, Autumn. Why would you care how many women I’ve slept with or am sleeping with?”

"I wouldn't!"

"No?"

"No!"

"Then I won't have to tax my memory trying to recall them all."

"There's been that many?"

He shrugged. "I like women and they generally like me."

"You don't have to sleep with every woman you like!"

He smiled. "For someone who has no interest in my love life you have a lot of questions."

She sucked in a breath. "That wasn't a question."

"You have me there."

"And did you say love life?"

"Okay. Sex life."

"So you're not in love with anyone?"

"Not so you'd notice."

He was apparently incapable of answering a simple question. She sipped her drink. "Do you have any pictures in your wallet?"

"Of women unrelated to me?"

"Yes. Do you?"

"Why do you ask, Autumn?"

"Because I want to know."

"There's one."

She moistened her lips. "Who is she?"

"A friend."

"Just a friend, Braden or —"

"Now honey, how is that any of your concern?"

"Is she blonde?"

"No, Autumn, she's not."

"May I see her?"

"Why?"

She shrugged. "I'm curious to see what type of women you like."

"Why?"

"I don't know why. I just want to see her."

He removed his wallet from his inside jacket pocket, opened it, and passed it across the table to her.

She gazed down at a headshot of a pretty woman with smooth dark skin and a full face. She passed the wallet back to him. "What's her name?"

"Kania."

"She's pretty."

"Yes, she is."

"Do you and she...?"

"I really can't see why that would interest you, Autumn."

Her cheeks burned. "I was just...it doesn't."

"Good." He glanced at her plate. "Would you like anything else?"

"No. Thanks."

"Then let's get out of here and go dancing."

"You're assuming I'm still interested in dancing with you."

He smiled. "You mean now that I've refused to discuss my relationship with Kania with you?"

"You're making me sound petty," she protested.

"I'm making you sound petty?"

She bit her lip and then laughed. "Okay. It was petty."

"Let's go dancing."

"Okay, but if you can't really dance—"

"What? You'll spank me?"

She laughed again. "Don't you wish?"

He shrugged. "Undoubtedly."

She stared at him.

He stared back. "Are you ready to go dancing?"

"I don't know when you're joking and when you're serious, Braden."

"That keeps things interesting. Don't you think?"

"I'm not sure how interesting things should be between us."

"Good point. Let's go."

He took her to the same jazz club where she and Seneka had dinner.

She was surprised and a little nonplused that he wanted to slow dance with her. But he didn't hold her particularly close and kept his hands well above her waist. Their lower bodies never met and there were no accidental touches. After the first dance, she relaxed.

"That's right," he whispered softly. "You don't ever need to be afraid of me, honey. I know you belong to Neka."

Was that regret in his voice or had the two glasses of wine she'd consumed gone to her head? "I do belong to him."

"Yes. I know."

After thirty minutes, she decided slow dancing with him was probably not a good idea. "Braden?"

"Yes, honey?"

"It's getting late."

“And you’re anxious to go home to see Neka?”

“Yes,” she admitted.

He released her. “Then let’s go.”

On the drive back to the complex, she cast an uneasy glance at him. His hands rested on the steering wheel without apparent tension. He seemed relaxed. Braden had no personal interest in her.

Soft jazz greeted them when she opened her unit door just after eleven p.m. He stepped in front of her. “Let me just make sure that’s Neka.”

She thought he was being overly protective but liked that he wanted to shield her. He was gone for several minutes when she heard raised voices. When he returned to the foyer, his gaze was narrowed and he looked annoyed.

“Braden?”

“Neka’s in the living room.”

“Is everything okay?”

“Actually, it’s not.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing you need worry about. I’d better go.”

“I thought you would stay for a nightcap.”

“That wouldn’t go over very well with Neka.”

She bit back the urge to insist she wanted him to stay anyway.

He bent his head.

Even as she told herself to turn her head to avoid his mouth, her lips parted.

He pressed a warm, lingering kiss on her cheek.

The scent of his cologne filled her nostrils. She placed a hand on his arm and rubbed her cheek against his.

He inhaled sharply seconds before allowing his lips to slide across her cheek. He kissed her on the corner of her mouth.

An involuntary tingle shot down her back at the contact. She turned her head slightly. Their lips met.

Her heart racing, she leaned closer. Then she felt the tip of his tongue brushing against hers.

A surge of heat rushed through her. She gasped and jerked away from him. "I felt your tongue," she hissed at him.

"Did you?"

"Yes!"

"I could say the same thing about your tongue."

"No you couldn't!"

He shrugged. "We don't have time to argue. It's not a good idea to keep Neka waiting any longer or he'll begin to imagine things."

"Like what, Braden? That you're putting your tongue where it doesn't belong?"

His jaw clenched. "I hope you won't feel the need to tell him that."

"Why shouldn't I?"

"Knowing that would tend to make him think he can't trust me with you."

"But he can. Can't he?"

He sighed. "Yes."

"Why would he think he couldn't trust you?"

"Because you're a very pretty, sensual woman I find totally enchanting."

She blinked up at him. "Enchanting? You mean like..."

"Never mind what I mean. Neka met you first." He brushed the back of his hand along her cheek. "Goodbye, honey."

She caught his hand as he walked by her. "Braden?"

He disengaged his hand before he turned to look at her. "Yes?"

"Goodbye? Not good night?"

"It's time I took my sorry ass back to L.A."

*Don't go.* "When are you leaving?"

"As soon as I can get a flight out."

"I don't know what to say."

"Goodbye will do nicely."

She didn't want to say goodbye to him. "I...when will I see you again?"

"I don't think it would be a good idea for us to see each other again until you and Neka are officially engaged."

She stared at him. "But I thought you'd be around for us to get to know each other better."

"Neka finds my interest in you a cause for concern."

Her cheeks burned. "But he can't think —"

"He does — and rightly so."

"Rightly so? You mean you really..."

"Yes. I do."

"Braden —"

"Just leave it, Autumn."

"You're delusional if you think I have any personal...physical interest in you."

He didn't bother to respond. He just walked out, closing the door behind him.

She stood in the foyer with a hand pressed against her breasts. It wasn't her imagination. He was interested in her. Satisfaction followed a brief moment of dismay.

Sam hadn't wanted her but she now had two handsome wealthy men in her life who did. Smiling, she walked into the living room

Seneka, pacing the floor stopped and gave her a weary look. "Is Bray...?"

"He left. What happened between you two in here?"

"What makes you think anything happened?"

"I couldn't hear what you were saying, but I heard raised voices."

"What we said is between us."

"You don't have any reason to be concerned, Seneka."

"Don't I?"

"No."

He shook his head. "Be honest, Autumn. We both know that's not true."

Oh, hell. She crossed the room and pressed her cheek against his shoulder. "I don't have any physical interest in him."

He engulfed her in his arms. "Don't encourage him, Autumn."

She pulled away. "What do you mean?"

"I don't think you should see him alone again."

"See him alone again? You make it sound as if we're dating."

"The two of you going out alone isn't a good idea until you both get the other out of your systems."

"Which one of us do you distrust?"

"I trust you both."

“He was a perfect gentleman and nothing happened that you need to be concerned about.” Recalling the feel of his tongue brushing against hers, her cheeks burned. One kiss couldn’t mitigate his otherwise blameless behavior.

He nodded. “He’s my brother. I know nothing of any real consequence happened, but I also know he has a high level of interest in you. And that does concern me.”

Although Braden had all but admitted as much, she felt a strange reluctance to agree with anything that might cast him in a bad light in Seneka’s eyes. “He was being kind—”

“Autumn, he’s not fond of Philly. He came back for one reason—to see you.”

She thought of the expensive presents he’d bought her and bit her lip. Should she tell Seneka about them or should she hide them? Return them? Well, she couldn’t return the shoes she wore. “While we were out, he bought me two presents.”

He sighed. “I noticed the shoes and he told me about the necklace. I don’t understand why you accepted those gifts, Autumn. If you wanted a necklace and shoes, I would have been happy to buy them for you. I’m nowhere near as wealthy as he is, but I’m a long way from having to pinch pennies. I can buy you what you want.”

“You’re overacting, Seneka.”

He inhaled sharply. “Am I?”

“What do you want me to do? Should I give them back or—”

“Of course not.” He shook his head and put an arm around her shoulders. “Don’t get the wrong idea, Autumn. He would never try to seduce you, but why tempt fate—unless you’re ready to stop playing games and do something about it?”

"Do something about what?" She frowned. "I hope you don't think I did anything to...encourage any interest he might have, Seneka."

"You mean other than dressing up for him while you wear sweats for me?"

"Seneka—"

"Let's clear the air between us, Autumn. We both know you share his interest."

She shook her head. "I...don't."

He caressed her cheek. "It's all right. You can admit it. We look enough alike for it to be understandable that you'd find him attractive."

"I don't—"

He pressed his fingers against her lips. "You're going to marry me, Autumn, hopefully sooner rather than later. I want you to get him out of your system before we're married."

"I don't have him in my system."

"The hell you don't. So let's do something about it and move pass this."

