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Knight Brothers Series Book 2

*Irresistible  
Knight*

Tierney O'Malley

*Irresistible Knight*

*Knight Brothers Series Book 2*

*By*

*Tierney O'Malley*

*Dedication*

*To Tom.*

*Me*



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Irresistible Knight by Tierney O'Malley

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# Chapter One

*International District*

*Downtown Seattle*

The back alley reeked. Though he'd been here many times before, it had never been as bad as this. The air smelled of something rotten mixed with urine, feces, and garbage. Bors breathed in and out through his mouth. Later, he would ask his brother, Tristan, to give him a surgical mask and wear it next time instead of a bandanna.

He pulled his collar tighter around his neck and flattened his back on the cold gray cement wall, a failed attempt to avoid rainwater that gushed forth from the useless roof gutters. With the amount of water raining down on him, he could have been standing under his shower and wouldn't know the difference. Bors watched with dismay as water splashed on his new pair of boots. *Damn*. His sister-in-law gave him these Ariat Cobalt XR Crepe cowboy boots last month for his birthday. He would have worn his old boots if the weather forecast said *rain*. What a freaking prediction.

Since he'd touched the wall, he consciously avoided using his hands to wipe

the moisture off his face. Instead, he shook his head the way a wet dog would shake his body. Of all the fucking nights, why did it have to rain right now? It was already a bitch to stand behind the reeking, lidless garbage dump full of shits from Zhin's Chinese Restaurant, but to disturb the decaying crap? Well, hell on earth. The smell was twice as bad as his younger brother's pet rat that had escaped, crawled and died under the belly of his bed. Gawain said rats were sensitive pets and smart. If taught, they could learn a variety of tricks. Responding to a call included. He also insisted that rats needed at least an hour of playtime outside their cage every day. But Gawain forgot that rats, when they were sick and ready to die, would find a place to hide, which is exactly what his did.

Everyone except for their mother and sister helped looked for the dead rodent. When they found it, the stench was so bad it clung to his skin for weeks. No amount of *Febreeze* could camouflage the smell. Their dad hauled the bed to the dump then came back with a new one, but didn't put it in the room until the smell was gone. Gawain had slept downstairs in his sleeping bag for almost a month and never asked for another pet again. He was only twelve at the time. Everyone believed he felt horrible and responsible for his rat's unfortunate demise.

With the aid of a dimmed streetlight a few yards from where he stood, Bors could see the thick film of shiny grime slither like a snake on the water's surface that quickly pooled beneath his feet. He took a step back to avoid the floating used

syringe, rotten vegetables, Styrofoam, bandage, and a brownish plastic that contained something he didn't want to know about. What the hell?

The streetlight flickered again. Bors wanted to shoot the damn thing. Since he'd taken his spot beside the darker shadow of the garbage bin, it had buzzed nonstop. The sound reminded him of the time he and his brothers hotwired their dad's car. He wouldn't be surprised if he started having epileptic seizures and ruined his retina. Fuck. The combination of rain and the stupid light wasn't helping his already darkening mood. He'd go nuts if he remained here another hour.

Bors pressed the dark blue rain-soaked bandana that covered half of his face. A useless thing to stop the stink from reaching his nose, but a good protection from whatever crawled out of the dumpster and the wall behind him.

*I hate this fucking place.*

Zhin's Chinese Restaurant may look like a regular family diner owned by a friendly elderly Chinese immigrant, but beyond its fancy Chinese lanterns and jade Buddha's hid the vilest man Bors had ever known—Congressman Bruno Jean. The bastard had been paying Zhin in exchange for his silence and used the restaurant as a front, a place to conduct his sickening business.

Seattle's International District would do well without Jean's filth, but the goddamn dog had the city by the balls. No one dared touch him out of fear that



he'd stir up foul smelling deeds ten times worse than the garbage floating around him.

*Well, too fucking bad for Jean. I'm not one of the coward dogs that cower whenever someone mentions his name. Not this Knight.*

He'd start by fucking dig up everything about he could about Congressman Bruno Jean. He'd bury him, and then he'd stand on the mound. Once he shoved Jean deep down, Bors guaranteed it that the rest of his friends would follow, including Zhin.

*Cut the fucking head and the rest of the body will fall.*

Something wet slithered down his nape. He smacked the back of his neck. Fuck! Okay, he had enough. Branyan had better give the signal now. He and his partner had been in this alley for almost three hours. They should call it a night, or in this case morning. Evil men like Jean always stay in the shadow of darkness when stirring up vicious deeds. It would be daylight soon. Jean and his men wouldn't show up now.

The only person that came out of the paint-chipped red door he'd been watching was the cook wearing a godawful apron. The filthy maggot came out, stood just outside the door, placed the pad of his finger on his nostril then blew his snot on the ground. Then used his apron to wipe his nose. What he did next reminded Bors to tell his family to stay away from this restaurant. Man, his brother

Gawain was a pig, but at least Gawain knew how to use tissues and always washed his hands.

Where the fuck was Congressman Bruno Jean? Snitch was never wrong. Tonight he said there would be a delivery. Girls from Texas Jean's men befriended online. Girls who hated being under the same roof with their helicopter parents and would rather hang out in chat rooms online or on *Facebook* and *MySpace*. Girls to appease the higher bidders' fucking libido. Except for the disgusting cook, he hadn't seen anything. No cars, limo, or van in sight. Meaning, no Jean tonight. *Where the fuck is he?* Changed his mind, or the girls were taken somewhere else? Jean, he learned, wanted to be around when his delivery arrived to inspect them. So far, no Jean or his cronies. What happened?

*If someone tells me his assholiness cancels his delivery when it rains because he hates getting his expensive shoes dirty and wet, I'll punch the son of a bitch.*

Everything about Bruno Jean was filthy. According to his sources, aside from dealing and selling girls, Orgy was Jean's pastime. He slept in the morning and stayed up all night. If he wasn't busy watching couples fuck, he was busy getting a blowjob. Or maybe sitting comfortably somewhere while inspecting virgins. Anyone, like Jean, who would use young girls for profit damned their souls. He could scrub his skin until he looked like a newly sanded wood, but he would never be clean.

*Fucking bastard.*

Jean's dubious, unsavory reputation and constant supply of fresh young girls was far from being a secret. But Bors could not find one soul to say so or put it in writing. Jean's absolute talent in discretion made him in demand among the vultures with strong appetites for virgins. In return, they made him rich, untouchable, protected by their names, and hard to find evidence against him.

*Damn, there must be one person out there brave enough to come forward.*

Working for the FBI, he knew how many abduction cases remained unsolved. Agents assigned to those cases suffered mentally and emotionally. Years spent looking for clues ate away time and energy that they should be spending with their families. Some agents ended up having family troubles because they remained in the dark, blinded from the knowledge of what happened to the victims that weren't even blood relatives. God, he couldn't imagine the kind of pain the victims' families had to go through when they learned their daughters, sisters, cousins or stepsisters disappeared.

To lose a precious daughter in the hands of evil men—unthinkable. Bors thought about his sister, Kirsten, the only girl in the family and his parents' precious flower. He bet he and his brothers, including their father, would take turns gutting someone who dared touch her the wrong way. Of course, the brat would never let any man disrespect her. She'd fight the way they showed her—

dirty.

A sodden rat crawled out of the bin and jumped into the puddle. Bors had the crazy urge to draw his gun and blast the dirty rodent. His frustration from yet another thwarted job made him want to shoot anything. Shit. Looks like he would have to face one more sleepless night. They just wasted another day, but there would be another chance to catch filthy trash like Jean.

And he hoped the bastard would put up a fight. Give him reason to put a bullet in between his eyes. The fucking congressman put a different meaning to the word dirty. He must be flushed and rid this world of a scum worth nothing. Anyone that preyed on women, innocent or not, didn't deserve to breathe fresh air, but the stink of jail. Better yet, to rot in grave.

Bors pulled his sleeve to check his watch. Almost two. No way would Jean show his ugly face now and this alley would come to life soon.

A short wave came from the corner where Branyan stood in vigil. About time. Bran's wife probably fell asleep on their couch waiting for him. Married men should stay away from this profession. They should be sharing meals and watching movies with their families, not spending hours scouting dangerous areas like this alley.