"I don't know what you're...suggesting, Seneka."

"I'm suggesting that you both get a little hot and heavy. I'm prepared to view anything short of intercourse as early bachelorette party behavior. If you want to allow him to eat you...or if you want to...jack him off or...suck him off...that's between the two of you. Just don't allow him inside you. That I'd find unforgivable."

She stared at him. "I...I don't want to have sex with him, Seneka!"

"Then don't, but we both know you find him attractive. Do what you need to do to get past your attraction to him, Autumn."

"Seneka—"

"Now, I've had a long, stressful day and I'm tired."

"Is it because of Braden—"

"I don't want to talk about him."

"Are you angry with him? Because if you are you should know that he's told me on more than one occasion that you're the cream of the crop of the Elkhorn men."

"I've already said all I want to about him tonight. Go see him before he returns to L.A. and get him out of your system, Autumn. Since we're neither married nor engaged, what happens between the two of you is your business. Get him out of your system now because I'm not going to share your attention or love with him after we're married."

"You're not sharing it with him now! I'm not in love with him!"

"Just in lust with him?"

She blushed and glanced at her feet.

He tipped up her chin. "I'm going to have to put in a lot of overtime," he warned. "Early mornings and late nights. We might not be doing much together beyond sleeping in the same bed at night. Use that time to get over Bray. Now I want to hold you so let's go to bed."

Ten minutes after they undressed and cuddled together, he was asleep.

She lay thinking about Seneka's insistence she get Braden out of her system for over an hour before she eased out of bed, pulled on a robe, and went into the living room to call Spring.

Jack answered. "Is something wrong, Autumn?"

"No. I know it's very late, Jack, but I really need to talk to Spring. Is she awake?"

"I'll wake her, but there's no emergency I need to warn her about?"

"Not a physical one."

"Girl talk?"

"Yes."

"Hold on."

"Autumn! What's wrong?" Spring's sleep-slurred voice sounded in her ear.

She told Spring about her day spent with Braden and the ensuing conversation with Seneka.

"You have the hots for both of them and the feeling is mutual? Damn, you go girl!"

"I'm in love with Seneka. I do not have the hots for Braden!"

"You can say that after admitting the two of you French kissed knowing Seneka was there and could walk into the foyer and catch you swapping spit?"

Autumn closed her eyes briefly. "It wasn't like that, Spring."

"Neither of you could help yourself? I think Seneka has the right idea. Get Braden out of your system. What's he packing? Anything you'd want to wrap your lips around and suck dry?"

Autumn blushed. "How should I know? We've never...my lower body has never been in contact with his."

"Haven't you ever eye balled him down there?"

"No!"

"Well, you'll soon have the opportunity to find out and with Seneka's blessing. What could be more perfect?"

"You can't be serious, Spring!"

"The hell I can't be! You'd be a fool not to enjoy the benefits of his enlightened attitude."

"That makes me sound like a —"

"A normal, modern woman. Get real, Autumn. What woman wouldn't be excited at the idea of two handsome, rich brothers who both think she's the cat's meow? Especially when said brothers are eager to spend thousands of dollars on one shopping trip?"

"It's not the money, Spring."

"You don't think I know that?"

"I liked Braden before."

"Enough to share a few heated kisses and caresses with him?"

"No! I'm not interested in sleeping with anyone but Seneka."

"I didn't say sleeping. I said a few heated kisses and caresses. Just enough for both of you to get out of each other's systems."

"He's not in my system."

"Then why this early morning call which has centered exclusively around him instead of Seneka?"

"I don't want to..."

"Oh, come on, Autumn. You can admit it to me. You'd like to engage him in another lip lock. And that's ok. There's nothing wrong with admitting that you have lust in your heart when you think of him. Don't let false modesty keep you from taking this opportunity. If you pass it up, you'll always wonder if you made the right choice."

"Sleep on it and then go give big brother a taste of brown sugar."

After she and Spring said good night, Autumn went back to bed.

Seneka turned onto his side and reached out to draw her into his arms.

She pressed her face against his neck. "I love you," she whispered.

He murmured something that sounded like wyanet.

She smiled. "That's me all right. Your wyanet. The owner of the keys to your unit and your heart."

She drifted to sleep only to wake later in her dark bedroom to find Seneka lying on top of her with his fully erect cock pressed against her thigh and lips locked on her left breast.

She slipped her fingers in his hair. "Love me," she invited, parting her legs.

He trailed a path up from her breasts to nibble at her ear. "I need a fuck," he whispered.

She smiled, stroking her hands down his back to his ass. "Then fuck me."

"You're not ready."

"I'm always ready to have you inside me, Neka," she countered.

He slipped a hand between their bodies to probe her pussy. "You are wet."

"Why so surprised? You got me wet and ready by molesting me while I slept," she teased.

"I'm sorry. I just need you."

“Don’t ever apologize for needing or wanting me, Neka. Take what’s yours, sweetheart.”

She sighed in pleasure when his naked cock began the delicious, sensuous slide into her pussy. This feeling of joy and wonder she felt when he entered her would never grow old.

She linked her legs around him. “Now fuck me like you mean it,” she whispered, tightening her vaginal muscles around his hard, thick length. “Like this is the only pussy worth sinking your big, sweet cock in.”

“Oh, shit. It is,” he groaned, pulled all but the helmeted head of his shaft out of her and thrust it nuts deep back into her.

She shuddered. “Oh, God, Neka. You fill me up as no other man ever has. Let me ride you.”

He kissed her as he rolled them over.

She parted her lips, sucking on his tongue.

He cupped his palms over her ass. “Fuck me.”

She sat up, resting her hands on his big chest.

“Oh, damn, Autumn. You are so beautiful.”

Pleased, she smiled. “How can you tell in the dark?”

“Your beauty, both inner and outer is strong enough to shine through even the darkest night.”

“Right answer, sweetheart.” She lifted her hips and then slowly pushed them down, driving his big cock back up into her pussy. She experienced a jolt of pleasure. “Hmm.” She pinched her nipples. “Oh, God, that feels so good...so pussy-pleasing good.”

He slapped her ass. “Ride me and make me come as only you can.”

As she happily obeyed, he paddled her ass until each cheek burned and she shuddered to a quick climax. She tumbled onto his body, moaning.

He cupped his hands over her ass and thrust deep inside her until he groaned, and exploded in her.

She rubbed her cheek against his shoulder. "Hmmm. That gets better every time we do it."

He cradled her close. "Yes, it does because we're perfect together."

"Perfect," she echoed.

When she woke in the morning, she found a note on her pillow.

*Morning honey*

*After a quick workout I'm going to the office early. I'll call you sometime during the day. I left breakfast on a warming tray in the kitchen. I'll see you late tonight. Neka.*

She sighed. It was going to be a long day without him.

### III

Braden, Raven, and Shane were all in the gym the next morning when Seneka went for his morning workout.

"We need to talk, Neka," Braden said, jogging beside him.

"What about?"

"I owe you an apology for my behavior with Autumn."

He kept running. "She told me nothing happened I needed to be concerned about."

"I kissed her."

"You kissed her or you kissed each other?"

"I kissed her."

"So you're not willing to admit she kissed you too?"

"No."

"I wouldn't worry about it, Bray. I don't think it even registered with her."

Braden laughed. "Damn. You're busting my balls."

"I'm sorry I was such an ass last night, Bray."

"You weren't an ass. You had every right to be angry. I had no business slow dancing with her or kissing her."

"I don't think she minded."

"The hell she didn't. She didn't mind the dancing because I kept it PG but she didn't take too kindly to the kiss."

"She didn't mention it and she went out of her way to tell me you'd been a perfect gentleman. After her experience with her ex, I think she likes the idea of both of us wanting her."

"And you're okay with that?"

"I'm okay with anything she welcomes short of actual vaginal or anal penetration with your cock."

"The hell you are."

He turned to look at Braden. "I'm serious."

After a moment of shocked silence Braden grimaced. "Now you tell me."

He laughed. "I'm serious, Bray. I think it would be good for her self-esteem and it might even help her to make up her mind to marry me."

"That's not what you said last night. You weren't taking any prisoners then."

"You kept her out after eleven o'clock. I'd been waiting at her place since 8:30."

"Why didn't you call? I would have brought her home."

"I knew she was with you."

"All the more reason to call instead of stewing at her place."

"Last night I was tired, frustrated, and upset. Today I'm okay with the two of you getting your mutual attraction out of your systems as long as you keep your cock out of her."

"You don't need to worry about my cock being any near her pussy, Neka. There's not a woman alive I'd betray you for. Besides, I'm flying home Thursday night."

"You don't have to leave, Bray."

"Yes. I do. If you want her to marry you, just tell her you love her."

"I already have."

"She wants to hear the actual words, Neka. Just say *I love you*."

He wasn't ready to say the actual words. "I need a little more time."

"Don't wait too long, Neka. You don't want to risk losing her to a man who's not afraid to tell her he loves her in the way she wants to hear."

He glanced at Braden. "Are you talking about yourself, Bray?"

Braden turned his head to meet his gaze. "If you're wondering if I'm in love with her, I'm not."

"You're sure?"

"You're the sensitive one. I'm one of the horny ones. I'll admit I wouldn't mind fucking her, but I promise you I won't. And I'm not in love with her."

"That's a relief."

"I won't do anything else to interfere with your relationship, Neka."

"You haven't done anything to interfere with our relationship, Bray. If anything, I think having her interested in you adds a little spice to the equation."

Braden stared at him. "Who knew you had that in you, Neka?"

Seneka shrugged. "I'm never going to want or need experience with as many women as the rest of you have had, but I am an Elkhorn male, Bray. As long as you keep your cock out of her, I can handle a little...dalliance. I know she shares your attraction. Just don't go too far and I won't have to kick your ass."

"I have no intentions of going anywhere near her, Neka."

"This is your one chance. If you don't take it now, it's gone. Once we're married, I will kick your ass if you even look at her with anything resembling sexual interest."

Braden shook his head and jogged away from him.

Raven jogged up. "Is everything okay between you and Bray?"

"Yes."

"He won't betray you with her, Neka."

"I know that, Ray. I admit I was fucked off last night, but I see things differently this morning."

"How differently?"

He told Ray of his suggestion to both Braden and Autumn.

To his surprise, Raven, who had openly engaged in threesomes with both Braden and Shane, frowned. "You think that's wise, Neka?"

"You never seemed to have a problem with a woman of yours doing even more with Bray or Shay."

"I wasn't in love with any of the women involved and neither were they."

"They have a thing for each other. I want them to get it out of their systems so I know it's over before I marry her. I'm prepared to overlook anything short of actual penetration."

"What if things get out of hand between them?"

"Did any of your women ever want to end things with you for either Bray or Shay?"

"No," he admitted.

"Then why should Autumn be any different? If I thought there was a chance in hell of that happening, I wouldn't have made the suggestion. I trust them both to stay within the boundaries I can accept."

"What about Shay and me? Do we get to know her up close and personal too?"

"Hell no!"

Raven looked relieved. "I'm glad to hear it, Neka."

"Why?"

Raven shrugged. "We like the idea that you're different, Neka."

"I've never felt the need or the desire to bed any of your women. I'm happy being a one-woman man as long as I have a one-man woman."



## Chapter Thirteen

On Wednesday night, while the other Elkhorns had dinner at Layton Grayhawk's home, Seneka arrived home just after eight p.m. and surprised Autumn by taking her out for a romantic dinner followed by dancing.

They slow danced for an hour before they took the long way home. Seated next to him with soft jazz filling the interior of the car, Autumn felt content and happy to have a few hours with him when she knew she commanded his entire attention.

Once they returned to her place, she stripped while he sat naked on the sofa watching, his beautiful dark eyes filled with desire. "Damn, you get more beautiful every day," he said.

She smiled. "You've been putting in very long hours. Are you sure you can muster up enough energy to get the job done?"

"Bring your big, brown ass over here and I'll show you how much energy I can muster."

"Hmm."

"Bring your ass here and let me spank it before I fuck it."

She bit her lip. "I don't know if I want...if I'm ready for anal sex with you," she teased.

"Well, you have about five seconds to get ready. That's about how long it will take you to get over here. Don't make me come and get you."

She sucked in a breath. "Fuck you!" She turned and ran from the room, confident he would follow.

He chased her to the bedroom where he briefly swept her off her feet before tossing her onto the bed.

“Hey!” She complained.

He climbed on the bed and they engaged in a sensual wrestling match that ended just as she wanted it to with her spread eagle on her belly.

“Lift your hips,” he ordered.

When she obeyed, he slipped a pillow under them.

She bit her lip, eager to feel his cock in her long neglected ass.

“Neka—”

He knelt between her legs, his big, warm hands massaging her ass. “Damn, honey you have the most beautiful booty I’ve ever seen.”

She smiled. “What are you going to do about it?”

“Just this.” He gave each cheek a quick slap.

She reached back to close her fingers around his cock. She pumped him.

He slapped her ass harder.

“Ouch!”

He leaned over to bite her ear. “You think that stings? Wait until you feel my cock sliding up this big, brown beautiful ass.”

Aroused by the thought, she ground her pussy against the pillow. “There are condoms and a tube of lube in the top drawer of the night stand,” she whispered.

He sat up, sliding off her.

She turned to watch him remove the condom and lube from the nightstand.

He placed the lube on the bed and gave her the condom.

Rising to her knees, she took it, placed it on the bed, and bent her head.

He cupped his hands over the back of her head as she kissed the tip of his shaft. "Oh, yeah," he encouraged.

She licked the underside of his length from top to bottom, nipping his balls with her teeth. Taking several moments to savor the taste and texture of his flesh, she licked a wet path back up his cock while gently massaging his balls.

He inched his hips forward, pressing his cock against her mouth.

Taking the hint, she slowly twirled her tongue around the big head.

"Oh, yeah."

Wrapping a hand around the base of him, she drew him into her mouth, compressing her cheeks.

His fingers tightened on her head. "Oh...shit!"

She sucked him with a greedy delight, loving the taste and feel of his thick length sliding in and out of her mouth.

When he thrust forward, sending his cock gliding over her tongue, she gripped his hips, sucking harder.

He shuddered and abruptly pulled his cock out of her mouth. "Enough," he said in a hoarse voice. He bent to kiss her. "Assume the position."

She sat back on her haunches. "I want you to come in my mouth."

He caressed her cheek. "Another time. Right now, I want your ass."

She nodded and quickly tore open the condom and rolled it over his shaft.

He picked up the tube of lube.

Moistening her lips, she knelt on her hands and knees.

He shifted on the bed, moving behind her. He kissed each cheek several times. "Part these beautiful mounds for me, honey."

Lowering her breasts onto the bed, she pushed her hips in the air. Then she reached back to pull her cheeks apart. His finger, coated with a creamy substance, slipped into her anus.

She bit her lip.

"All right?"

"Yes."

He added another digit. "And now?" He asked after giving her a few moments.

"It's been so long." She glanced over her shoulder at him. "That feels so good."

Bending over to kiss her back and shoulders, he gently pumped in her. When he stopped, she pushed her hips backwards. He held his hand still, allowing her to control the speed and depth of his fingers inside her.

"How does it feel?"

She glanced over her shoulder. "I'm ready for the real McCoy."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

He eased his fingers out of her. "Show me."

She reached back to palm her ass.

He bent to kiss and nibble at her anus before moving close enough to press his cock against her.

She sucked in a breath, tensing.

"Relax. I'll be gentle."

"Give it to me."

He rubbed the edge of his hard length along her crack.

"I want it," she told him.

He urged his hips forward, applying steady pressure until the big head of his shaft penetrated her anus.

"Oh..."

"Is that a good oh?"

"Yes. I think...yes. It is. Give me more."

Holding her hips, he drove another few inches into her.

"Oooh..." She bit her lip. It had been so long since she'd had anal sex. His shaft felt a little painful, but she knew the pleasure would soon outweigh the discomfort.

"Are you still all right?"

"Yes. Give it to me, Neka."

Holding her hips, he slid slowly in and out of her, never allowing more than a few inches to penetrate her body until she tossed her head back, impaling herself on nearly half of his length.

While he fucked her, he poured more lube on to his shaft before sliding back into her.

As it started to feel better, she reached back to clutch his thighs. "Fuck me," she encouraged. "Do it until you make me come. Harder."

"If I thrust harder I'll hurt you."

"It won't. I don't know how often you're putting your hot sausage in my ass so you'd better enjoy it while you have the chance."

"Okay, but remember I warned you." He paused and leaned over to kiss her back. "It might hurt, but I'll make sure you come," he promised.

While maintaining an even, slow motion, he reached around to fondle and stroke her pussy and clit.

The build up to her release was slow. Each thrust filled her anal cavity with more cock. The deeper he slid in, the more she enjoyed it. She tightened her ass muscles around him, smiling as she felt his tension increase.

He abruptly gripped her hips, drove her down to her belly, laid his weight on her, and slammed into her.

She gasped, grabbing the sheets. "Oh...God...yes!"

He pushed her hands up over her head and laced his fingers through hers. Then he continued to drive his entire shaft into her stuffed ass.

A few minutes of deep, relentless strokes triggered a powerful orgasm in her.

In response to the tightening of her pussy around his cock, he buried his face against her neck and came. Shuddering, he collapsed on top of her.

Autumn sighed. "You're too heavy, Neka."

"I'm sorry." He kissed her neck and lifted his weight onto his extended arms. He slowly, tenderly withdrew from her. "Did I hurt you?"

"A little," she admitted. "But the pleasure far outweighed any pain."

He rolled onto his back and drew her into his arms.

She settled against him, rubbing her cheek against his shoulder to drift into a contented sleep.

In the morning she woke to another note on his pillow. She sighed. How long before the merger talks proceeded well enough for

him to stop putting in such long hours? It would be so nice to see him during the day and wake up with him still in bed with her.

She read his note.