The morning called for a strong triple shot espresso Starbucks coffee and a cinnamon bun. Yeah, that would make up for this miserable morning. Bors made a

move to leave his spot. A sting stopped him from taking another step. “What the fuck?” he whispered. Even in the dark, he could see the sleeve of his Northface jacket cut open. Blood oozed out of his open skin. He squinted at what had caused it. A broken piece of glass—must have been part of a window once—protruded from the side of the dumpster.

*Fucking shit! How did I miss that?* A short whistle made him look up. Branyan gave him another signal that it was time to leave. Careful not to step on the deep part of the puddle, he left his hiding spot, hoping the cut wasn’t big enough to require stitches.



“Eewww! Knight, you stunk up the whole elevator. You know my knees hate the stairs.”

“Hey, Astrid. Good morning.” Bors grinned at the sixty-year-old secretary fanning her face with her wrinkled hand. He ignored the others plugging their noses up. “Sorry about the elevator. I’ll make it up to you. Say, Teriyaki?”

“How about you pay for my perm. Got an appointment at The Cut this afternoon.”

Bors laughed. “Sure.”

“I have witnesses, Knight.”

“Knight’s honor. I’ll pay for your perm.”

“And pedicure?”

“We’ll save the pedicure for Christmas.”

“Cheapskate.”

Bors puckered her lips like a fish and made kissing sound. “I love you, Astrid.”

Astrid snorted. “Can’t imagine how many women actually heard you say those words to them.”

“I can count five including you and my girlfriend in the tenth grade.”

“Your mother, sister, and sister in-law aren’t counted.”

“What can I say? I haven’t found *the* one who deserves those three words.”

“Well, you won’t find one if you keep smelling and looking like *that*. You look worse than the homeless guy I’ve seen downtown.”

“But he doesn’t love you.” Bors wriggled his brows, but Astrid only scrunched her nose.

“Are you sure you don’t have cooties?”

“Maybe. Wanna check?”

“You’re a Knight and I know what’s hidden beneath your scraggly, hobo look, but I will not touch your rock-star hair until you had it washed.”

“You wound me.”

“Whatever, Knight. Simms is in his office, tinkering with his laptop. You

know what that means.” Astrid took a deep breath then stepped into the elevator.

“Thanks for the warning.” Astrid rolled her eyes but Bors glimpsed her smile before she turned her back on him.

Astrid had been working for Simms since she was nineteen. She’d been qualified for a retirement, but insisted that retirement would only kill her. With her husband gone and no kids and grandkids to visit, her life would stand still.

Downing the rest of his coffee, he tossed the empty cup into the can before rapping on his supervisor’s door. Without waiting for an invitation, he opened it.

Just as Astrid said, his supervisor hunkered in front of his laptop. The man looked like he was ready to kill it. Simms and his computer never got along. He called it a piece of crap and a waste of his time. Bors couldn’t have agreed more. Simms didn’t look up when he walked in. He merely grunted his acknowledgment.

Bors stretched on the leather couch and closed his eyes. Two cups of coffee didn’t help cheer up his scummy morning. It only made him piss every fifteen minutes like his pregnant sister in-law.

Simms let out an aggravated sigh. Bors understood. Like Simms, he hated this new technology crap. Writing a report was easier before. All he had to do was find the right form, fill it out and bam, report finished. Now he must log in to dot G.O.V, type his name, password, which he could never remember, click here and click that. It was all bullshit. Of course, his brother Percival would disagree. But



Percival was born with patience to sit down for hours staring at a computer screen and a blinking cursor. His brother's brain worked like a genius when it came to new technology.

"Fucking computer," Simms said, running his fingers through his thick gray hair. "There are always updates I don't even understand. Good god, Knight! What the hell are you doing contaminating my couch? You stink."

"I know." Bors opened his eyes then sat up. His head was fuzzy from days of no sleep and his cut throbbed. He pried it with his fingers. The damn thing looked infected already.

"What the hell happened?" Simms asked, his voice hoarse from years of smoking, and then went back to glaring at his computer.

"Nothing happened. Branyan and I waited for hours and Jean didn't show."

"I am asking about your arm. Whose bones did you break this time?"