*Morning honey*

*As you know Bray is going home tonight. This will be your last opportunity to get him out of your system. Go see him and get him out of your system today. I won't interfere by calling you. I'll see you later tonight. Yours only and always, Neka.*

She hugged the note against her breasts. Hers only and always. *Oh, Neka. What should I do?* Should she wait to see if Braden called her? Or should she take Seneka's advice and go see him?

### III

Later that morning, after reading Seneka's note several times, Autumn found herself standing outside the door of his condo.

She stood in the corridor for several minutes before she took a deep breath and opened the entrance door. She heard music coming from the living room. *Why are you doing this? If he'd had anything to say to you, he would have called you.* She turned and reached for the door handle. *If you leave now, you'll probably come to regret it. Seneka doesn't have a problem with a few kisses and a little touching. Get him out of your system now.* She took another deep breath and walked down the hall towards the living room.

She paused in the doorway.

A shirtless Braden sat on the loveseat with his bare feet on the coffee table and a notebook computer open on his lap.

Autumn bit her lip. Damn he had a very well built upper body with wide shoulders, rippled abs, and just enough hair on his big chest to make rubbing a cheek against it even more exciting.

"You're back early, Chief," he said without looking up from his computer.

"Hi, Braden."

His head jerked up. "Autumn!" He stared at her a moment, noted her gaze locked on his bare chest, and quickly rose.

His jeans hung on his lean hips and molded to his long legs. He was nearly as sexy as Seneka.

"Excuse me for a moment." He put the computer on the coffee table and quickly left the room.

Autumn stood still, her heart pounding against her ribs. He hadn't looked that happy to see her.

He returned to the living room wearing a pair of shoes and a dark pullover with the jeans. He walked back to the loveseat but didn't sit. "Neka's at the office."

She nodded. "I know."

"Then why are you here?"

"He told me you were leaving tonight."

"And?"

"And I wanted to say goodbye."

"We did that Monday night."

This was not going well. "Aren't you going to ask me to sit down?"

"No. There's no reason for you to sit down. Neka's not here."

"I came to see you, Braden."

He shook his head. "Neka's my brother."

"I know that."

"I don't want to hurt him."

"Neither do I. I love him."

"You love him? Then what the *fuck* are you doing here, Autumn?"

The censure in his voice stung her. She swallowed hard. "I thought you'd be happy to see me."

"You thought wrong."

She sucked in a breath and swung around as her eyes welled up with tears. She ran from the room. In the foyer, she jerked the front door open.

He reached past her to push the door shut.

She leaned her forehead against the panel, closing her eyes. Her shoulders shook.

"No...no, honey. Don't cry." He turned her around to face him.

Although she opened her eyes, she kept her gaze downward, willing herself not to cry. "You've humiliated me enough. Let me go, Braden."

He brushed the back of his hand against her face.

Several tears rolled down her cheeks.

"I'm sorry." Placing one hand on the door, he bent his head to kiss her cheek.

She pushed against his shoulder. "Don't touch me, Braden!"

"Don't touch you?"

"Don't touch me!"

He laughed and then slapped his palm on the door beside her. "What the hell do you mean don't touch you? If Neka weren't my

brother and if you weren't who you are, you wouldn't find it so easy to tell me not to touch you after *you* came looking for me with seduction on your mind."

She sucked in a breath and hit a fist against his shoulder. "I hate you!"

"I doubt that. Thankfully for you, Neka is my brother and you are who you are." He raised her fist to his lips. "I would never knowingly do anything to hurt you, honey. So please don't cry and don't ever fear me." He released her hand, stepping back from the door.

She stared at him with tears still streaming down her cheeks. "I do love him."

He nodded. "I'm sure you do." He extended his arm.

Autumn bit her lip and then shook her head. She wasn't going to give him another chance to humiliate her.

"I'm not going to hurt you."

Why did she believe him when he had already hurt her? She stumbled forward.

He put his arm around her shoulders.

She didn't protest when he led her back into the living room.

He sat on the loveseat and patted the cushion beside him.

"Do you have seduction in mind, Braden?"

"No."

"No?"

He laughed. "Okay, I do, but I don't plan to act on it."

She sank down beside him.

He placed his arm back around her shoulders. "Neka trusts us. We have to show him we're worthy of his trust."

She closed her eyes, laying her head on his shoulder. "I never planned anything beyond a few kisses," she admitted.

"Then far be it from me to disappoint you." He stroked his hand over her hair before turning her face toward his. He brushed his lips over hers with a gentle tenderness for several moments before he lifted his head.

She sighed and pressed her cheek against his shoulder. "Neka is a much better kisser," she told him.

He laughed and slapped the side of her thigh. "I'm very glad to hear it."

"But I'm going to miss you."

"I'll miss you too, honey." He lifted her chin and pressed a warmer, longer kiss against her mouth.

She parted her lips.

He swept his tongue into her mouth.

She touched his hair, returning his kiss.

Although they shared a number of sweet and heated kisses, neither allowed their hands to wander below the other's shoulders. When she felt the warmth from his mouth start to send tingles down her spine, she gasped and pulled away from him.

"Enough?"

Hearing the husky quality in his voice, she nodded. "Yes."

"You're probably right." He drew her back against him, slipping his arm around her shoulders.

After a moment of uncertainty, she relaxed against him.

They sat listening to soft jazz without talking or engaging in any more intimacy. She drifted to sleep.

When she awoke, she lay on the sofa. Seneka sat on the edge, stroking her hair.

She smiled up at him. "Hi!"

He leaned down to kiss her. "Hi yourself."

"I'm surprised but happy to see you. Are the talks going okay?"

He nodded. "Yes. Raven and his team are still at it but he insisted I come home to spend a few hours with you." He caressed her cheek. "I thought you were planning to sleep the rest of the night away."

She looked around. "Where's Braden?"

Seneka glanced at his watch. "Probably about to board his plane back to L.A."

She sat up. "Oh, no. I didn't get a chance to say goodbye."

"I'll give you his phone number if you like."

Recalling the warmth of Braden's kisses, she decided to leave well enough alone. She'd had a taste of the forbidden and it had been enough—at least for her. Hopefully it had been for him as well. But just in case it hadn't, there was no point in tempting fate any further. She shook her head. "I'll see him whenever he returns to Philly."

"Are you hungry?"

She linked her arms around his neck, smiling at him. "Yes, but not for food."

He laughed. "That's your pretty pussy talking."

"So? You have something against pretty pussies talking?"

"Not if it belongs to you."

She ran her fingers through his hair. "Aren't you going to ask me what happened between me and Braden?"

"No. I trust you both enough to know you haven't betrayed me. Besides, he called me before Layton drove him to the airport. I just want to know one thing. Is it over for you?"

"It was never really on, Neka. I fell for you the night we met. It was just a momentary fantasy with him. He's handsome and charming, but so are you. I like him. You, I love with a passion and affection so deep I can almost taste it. We didn't do any more than share a few kisses because we both love you."

He cupped her face between her palms. "Autumn...I love you."

She stared at him. "You do?"

"Yes. I do."

Her eyes welled with tears. "I feel as if I've waited a lifetime to hear you say those precious, precious words. Why was it so hard for you to say the actual words?"

He sighed. "I guess I was trying to hold onto some of my past with Kelli. Saying the actual words felt like saying goodbye to her for good."

Looking into the handsome face of the man she loved she decided he was never going to fully say goodbye to Kelli. A part of his heart would always belong to her. Autumn decided she was okay with that.

She pressed a gentle kiss on his mouth. "Where's Shane?"

"I told him we needed some time alone. He and Raven will be staying in one of Randall Grayhawk's guest houses until he leaves for L.A. this weekend."

"One of them?"

“Randall has eight siblings. I believe he has two on his property.”

She treated him to a teasing smile. “Hmm. Rich brothers and rich friends? I just might have to marry you after all.”

“Might? Can I get a definite yes if I get a second job?”

Her smile vanished. “You already have everything you need to win my heart.”

“I want it all...your heart, your body, and for you to take my name.”

“Oh, yeah? Let me see. Autumn Walker Elkhorn. It has a very nice ring to it. I think I’ll take it.”

“You will?”

“Yes.”

“You’ll marry me?”

“Yes, Seneka. I’ll marry you.”

He sucked in a breath and then surprised her by sinking to the floor. He laid his head on her lap. His shoulders shook.

She stroked his hair and his shoulders. “Seneka...?”

Rising to his knees, he wrapped his arms around her while pressing his face against her stomach. “I love you...I love you...I love you.”

The chant sent a wave of delight crashing over her. She kissed his hair. “I love you too.”

He lifted his head.

Seeing the tears glistening in his eyes, hers welled up again.

He rose. “Let’s go to bed.” Taking her hands in his, he urged her to her feet.

They walked hand in hand into his bedroom.

He undressed quickly.

With him lying naked on the bed watching, she slowly stripped for him.

To her surprise, when she joined him in bed, he turned off the bedside lamps, curled his body behind hers, and fell asleep.

She sighed and lay awake for what felt like forever listening to the sound of his breathing.

### III

"It's time to let me go, Neka."