"What?"

"Come on, Knight. You wouldn't let anyone get away intact after cutting you like that."

Bors looked at his arm then shrugged. "Cut myself on a broken piece of glass."

"Lack of sleep."

"What?" Damn, he sounded like a parrot repeating a question every second.

“Carelessness is a sign of sleep deprivation. And you, Agent, look in need of a long sleep. When was the last time you saw your bed? Ah, never mind. You probably sleep on your feet. Go to the hospital and have that stitched up.”

“Hate hospitals.”

“I know, but they’re here for a purpose. You know that.”

Bors took a deep breath. “I know.” He knew how important hospitals were. His brother Tristan and sister Kirsten wouldn’t be alive if it weren’t for the doctors and hospitals. But his siblings were just a small fraction of reasons why he didn’t like hospitals. The place reminded him of death, near death, or pain. How many times had he taken scumbags, innocent victims, or fellow agents, to the emergency room? Too many times to count.

“Where’s Branyan?”

“I gave him a ride home. The man couldn’t wait another minute to see Susan and take a shower.”

“How’s the pregnant wife?”

“Still pregnant. Walks like a duck and real pretty.”

“All pregnant women are pretty.” Simms looked at the three clocks on the wall. Each one showed either the Pacific, Central or Eastern times. “It’s almost noon, Agent.”

Bors knew where the topic was heading so he decided to tell Simms where

he was between visiting Branyan's wife and before coming to this office. "I went back to Zhin's."

"You just don't know when to stop, do you Knight?"

"I know I am close to getting Jean. I can feel it."

"Shit, you won't feel a thing soon if you don't take care of yourself and that nasty cut. I suggest you see a doctor first before that thing gets infected, then go home. You're not *7-Eleven*. Open twenty-four seven. You are your father's son. If it wasn't for Katherine, Arthur would still be working his ass off. Go home, Knight. Take a nap."

A nap? The hell. Last time he took a nap was during his preschool years. "Don't you want me to write a report first?" Bors leaned back, draping his arms on the back of the soft leather couch, not caring if he was *contaminating it*. Shit, counting the number of agents who had sat on this couch after visiting places he could only describe as hell would be as difficult as counting leaves on a tree.

"Since you said nothing happened, your report can wait." Simms looked at Bors and pointed his finger at him. "Go home. I don't care if you go to your condo or to the one you had built recently. Just go home. I promised your mother to send you home once in a while intact. And you're useless to me walking around in a fog."

"I'll go home. Don't know if Snitch gave us a bogus tip or not, sir. Have you

heard from him?”

Simms threw up his hands in the air, leaned back on his chair, and then rested his elbows on the armrest. “Life would be a lot easier without this computer.”

Bors’ brother Percival would disagree. “I agree.”

Simms looked at him with his brows arched high. “Don’t know how your brother could stand this thing. Anyway, Snitch was positive about the delivery this morning.”

“Then what happened?”

“Okay, I’ll give you something, but you act on it after you recharge.”

“Cool.” Bors leaned his elbows on his knees, then hung his head. The simple movement made the room spin. Crap, he’d really pushed himself close to the limit.

“Are you still awake?”

“If this had to do with Jean, I’m all ears.”

“I’ve heard from him. Just before you walked in. What Snitch told me might have something to do with why Jean didn’t show up this morning.”

“Yeah?”

“Jean has something more important to do.”

“Other than luring girls into his den? Hard to believe.”

“Well, better believe it. Someone took Jean’s mind off his business.”

“Infestation of crab lice on his pubes?” Bors grinned.

“Trying to be funny, Agent?”

Bors shrugged his shoulders, ignoring the shooting pain in his arm from the simple gesture.

“Snitch finally got something on the mysterious limo coming in and out of Jean’s mansion. Apparently, a woman uses it.”

“And?”

“This woman caused an uproar and most likely the cancellation of Jean’s delivery.”

“Why? She left Jean unsatisfied after his Viagra failed to work?”

Simms gave him a look that said he wasn’t in the mood to listen to sarcasm.

“No. This woman is special to Jean and she disappeared.”