Kneeling at Kelli's bedside, Seneka felt as if his lungs were filled with water. He couldn't breathe. The tears filling his eyes impaired his vision. "I can't...I love you too much. Please don't leave me."

Kelli tore the tube and needles from her body and rose to kneel beside him. "I'm already gone, Neka. It's time to move on with your new love. Know that I will always love and adore you, Neka. The only thing you can do for me now is to be happy with her. Let go, my love. Let go."

"Don't leave me. Please don't leave me."

### III

Autumn jolted awake with a start. She sat up in the darkened bedroom. It took her a moment to realize where she was and what had roused her.

Beside her, Seneka tossed and turned, groaning in his sleep.

“Don’t leave me, Kelli...please...I don’t want to love anyone else...I can’t love anyone else...you’re the one love of my life...without you my life isn’t worth living...

“No...never. I’ll go through the motions...I’ll say the right things, but I will never, ever love another woman. My heart will always belong to you, Kelli...you are now and always will be my one wy Janet. Please don’t leave me, Kelli. Don’t.”

Tears rolled down Autumn’s cheeks as she listened to him.

### III

Seneka was surprised by Autumn’s absence from the bed when he woke just before dawn. He lay listening for a sound from the master bathroom for a minute or so before he got up. “Autumn?”

There was no response. He returned to the bedroom and turned on the bedside lamps. His clothes were still on the floor. Hers weren’t. Where the hell had she gone? He searched his unit and then picked up the cordless phone. He called her land line and then her cell phone. She didn’t answer.

He pulled on a pair of jeans and a sweater, grabbed his keys, and then froze. Her spare set of keys weren’t in his pants pocket. Damn it. What the hell was going on?

He went down to her unit. She didn’t respond to her bell. He left the complex. A surge of relief washed over him in the parking lot. Her car was there. Back inside, he went to Martie’s, but she wasn’t there.

Finally, he found her walking briskly along the track.

She looked away from him.

Damn. He fell into step beside her. "What have I done?"

She shook her head. "I need some time by myself to think."

Oh, hell no. "What's there to think about? We're in love."

She sucked in a breath. "Yes, but who are you in love with Seneka?"

"With you!"

"I don't think you're ever going to be in love with anyone but Kelli."

He touched her arm. "Autumn—"

She jerked away. "I thought I'd come to terms with that until early this morning."

"What happened this morning, Autumn?"

She stopped and swung around to look at him.

The only other two people on the track walked around them.

"I'll go through the motions...I'll say the right things, but I will never, ever love another woman."

He stared at her. Oh, hell. The urge to say he'd never said or meant the words tempted him. But lying to her was out of the question. "I was dreaming Autumn," he said.

"It was more than a dream!" She insisted and stormed across the track and out of the gym.

He followed her. At the elevator bank, he caught her hand.

She tried to jerk away.

He tightened his hand. "I know you're probably hurt and angry, but we have to talk."

"Right now I don't have anything to say to you. So please leave me alone!"

He clenched his jaw, but didn't follow her onto the elevator. He returned to the gym for a vigorous workout. As soon as he walked into his door, he saw the keys he'd given her on the foyer hall table. Oh, damn. The day just kept getting worse.

After a long shower he called her. She didn't respond. Ignoring his inclination to storm down to her place to pound on the door until she opened it, he decided to give her an hour or two alone.

## Chapter Fourteen

Autumn sprawled across her bed, willing herself not to cry. Surrendering to tears might provide a measure of emotional relief, but wouldn't really help.

She had drifted to sleep when her phone rang. Noting the California area code, she glanced at the name. B. Elkhorn.

She answered. "Braden?"

"What the hell is wrong with you, Autumn?" He demanded.

"What do—"

"I just talked to Neka. Where the fuck do you get off getting angry over a dream when you and I shared some steamy kisses? Did he take his keys back and refuse to talk to your silly ass after you tried to seduce me?"

"My silly...it was his idea!" She said defensively. "He kept at me until I went to see you to get him off my back."

"Don't you hand me that shit, Autumn! He insisted I come see you, but I didn't. And if I'd been so inclined, I could have fucked you raw!"

Her cheeks burned. "No, you couldn't! I would never have slept with you!"

"The hell you wouldn't have!"

"I love him!"

"Then act like it, you silly bitch!"

She gasped. "What did you call me?"

"A silly bitch who's too busy thinking with her greedy pussy to realize she has a man she's not good enough for interested in her."

"You bastard! How dare you speak to me like that?"

"How dare you kiss me and then play self-righteous over a dream? Get with the program before he wakes up and realizes you're not the only woman willing to spread her legs for him.

"A man with his looks and wealth can find a lot of willing pussies to fuck until you're just an unpleasant memory."

She gasped. "Are you implying I'm just a willing pussy?"

"Are you? If it's over between you and Neka, I'd be happy to return to Philly for a weekend of mindless fucking."

"I wouldn't let you touch me if you were the last man alive!"

"The hell you wouldn't. And you know what? All I wanted from you was a meaningless fuck. He wants to spend the rest of his life loving and adoring you. Blow it with him over a dream and you might have to settle for someone like me who's only after pussy and who would never marry a woman who came within a breath of fucking his brother."

"Fuck off you crude, over-confident bastard!" She hung up on him with tears streaming down her face.

She had a good cry before she called Spring.

"He's right, you know," Spring said.

"He practically called me a...a cunt and you're agreeing with him?"

"He was probably just trying to shock you."

"He made me feel cheap and I hate him!"

"He was right, Autumn. You have to get over your jealousy or you might lose him. And he was willing to allow you to have sex with his brother."

"I wouldn't have!"

“Honestly, Autumn, I’m not sure about that. If you are, fine. In any case, your Seneka sounds like a winner. Don’t begrudge him his memories. Work on making him love you as you love him. Now get it together. You can’t break up with him before Mom and I have even met him.”

As Autumn soaked in the tub later that day, her bell rang. She sighed and climbed out. Wrapping a large toweling sheet around herself she walked to the entrance door.

She saw Seneka through the peep-hole. She opened the door.

He walked inside. “Braden told me he called and what he said. I’m so sorry. I hope you know he—”

She shook her head. “He was crude and made me feel like a slut who parts her legs for anything wearing pants.”

“That wasn’t his intent.”

“Yes it was!” She inhaled a calming breath. “But after having my sister tell me off as well, it appears I’m the one who should be sorry. She told me I was running the risk of losing you. I’m ready to talk.”

He engulfed her in a bear hug. “I do love you.”

She drew out of his arms. “But you love her too and always will?”

“It was a dream.”

“But you said it and meant it. Didn’t you?”

He closed his eyes briefly. “Yes. I did. When we knew the end was so close...I felt overwhelmed with grief for what I was losing and for what I thought would be a life devoid of love and passion. I said things that I meant at the time because I didn’t know I’d meet and fall in love with you.”

She blinked back tears.

"Kelli knew my reluctance to move on would create problems if I ever fell in love again. She left you a letter."

"She left me...how could she possibly leave me a letter?"

He removed an envelope from his inside jacket pocket and handed it to her. "This has been in my safe since her death. She begged me to give it to the next woman I fell in love with. That's you."

"Why would she do that?"

"Because she wanted me to go on living and to be happy with someone else."

She stared down at the cream-colored envelope. The front bore one word. *Wyannet*. She looked up at him. "What does it say?"

"I don't know. I promised her I wouldn't open it and I haven't."

She sighed. "I don't think I want to read it."

"Please, Autumn."

"For all I know it might be a letter telling me that you'll always be hers and I'll always be second best."

He shook his head. "No! She would never stoop so low. Please read it."

She walked into the living room to sit on the sofa.

He followed and sat across from her on the loveseat.

She moistened her lips and tore the envelope open. Tears blurred her vision as she read.

"Autumn?"

She blinked before she looked up to find Seneka watching her with a wary look in his dark eyes. She read the letter to him.

*"Dearest Wyanet*

*"Although we've probably never met, if you're reading this letter, you are or soon will be married to Neka. He was the one love of my life and the best thing that ever happened to me. I hope you feel the same way about him.*

*"I'm sure you've discovered he's the kindest, warmest, and the most supportive and loving man you'll ever meet. He's also very loyal and you can trust him not to stray. I loved and enjoyed each day spent as his wife – as I hope you will.*

*"If he seems to be having a difficult time letting go of my memory, please don't be discouraged. I ask you to view that as a sign of the deep love and devotion you will enjoy as his wife.*

*"Not even during our darkest hours did I ever regret falling in love with or marrying him. His love and support was unwavering and constant. I know he'll do his best to keep you as happy and as satisfied as he did me. I pray that you will offer him a similar level of devotion.*

*"Please accept my deepest and most profound wishes and prayers that you and Neka share a long life together filled with love, joy, happiness, and all the blessings God bestows upon you.*

*"May a loving God always keep you both in his care and love. And please accept my thanks for loving him and helping him move on.*

*"If you're so inclined, please share this with him so he'll know how very much I want him to be happy with you. Please give him the letter under this one. And when you're married or otherwise committed, Bray has a present from me to you.*

*"With my deepest gratitude and warmest wishes for your happiness,  
"Kelli Elkhorn."*

She held the folder letter under hers out to him.