“I knew it. He’s banging someone special.” Rarely seen in public with a woman on his side, the bastard was smart enough not to link anyone with him. A pretense. Bors fucking knew it. “I’ve watched Jean many times, but I’ve never seen him with a woman. He’s always with his bodyguards and or other lechers but never with a woman. And it’s because she rides the limo.”

“She’s a secret.”

“Until she disappeared. Isn’t that ironic.” Only a spoiled, egotistical maniac would make a big deal out of a missing woman. She must be unique and an expert

in bed. Or fuck ugly but could suck dick really good. “What made this woman special?”

“We don’t know yet. However, we now know that Jean never lets her leave the house without a guard.”

“A very special prisoner.”

“And she lives in Jean’s mansion at Lake Washington.”

“That mansion? Jean hardly goes there. He lives at the Westin Tower downtown.”

“Right.”

“How long has she been with Jean?”

“We don’t know.”

“Damn, Jean is fucking good in keeping secrets.” *Can’t believe this.* “Do we know if this woman was taken, kidnapped, or Jean did kill her because she pissed him off, but wants it to sound like she simply disappeared?”

“She ran away.”

“Good for her. Only an idiot would want to stay with that bastard.”

“Might not be good if she gets caught. Jean is livid.”

“How long has this woman been gone?”

“Since this morning.”

“She never leaves the house without a chaperone, but she managed to

disappear.”

“Snitch didn’t get the detail on how exactly she escaped without her guard noticing.”

“Could be that she sucked the guard’s dick to let her go and make it look like she had managed to escape.”

“Whatever the reason, it’s not my concern. She disappeared after she played for Seattle Symphony.”

“Okay, so we know that she’s a musician who plays for Seattle Symphony. There’s our ticket to finding out who she is.”

“No need. I already called. The director said they don’t have a Taylor Monte Carlo that plays for them. My hunch tells me that she uses a different name.”

“How do we know her name is Taylor Monte Carlo?”

“Snitch bribed the limo driver.”

“He only thought to do it now?”

“The regular driver couldn’t be bribed. The reliever was new. Snitch knew right away he could bribe the schmuck. For fifty bucks and a hit, he got everything that I just told you.”

“Anything else? Family, school, boyfriends?”

“No records or anything. We don’t want to ask Seattle Symphony for more information. The bells would start ringing, then Jean would know we are looking



for this woman.”

“Did Snitch describe her at all?”

“Uh-huh. He used only one word to describe her.”

“And that’s what?”

“Goddess.”

“That doesn’t mean shit. Taylor could be a man’s name. Didn’t Snitch fuck a transvestite he thought was a woman because he was high?”

“God. You and your brothers. Don’t know why Katherine asks you Knights to pay a quarter each time you curse. She should have made it ten bucks. Because a quarter obviously didn’t help any of you stop from cursing. Fine. She could be as ugly as a burned wood. Well, at least we know there is a woman involved with Jean who, at present, is a prick in his balls. Other than that, we know shit. So, I don’t have the answers to the whys right now. One thing for sure, though, Congressman Jean wants to find his woman.”

“And you want me to find her.”

“Yes. I smell something foul, Knight. Find the source before the stench spread. Jean is intent on finding this woman. We need to know why. Get to her first. Most likely she heard or saw things about Jean. I have a feeling she’s your ticket to sending Jean’s ass to jail.”

*Or in hell.*

“Focus on finding Taylor. And when you do, get as much information as you can from her. Maybe we could put her on the stand. Find her and you’ll find Jean. It should be easy. We are the fucking FBI.”

“I’ll see what I can do.” *Taylor. Pretty name. But is she pretty? Who the fuck cares?*

“As soon as Taylor’s picture gets in my inbox, I’ll forward it to you.”

“There must be a picture of her somewhere else.”

“We looked. Couldn’t find one. Not even a blurry one. Jean did a great job of keeping her out of prying eyes. As far as everyone knows, Taylor doesn’t exist. How Jean did that, who the fuck knows. I suppose if he could hide his shit, he could hide a woman easily.”

“Maybe Jean’s afraid Taylor will start talking about his puny dick.”

“Agent, enough. Just find the woman. Damn pictures and documents are all digital now.”

“Where is the picture coming from?”

“Snitch took it with his cell phone.”

“How did he get it?”

“He was at the orchestra and took the picture of the group. We don’t know which one is Taylor, but that’ll be easy enough to figure out.”

“And Snitch is clueless about the mysteriousness clouding Taylor,” Bors said more to himself.

“If he knows something, he would have told me. He knows better than to hide that kind of information. It’s either spill what he knows or sit his ass in jail.”

Curious about the woman, his impatience bubbled on the surface. “Why couldn’t you just ask for his cell phone?”

“Agent, I would if the fucking man hadn’t drop it in the toilet while emptying his sagging fat stomach and filling the toilet bowl with his crap. Don’t ask me questions as if I don’t know how to do my job.”

Bors winced when Simms started pounding on the keyboard. He kept his mouth shut. Everyone knew not to challenge Simms intellect. Like him, the man cared too much about his job. So much in fact, that he forgot he had a wife waiting at home. That was before she divorced him. With his wife gone, Simms became ornery, quick to lash out. Office staff, including the janitor, understood. Simms regretted losing his wife.

Since work caused his marriage to fall apart, he vowed to show that he hadn’t lost his wife for nothing. Bors decided not to suggest searching for Seattle Symphony’s website to check for the pictures. Jean might see it as *telling him what to do*. Besides, they wouldn’t know which one was the runaway Taylor.

Simms fist pounded his table. “And I don’t know why the fuck we have to use a computer. Memos, reports, forms. All saved in a computer folder. Whoever said that jobs are a lot easier now that we use computers is a fucking lunatic. And

Mac not wanting to talk to PC makes my life fucking harder. I'll forward the copy to you or have Astrid do it. No, maybe I'll print it, *if* the printer works."

"Whatever medium you use is fine with me, sir." When he got home, he would do his own searching. Right now, like Simms, he wasn't in the mood to *surf* the net.

"The media doesn't know about Taylor yet. As soon as this gets out, they will be all over this story like flies on warm cow dung. I doubt Jean will be ordering hot young virgins for a while. But through Taylor—I'm following my gut here—we'll get something to pin the son of a bitch. Consider this new scoop a break. Now, go to the hospital and take care of your wound. Take a long fucking shower and sleep. You're a danger to yourself, to me, and to this agency, if you continue walking around like a damn zombie. I don't want another stupid shooting in my office."

Bors knew whom Simms was thinking about. A rookie. Eager and excited about his work, he had tried to impress Simms. The kid worked his ass off until he couldn't keep his eyes open anymore. He fell asleep standing, must have dreamt about having a shootout, and started firing inside. No one was hurt, but what happened became the joke in the office, so the rookie had to be transferred to keep his dignity intact, or what was left of it.

"I'll call Branyan and let him know I'll be in island for a few days."

“Forget it. I’ll talk to him. You look half-asleep. You’ll probably bungle the information.”

Shit. How hard could it be to say you’re gonna be gone? Bors made a fist and winced at the shooting pain in his arm. The cut was big enough to require stitches. Swedish Hospital is in Capitol Hill and Broadway. Only a couple blocks from Third Ave. He thought for a minute. Nah, why go there when he could go to his brother’s clinic and have him stitch his cut.

“I’ll go see my brother.”

“Good. Spend time with your family while waiting for my goddamn email. Do your research over on the island. How’s that house of yours?”

“Finished. Kitchen appliances were delivered three weeks ago.”

“Good. When are you going to plant someone in there to use the appliances while waiting for you?”

Bors snorted. “And act like Branyan, always texting his wife? Or my brother Tristan, begging Julie to come to his clinic so he can see her. They are both drunkenly in love. No fucking way I’m going to follow their footsteps. At least not anytime soon.”

“Well, good. I don’t want another agent filing for a paternity leave anyway. Say hi to Judge Knight and hug your mother for me. I’ll see you Sunday.”

“Okay.” Sunday? Simms worked on Sundays, too. What was so important in

the island that he'd leave his work? Damn, he had a feeling he was forgetting something. But he'd cut his own fingers before he asked Jean what he meant by Sunday. His boss would only insist that he take a vacation because his brain needed to be charged and rebooted. If he said Sunday then fine, he'd see him then.