He rose and walked over to the sofa to take the letter. He sucked in deep breaths as he read it. Then he handed it to her.

She read it quickly.

*My darling Neka,*

*If you're reading this, you've fulfilled my dearest wish for you. You've fallen in love again and have given away the keys to your heart. I know you'll do your best to make her as happy as you made me every single day of the life we shared together.*

*I know how deeply and devotedly you love once you've given your heart. My most cherished wish is that you'll share a long, healthy, happy life with your wyenet. Love her as much or more than you loved me and I know she'll thank God every day for you – as I did.*

*If you haven't already done it, it's long past time to forget me. Forget the past. Move on and make every breath you take about making and keeping her happy. Love her with a depth of passion and fidelity that will grow stronger every year you're together.*

*May God always keep you in his loving care and grant you your heart's desire – as he did me when I met you.*

*Let this be our final farewell. Live long and love well, my Neka.*

*Kelli*

She looked up at him with tears streaming down her cheeks. "Oh, Neka, your Kelli...your wyenet must have been an exceptional woman."

He dropped to his knees and sobbed, his palms pressed against his forehead.

Autumn reached for him, pulling his head onto her lap.

He wrapped his arms around her.

She stroked his hair and shoulders, and then knelt. She held him as he continued to sob. "It's all right, Neka. Get it out...let it all out. Cry, sweetheart. It's all right. Cry. Grieve. I have you. I'll always have you."

She lost track of how long they knelt clinging to each other before he rose. He took her hand and they went into her bedroom. They undressed and got into bed. She held him until they both fell asleep.

He woke her later with a kiss.

She sat up and touched his cheek. "How are you?"

"I'm sorry I...about my earlier...I'm sorry. I don't want you to misunderstand—"

"It's all right, Neka. Clearly, losing her hurt and you had some pent up emotions you needed to release. There's no need to apologize. Just tell me how you are."

"I'm fine. That is if you're still going to marry me."

"It would take an act of God to stop me."

He closed his eyes. "Thank God. I was afraid you'd—"

"Your wy Janet was an exceptional woman. I finally understand why you loved her so much. And I know she'll always remain in your heart and I'm okay with that."

He opened his eyes. "I'll always have fond memories of her, but she's no longer my wy Janet. You are." He kissed her. "I love you."

She linked her arms around his neck. "I love you too."

"And you'll marry me?"

"In a Philadelphia second."

"I've never heard the term but I like the sound of it."

"I made it up."

He smiled, stroking a finger down her cleavage. "Clever as well as pretty. I'm a lucky man."

"I'm a lucky woman."

"Let's shower and change. We can argue about who's luckier over dinner."

"Sounds like a plan, my handsome brave."

"And tomorrow we're going to pick out rings and call our mothers to tell them we're in love and getting married ASAP."

She nodded. "Yes. Oh, yes, but I should warn you I plan to lose some weight first."

He gave her a wary look. "I won't try to dissuade you if that's what you want to do, but please remember I love you just as you are and don't go overboard."

"I won't," she promised. "Besides, look at the bright side."

"What bright side?"

"Any weight I lose before the wedding, I'll surely gain back with interest when I'm pregnant."

He grinned. "Now you're talking."

She laughed and kissed him. "You said something about dinner?"

He nodded. "Yes, but before you get up to dress, I thought you might like to know that while you were asleep, flowers arrived from Bray."

The arrogant bastard. "Was there a card?"

He nodded and handed it to her.

She opened it.

*You know I'm crazy about you and didn't mean a word of what I said. Forgive me. Affectionately, Braden.*

She looked up at Seneka. "What kind of flowers did he send?"

"He sent two dozen yellow roses. They're in the living room."

"Yellow roses as a sign of friendship?"

He nodded.

"Perfect."

"Not quite. Once we're married and you're no longer trying to prevent pregnancy, then everything will be perfect.

"Oh, you of the one track mind." She frowned. "Do you know what Kelli gave Braden for me?"

"Yes."

"What is it? Give me a hint."

"The sooner you marry me, the sooner you'll find out."

"Blackmail?"

"Maybe."

"Blackmail? I like it."

He laughed and drew her down to the bed. "Show me how much you do."

"What about the dinner you promised me?"

"Dinner can wait. My need for you can't."

She rose from the bed to undress. "Then take what is now and always will be yours alone, Neka."

"And the little matter of birth control?"

"That little matter will be taken care of six months after we marry. I want that long to enjoy being your wife and wyanet before we start a family."

"Six months and then your unprotected pussy is all mine."

“All yours. Now give me my big, thick, hard cock,” she whispered.

“Gladly,” he said, sliding balls deep inside her.

### III

Seneka continued to put in long hours during the following weeks. Autumn started getting up early and going to the gym with him in the mornings. While he went through his regular workout, she power walked around the track and began working with light weights. Then they took a quick shower together. Once he left for work, she got back in bed and went to sleep. After lunch, she read and spent time planning low-calorie meals between spending a few hours with a wedding planner.

After a month of exercising each week-day and watching what she ate, she'd gone down one dress size. To celebrate, she planned a special dinner to introduce Seneka to Spring and Jack. After an enjoyable meal during which Spring and Seneka flirted outrageously with each other, she and Seneka called her mother and made arrangements to fly down to Florida during the following weekend.

They spent the night in each other's arms alternately making love and fucking. Following their morning workout, Seneka called his mother for his weekly phone call. When he finished talking to her, he handed Autumn the phone. “She wants to talk to you.”

Autumn and Mrs. Elkhorn spent five uncomfortable minutes discussing the weather on both coasts before saying goodbye. She sighed. “She doesn't like me, Seneka.”

He slipped his arms around her. "It's not that she doesn't like you. It will just take her a little while to warm up to the idea that you're not Native American. Can you bear with her?"

She nodded. "I'll have to, I'm in love with you and you're probably going to need patience when dealing with my mom."

"Not a problem. I'm inclined to adore the woman who gave birth to you."

"Small wonder I love you and your silver tongue."

"Is it just my tongue you love?"

She reached between their bodies to cup a hand over his cock. "I'm kind of fond of this as well."

"Really? Why don't we go to bed so you can prove it to me?"

"Sounds like a plan."

### iii

Autumn and Seneka's visit to her mother in Florida wasn't entirely successful. Although he went out of his way to be charming, it was soon clear to Autumn her mother didn't want to be charmed.

"Well, that could have gone a lot better," Seneka said after they'd boarded a plane for the return flight to Philly.

She leaned over to kiss his cheek. "You'll grow on her. Just give her a little time."

"I'll give her all the time she needs," he promised. "Let's spend the week recharging our batteries and next weekend, you meet my mother."

"Oh, joy," she said.

He laughed. "No matter who does or doesn't like you, I love you."

“And that’s really all that matters,” she assured him.

## Chapter Fifteen

Eight weeks, two dress sizes smaller, and one merger deal later, Autumn and Seneka exchanged their wedding vows in Randall Grayhawk's garden. Spring was her Matron of Honor and Braden was Seneka's best man. She learned later that her mother and Seneka's both cried as they recited the vows they'd written themselves.

Mrs. Elkhorn's drew her aside in a quiet corner during the reception. "We need a brief talk."

Ignoring the sudden butterflies in her stomach, Autumn smiled. "Mrs. Elkhorn, I know you were hoping Seneka married a Native Woman," she said.

She nodded. "That would have been my preference."

Autumn sighed, looking down.

Her mother-in-law touched her arm. "But that was before I saw how very good for him you are."

Autumn looked up.

"I feared I'd never see him so content and happy again."

"I'm happy too. I love him so much."

"I'll expect tangible proof of that soon," she said.

Autumn blinked in surprise. "Proof? I don't understand."

"Yes. In the form of grandchildren. I'm not getting any younger you know."

Autumn laughed in relief. "We plan to start trying soon."

"I'm very glad to hear that. I have a present for you." She removed a long slender jeweler's box from her bag and gave it to Autumn.

Autumn untied the bow and removed the top of the box. A beautiful gold watch lay inside on a black velvet cushion. "It's beautiful."

"There's an inscription."

Autumn turned the watch over and read the inscription on the band. Wyagnet Autumn Elkhorn. Underneath was that day's date.

Touched, Autumn pressed her lips together.

"May I help you put it on?"

Autumn nodded, her throat tight with the effort to hold back tears. She extended her arm.

Jacqueline Elkhorn fastened it around her wrist. "Allow me to give you the traditional Elkhorn wedding greeting. May you and Seneka live long and love well...daughter."

"Daughter?"

Jacqueline Elkhorn nodded. "The wives of my sons are my daughters. Since you are the only one, you will become even dearer to me."

"Oh, thank you."

"I know Seneka will make you as happy as his father made me."

"I only hope I can fill the void Kelli's death left in his life because—"

"He has given you the keys to his heart. There is no longer a void in his life. Only joy and happiness." She kissed Autumn's cheek. "As family matriarch I welcome you into our family, Wyagnet Autumn Elkhorn."

Autumn blinked back tears as she watched Seneka's mother walk away.