## Chapter Two

Kind of weird being alone for the first time. Alone. Lordy, Taylor never thought she'd be alone until she expelled her last breath. No one watching, or following her every move felt kind of nice. Taylor didn't miss it all, but she couldn't shake the feeling that any minute someone would grab her from behind. And she kept expecting to see her father's runner appear at the door or in a corner of the room.

So this was how it felt like to be free.

Taylor lowered her black violin case beside her chair while she waited for a nurse to call her name. She suppose she should have gone to the hospital and gotten immediate treatment for her sprained ankle, but her need to get as far away as possible from Jean had her riding the first Kingston ferryboat to Orcas Island, the largest of San Juan Islands.

Letting out a deep and long sigh, she diverted her mind off Jean and smiled at the little boy using the chair beside her as a table. He'd been opening and closing the page of a pop-up book, laughing at the dancing clowns that sprang up. How wonderful to be a child, she thought. No worries whether the world was in



chaos or if the sun stopped shining. Too bad adults stopped seeing the world the way children do when they age. Like snakes, we shed that innocence as we get older, which kind of sucked.

The boy giggled as if someone tickled him. Spit dripped down his chin.

*I wish I could laugh easily like that.*

Taylor had happy childhood memories. She was born in Italy, lived there with her Italian mother until she was twelve. Her mother, as she recalled, was a shopaholic. Whenever she shopped, Taylor went. They frequented stores the way religious fanatics would their church. She remembered the streets, different languages, and her mom speaking in Italian. She also remembered laughing a lot. Just like her late mother.

A day after her twelfth birthday, she and her mom traveled here in the United States to see Jean. When she asked who Jean was, her mother only said, “A politician with money”.

They stayed in a hotel and waited for him. It was late at night when Jean arrived. He smiled at her, said hi, touched her head, and told her how beautiful she was. And then he told her to go to the bedroom and stay there. If she thought it odd, she didn’t say anything.

The next night, he came again. His visits became a routine. Once in a while they would eat dinner together, but not in a restaurant. Always in their hotel

room. She heard her mother asked Jean why they had to stay in the hotel and not live with him. Taylor remembered that most of the time, her mom's questioning turned into full-blown arguments and then Jean would leave.

One day, her mom told her to get dressed. They would visit Jean, she said. They took a taxi and found the address Mom wrote on a sticky note. Standing beside her mom, she listened to her talk to a man over the intercom. The man who answered said that Jean wasn't home and would be gone for a week. But when her mom said it was Trisha Monte Carlo calling, the gate opened right away.

She remembered sitting on the couch with her mother who complained endlessly about Jean. But Taylor didn't mind the wait. She liked the house. It was bigger than the hotel, of course. But it was the view that captivated her interest. It faced the magnificent Mount Rainier and Lake Washington where boats sailed by back and forth. She loved the commanding views of sunsets and sunrises and boats dotting the calm water. After that, she never wanted to leave. Sentiments that she had shared with her mother. That day, she wished they lived in that house. A week later, when Jean came home, he had made her dream come true.

What she didn't realize was that the house would become her and her mom's private jail. At the time, she had not understood why and she didn't care. But her mother took it hard. She had turned her attention to alcohol, and everything went downhill.

The boy lifted the book and called to his mother, sitting on the other corner of the room busy chatting with the other mothers. The young mother simply raised her manicured fingers. One of the babies in the baby carrier whimpered. Another one followed and then another. Suddenly the room resonated with the cries of babies. It was quite interesting to listen to. Kind of like frog mating calls. It began with one frog breaking the silence then others quickly following.

The mothers fussed over their babies. One by one, the crying stopped until the room was quiet again. From the other part of the room, a toddler fell flat on his face. He screamed like a banshee. The mother rushed to his side and kissed his face.

“There boo-boo’s gone,” she whispered. The boy nodded and went back to playing.

*A mother’s kiss. A quick cure to aches and pains. When Jean finds me, no cure in this world will heal the pain he’ll inflict upon me. This time I bet he’ll toss me back to Italy like he said he would if I try to run away again. Living in Ital isn’t bad, but I’m not going to leave until I’m sure Jean changes. I must save him.*

Taylor moved her foot and groaned from the pain that shot up to her calf and leg. In a hurry to get a cab so she could escape, she ran on the cobbled street without a thought that she might break a heel. So when it did, it caught her by surprise. Twisting her ankle, she landed hard on the ground. It was a good thing

she was able to lean on her violin case, which somewhat broke her fall.