Autumn looked around for Seneka. He and her mother stood talking in one corner of the big room.

Spring joined her. "Mom and Seneka look good together. Don't they?"

Autumn nodded and pointed at the watch on her wrist. "Mrs. Elkhorn gave this to me."

Spring smiled and hugged her. "It's beautiful, but it's no more than you deserve."

Glancing around during the next hour, she was pleased to see all three of her brothers-in-law taking turns spending time with her mother.

Surrounded by her extended family and new friends, Autumn was so happy she almost felt as if she floated through the day on a joyous cloud.

"You look so lovely, darling," Autumn's mother told her when she, Autumn, and Spring were alone in a private room off from the garden as the reception wound down. "And very happy."

"I am happy, Mom. I love him so much."

"And he loves you."

She nodded, hugging herself. "Yes, Mom. He does."

"He's a good man and you've married well. I know you'll be very happy with him." She kissed her cheek. "Enjoy your honeymoon, darling and call me when you return home."

"I will."

She and her mother exchanged hugs before she left her alone with Spring.

She and Spring stood smiling at each other in silence before Spring engulfed her in a warm embrace. "Oh, Autumn! I knew this day would come when I'd see you happy again."

"Thanks for all your advice, encouragement, and love. I couldn't have survived with my sanity intact without it."

"That's what sisters and best friends are for."

"And you've been both."

"And always will be," Spring promised before she kissed her cheek and drew away.

Both sisters had tears in their eyes.

"I'm sure your handsome brave is itching to get you alone so I'm going now before we both start bawling."

Tears trickled down Autumn's face. "I love you."

"I love you too," Spring said and walked away, wiping at her cheeks.

Moments later, the door opened and Seneka walked in.

"Seneka!"

"I hope those are happy tears."

She nodded.

He smiled. "Autumn, the light of my life."

"Oh, Neka."

"Alone at last." Closing the door behind him, he quickly crossed the room to her. He wiped her cheeks with his handkerchief. "You're even more beautiful than usual in that dress." He took her hand in his and kissed her ring finger. "I love you."

"Oh, Neka. I love you too." She held out her watch. "Your mother gave this to me."

"It's almost as nice as you are beautiful."

"And she called me wyanet and daughter, Neka. I think she might like me after all."

"Of course she does. And I think maybe your mother might like me too." He slipped a hand in his pocket and held it out to her. "Look what she gave me as a wedding present."

She saw a familiar diamond-cut gold money clip which had been one of her father's prized possessions. She clutched his arm. "Oh, Neka. This belonged to my father."

He nodded. "I know she told me."

"Oh, I knew you'd grow on her."

He slipped the clip back into his pocket.

They embraced and kissed before he led her across the room to the loveseat.

She closed her eyes, sighing softly and enjoying the touch of his warm mouth.

There was a tap on the door.

Seneka ignored it, cupping her breasts.

After another brief tap, the door opened slowly.

She lifted her head.

Braden looked around the opening. "I'm sorry to interrupt, Neka, but I need a moment with Autumn."

She tilted her neck away from Seneka's lips as Braden, dressed in a black and white tux pushed the door open.

"Now?" Seneka asked, frowning.

"Yes. I wanted her to have Kelli's present before you two left."

Seneka nodded and rose. "Don't keep her long, Bray."

"I won't." He stepped out of the door to allow Seneka to walk past him. He closed the door behind Seneka.

She smiled at him. "You look almost as handsome as Neka's does."

He smiled and walked into the room and sat beside her. "Flattery will get you everything you want."

She laughed. He took an envelope from his inner jacket pocket. "Before she died, Kelli asked me to safeguard this and to give it to the next woman Neka fell in love with."

She accepted the envelope. On the front were two words: Wyanet Elkhorn. "What is it?"

"Open it and find out."

She held it against her chest. "Give me a hint."

He smiled. "If you open it you won't need a hint."

"You're no fun."

He grinned. "But I'm sure Neka is."

She nodded. "Yes. He is. He's all the fun I need and more."

"I knew he would be."

She smiled and carefully opened the envelope. Inside was a bank statement in Braden's name. The words "In trust for Wyanet Elkhorn" were written under his name. She glanced at the balance in the account and caught her breath. "How much of the two hundred fifty thousand dollars is mine? The interest?"

"The interest and the principle."

"Both?"

"Both. It's all yours, Autumn."

"All of it? I don't understand. Where did it come from and why didn't she leave it to Neka?"

“Elkhorn men are old-fashioned. Our father taught us that a man shouldn’t marry until he’s capable of providing the sole financial support for his wife.”

“But Bray, that’s not always possible today.”

He shrugged. “Thankfully we’re all in a position to do that.”

“You are now, but what about when Neka first got married?”

“It was difficult for him starting out, but we all helped out.”

“Who?”

He shrugged. “Mostly Raven and I. He was in love and we wanted him to be happy and he wasn’t going to be happy unless they were married.”

“What about living together?”

He shook his head. “We’re not the moving in without marriage kind. Our father taught us that if you love a woman, honor her. If you honor her, don’t ask her to live with you. Marry her. So we helped out for a year or two so that Neka was able to pay all the household expenses. Kelli saved and invested her salary as a CPA. However, she inherited the majority of this money from her grandparents.”

“Why didn’t she leave it to Neka?”

“He got her pension, insurance policies, and investments. She was an intelligent woman and a smart investor. Believe me, Neka isn’t going to miss this. And it was her money to do with as she chose. She wanted you to have this as a sign of her well wishes for you.”

“How much of it did she leave me?”

“You’re repeating yourself, honey. How many times must I say that it’s all yours before you believe me?”

"All of it? Oh, my God! She left me a quarter of a million dollars?"

He nodded.

The Elkhorns had given her a wedding present of \$50,000 a month earlier. Although the accompanying card bore all their names and had been presented by Mrs. Elkhorn, she suspected the lion's share had come from Braden. "I don't know what to say."

"You don't have to say anything. Just enjoy it."

"Are there strings attached?"

He took the envelope from her and turned it over a few times. "I don't see any."

She laughed.

He smiled. "The money is yours to do with as you wish."

"I feel like I'm getting a dowry for marrying him."

He grinned. "Between you and me, we were afraid you wouldn't take him unless we paid you."

She shook her head. "I love him. I'd happily take him if he didn't have a penny to his name."

"I'm very glad to hear that, honey."

She hugged herself. "I can pay off my mom's mortgage and give her a little nest egg so she'll feel more independent and won't have to pinch pennies."

"Sounds like a plan to give her a nest egg, but I'd be very surprised if Neka didn't take care of her mortgage. If he doesn't, I will."

She stared at him. "You're serious."

“Very. You’re marrying into a family that has more than its fair share of wealth. Our mother has no financial worries. There’s no reason your mother should have either.”

“Oh, Braden, thank —”

He held up a hand to silence her. “We’re family now. There’s no thanks needed or wanted, Autumn. When you return from your honeymoon, we’ll go to the bank to remove my name from the account. Then it’s yours to do with as you like. Okay?”

“Oh, Braden, Kelli must have been —”

“A wonderful woman?” He nodded. “She was, but then so are you.”

“You’re kind of wonderful too, Bray.”

He arched a brow. “You’re just noticing that?”

She shook her head. “I’m sure your Kania has noticed it as well,” she said of the woman who had accompanied him to the wedding.

“I don’t know that she is mine.”

“I’d like to get to know her.”

“She and I are close friends so I’m sure you’ll have an opportunity to do that one of these days. Now I’d better get out of here before Neka comes in and drags me out.” He kissed her cheek and rose. “I know you and Neka are going to be very happy together.”

She nodded. “Oh, yes.”

“And you and I are all right?”

Raven and Shane were charming and she liked them. But she suspected Braden would always be her favorite brother-in-law. She smiled up at him. “Yes. Of course.” She extended her hand.

He held it between both of his. "You've forgiven me for my outburst?"

"You were trying to protect Neka. And you were right." She grimaced. "Of course I wish you hadn't felt the need to call me a silly bitch, but —"

He squeezed her hand. "I know that was unforgivable. I wish I'd thought it through before I said it."

"Do you?"

He nodded.

"Well, don't lose any sleep over it because it's water under the bridge now."

"You're as gracious as you are pretty."

"And you're as charming as you are handsome."

"Thank you, honey."

"You're welcome."

"Well, I'd really better get my ass in gear now. Enjoy your honeymoon, Autumn and your life with Neka."

She grinned. "Oh, I, intend to, Braden."

"You couldn't have fallen in love with a better man."

She nodded. "I'm very well aware of that."

"Good." He smiled and left her alone.

Moments later, the door opened and Seneka entered. "He certainly took his sweet time."

"I know," she said, feigning annoyance. "I thought he'd never leave."

He leaned against the door, smiling. "What did you think of Kelli's present?"

She stood up and rushed across the room to link her arms around his neck. "Oh, Neka. I can't believe how unselfish and generous she was."

He slipped his arms around her waist. "And I can't believe how lucky I am to have another wonderful woman love me."

She ran her fingers through his hair. "We have to have at least one daughter."

"I'm game. You've always wanted a daughter?"

"Yes and I know what we're going to name her."

"Let me guess. You want to complete the season and will name her Summer after your mom. Or maybe Winter?" He teased.

She laughed. "No. We're going to call her Kelli Anne."

"Kelli? Are you sure, Autumn?"

She nodded. "I'm very sure and I pray that she'll be half as generous and loving as your Kelli was."

He shook his head. "That's a noble sentiment and would be an unselfish gesture, honey, but I know it's one Kelli wouldn't have wanted or expected. She wanted me to move on and I'm ready to do that now."

"Yeah? That's what I'm talking about. Our moving on together."

"Today is the first day of our doing that."

"I know, Neka, and I couldn't be happier."

"But?"

"But I still want to name our first daughter Kelli Anne."

"Our *first* daughter?" He grinned. "Now you're talking, but you know I want at least two sons as well."

"You do? That's four kids, Seneka!"

He caressed her ass. "Do you know how sexy a woman who can count is?"

She laughed. "We'll name our first son after you?"

He shook his head. "I'm not really into the junior thing."

"Okay. Then we'll name him after your father and Braden. Adam Braden Elkhorn."

"It has a nice ring to it. I know Dad would have been proud and Bray will be honored. Now. Why is our first daughter going to be called Kelli Anne?"

"It's Spring's middle name."

"Do you have a middle name?"

She shook her head. "No. Do you?"

"No."

"I think we've exhausted that topic."

"Oh?" He squeezed her ass. "You have something else you'd rather do than talk?"

"I can think of at least one thing."

He brushed his lips against her ear. "What?"

She drew back and glanced around. "This is a big house. Do you suppose there's a private room with a bed where we can share a first fuck as man and wife?"

"I thought you'd never ask. Randall and Benai are the ideal hosts who think of everything. It just so happens there's a room down the hall they prepared for us for today."

"Yeah? Then why are we still in here talking?"

"Good point." He kissed her and then took her hand in his. They left the room and walked down the hall. The sounds of laughter and talking drifted from the open doorways of various rooms.

Midway down the hall, he led her into a medium sized room with a bed, a vanity, and a loveseat. Their suitcases were along one wall. There was a bottle of chilled champagne in an ice bucket, two glasses, and a covered tray on a wheeled table near the bed.

Seneka locked the door and turned to smile at her. "Now, Mrs. Elkhorn, why don't you allow me to take that beautiful gown off and then join me on the bed for what will be the first of a lifetime filled with long, hot fucks?"

"That's the best offer I've had in a long time, Mr. Elkhorn." Feeling happier than she'd ever imagined she'd be, she turned her back to him.

He crossed the room and as he removed her gown, he rained kisses on her neck and exposed back. She was surprised and pleased at how carefully he handled her wedding gown and all her under garments.

When she was naked and aroused, he smiled at her. "Your turn."

She undressed him with much less care, eager to bare his beautiful body.

Stripped to his socks and briefs, he stood smiling at her. "See anything you like?"

She shook her head.

He slipped his cock out. "How about now?"

"Nope. Sorry. Oh, wait a minute. What's that thing between your legs?"

"You know how to find out."

"I do." She knelt in front of him. She caressed his cock and balls. "Oh, very nice, Neka."

“Why don’t you taste it?”

“Sounds like a plan.” Smiling, she slowly drew his semi-erect shaft between her lips. She twirled her tongue around the head several times before she cupped his balls in her free hand and sucked on it.

“Oh, shit, honey. That feels do damn good.”

Encouraged, she drew more of his length into her mouth.

“Damn, honey, that’s good. Hmm. Suck me and make me come in your mouth.”

She removed her mouth from his cock to smile up at him. “I intend to and when you do, I’m going to gobble up every drop of your sweet cum.”

“Oh, damn. Then stop talking and start sucking again!”

She laughed.

He placed his hands on her head and guided her mouth back to his groin.

Autumn parted her lips, and slowly sucked his cock into her mouth, determined to ensure their first sexual encounter as man and wife would be one he would always recall with fond memories.

Night of Sin

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### Excerpt

Chandra stood in the entrance to the only room of Foreplay open to non-members. The leering bouncer told her the closed doors on the left and right led to members' only rooms.

She felt overdressed in a tailor-made mauve silk pants suit. The sleeveless silk blouse hugged her breasts. The pants' hidden panels helped slenderize her stomach while making the most of what she'd been told was a bootylicious ass. The jacket ended just below her hips, concealing her gun.

She moistened her lips. There was definitely more than foreplay going on. She cast her gaze around the room with the medium blue walls, lit by strobe lights that seemed to flash in time with a song that urged some woman to shake her booty.

There must be at least one hundred people present, forty percent of them women. A number of the males had their erect cocks exposed. Most of the females were at least partially undressed. She hadn't seen so many bare breasts, naked asses,

exposed pussies and cocks since she'd worked vice several years earlier.

The lighting was dim but she noted many people having sex, some of it same gender in nature. The center of the room contained a dais on which an armless leather chair sat. A slender blond male sat on the lap of a naked, blue-eyed man with long, dark hair. The blond's eyes were closed, his fingers wrapped around his short, fat shaft. He bounced up and down on the other male's cock.

The music was now low and muted. The air was fragrant with the smell of sex and the sounds of moans of lust. There were at least two other couples having sex but Chandra stared at the couple on the dais, who were clearly enjoying their fuck. They seemed to move and groan as one. The dark-haired male held the blond's hips as he licked the side of the blond's neck. To her dismay, Chandra found that not only couldn't she look away but also that watching the two fuck aroused her.

As if aware of her gaze, the blond suddenly opened his dark brown eyes, staring directly at her. Smiling, he released himself, placed both hands on his slender thighs and lifted his hips. He did it slowly so that Chandra got a leisurely view of the thick cock on which he reamed himself. Her nipples hardened.

She felt a tingling sensation in her pussy. She dragged her gaze away from the couple on stage seconds before a male voice intruded on her thoughts.

“Do you like to watch two males fucking?”

Chandra’s cheeks burned. She turned to face the owner of the deep, sexy voice that sent a shiver down her spine. She stared at him. Her heart raced and her pussy flooded. He was a handsome, six-foot-plus hunk with short dark hair and intense blue eyes. Their gazes locked briefly. She felt a shock of desire.

His all black outfit emphasized his tall, muscular frame. He had wide shoulders, long legs, large feet encased in expensive leather shoes and... She bit her lip. The clear outline of a long, thick cock was visible along the inside of one thigh under the tight leather pants he wore. God, he must be all of —

She dragged her gaze away from his groin to his face.

He gave her a long, intense stare, allowing his eyes to caress her breasts for timeless moments before he spoke again. “Can I buy you a drink?”

He was the most attractive man she’d ever seen in person. She found herself staring again. His open shirt revealed an intriguing expanse of hair on an impressively sized chest. She knew it wasn’t in vogue but found chest and public hair on a male sexually stimulating. It would be exciting to push the shirt off his shoulders and run her fingers through it.

Standing nearly five nine barefoot, Chandra preferred big muscular men. The male smiling at her had miles of muscles. He was also one of the few males present with his cock still inside his pants. Nevertheless, everything about him screamed hot, mindless sex. She felt the urge to rip off her clothes and beg him to fuck her all night long.

A faint smile spread across his handsome face. "What would you like to drink?"

Chandra averted her gaze, feeling almost as if he were aware of her lustful thoughts. Given the way she'd ogled him, he wouldn't need to be a rocket scientist to figure out how aroused she was. *Get a grip, Chandra. You're here to grill the Stoner boys, not to get laid by some drop-dead gorgeous, big-cocked hunk.* God, it should be illegal for any one man to be so damned sexy.

"What can I get you to drink?"

"Nothing."

"Why not?"

"I'm driving. I don't drink and drive but thanks for the offer."

"Maybe another time?"

If there were any justice she and Mr. Tall, Dark and Well-hung would meet again when she could afford to devote time to selfish pleasure. "Maybe." She reluctantly turned away.

He caught her hand.

A shock of desire sizzled through her.

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Marilyn's Bio:

Marilyn Lee lives, works, and writes on the East Coast. In addition to thoroughly enjoying writing erotic romances, she enjoys roller-skating, spending time with her large, extended family, and rooting for all her hometown sports teams. Her other interests include collecting Doc Savage pulp novels from the thirties and forties and

collecting Marvel comics from the seventies and eighties (particularly Thor and The Avengers). Her favorite TV shows are forensic shows, westerns (Gunsmoke and Have Gun, Will Travel are particular favorites), mysteries (loves the old Charlie Chan mysteries. Her all time favorite mystery movie is probably Dead, Again), and nearly every vampire movie or television show ever made (Forever Knight and Count Yorga, Vampire are favorites).

Marilyn has won numerous writing accolades, including a CAPA award for Bloodlust: Conquering Mikhel Dumont and the following Lub-Dubs Awards for 2009: Lifetime Achievement Award, In Blood And Worth Loving (Best erotic novel and best sci-fi/fantasy/paranormal Award.

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