Taylor grimaced at the sorry state of her sling-backed, four-inch high heels. The tips were scuffed, and one heel was loose like a tooth ready to come off any minute. Too bad her double violin case didn't have enough room for her shoes. She was barely able to fit a change of clothes for one night. Taking another bag would have looked suspicious so she opted from carrying one. She should have put her toiletry bag in her purse. Oh well. Later, she'd buy personal necessities.

While on the ferryboat, she had changed into her green blouse with puffy short sleeve. It wasn't her favorite because she practically spilled out of it. Her hip-hugger felt tight, too. God, she must have gained weight since she bought these clothes last month.

Cripes, she shouldn't think about her shoes and clothes. She should focus on her alibi when the doctor asked about what happened and why she came here in the children's clinic instead of a hospital or general practitioner. Well, she could try telling the doctor that another clinic was out of the question because the cab driver she hired after she got off the ferryboat said that this was as far as her cash could go. But how she injured her self? Taylor could say she was born a klutz.

*Oh yeah. I knew my clumsiness would come in handy.*

Taylor shifted in her seat. *Come on, what is taking so long?* She didn't mind the wait, but sitting in the same room with sniffing children and one dirty, garbage

smelly hobo guy wearing a nice pair of water stained black leather boots and what must be expensive jacket—if she were to judge it base on the material—with a tear on the left arm wasn't good. Last thing she wanted right now was to catch a cold or flu.

Hobo guy moved his foot. His white shirt and jeans, Taylor noticed, were filthy and one would think he had been in a fight, rolled around in muddy dirt and the only injury he received was the ugly red cut on his arm. Was the cut his reason for being here?

Maybe he, like her, didn't want whomever he had a fight with to find him in the hospital. But she didn't hear him check in. He just walked in, sat down, and then went to sleep. Maybe he called in ahead of time. But then again, why come in a pediatric clinic? Taylor wondered if the man came here from Seattle, too, and like her hoped to find a hiding place in this beautiful San Juan Island.

Taylor looked at the pair of legs stretched across the floor. She wondered what happened to him. Maybe he was in a bar fight last night, got knocked out, and woke up beside the garbage bin. However, with his frame, it would be difficult to do that unless the tosser possessed same height and build. Funny thing, though, despite the man's appearance and stench, the young receptionist practically swooned when he walked in. She said a breathy hi and then giggled. The poor thing turned bright red, making her pimples more visible. Surprisingly, the girl had

managed to take her eyes off this— maybe over six feet tall — man who closely resembled a troglodyte. Long tangled hair, dirty clothes. Oh yeah, a caveman.

The air stirred. Taylor got a whiff of the man's pungent smell. If it weren't rude to pinch her nose, she would have done so now. So she just tried to control her breathing until her chest felt like exploding. Sheez. Didn't this guy know he could infect the babies with whatever he was carrying? If a cockroach started crawling out of the man's jacket, she'd be out of there in a hurry. The hell with her broken ankle.

*Yew! I hate cockroaches.*

Too bad the waiting room was full, otherwise she'd sit somewhere else. The doctors here must be raking dough. Good for him, but tough for her because she had to wait. Who knew how long it would take before the nurse called her name. Three mothers with wailing kids came in the same time she checked in. It was so loud and chaotic that she didn't even catch the doctor's name. Not that she was interested. All she wanted was for the doctor to give her something for the pain and put a cast on her ankle. There were two doctors here, but the receptionist named Cindy said Doctor Edmund with a last name she couldn't remember would see her. Whoever treated her would be fine with her.

Jean had a private doctor at his beck and call. Taylor never experienced waiting in a clinic's wait room. She grew up having her own nanny and a nurse to

tend to her without ever leaving her room if she were sick. Being a daughter of a rich congressman had its own advantages, but she'd exchange a bus for a limousine anytime.

Wiggling her toes, she scanned the room. *Looks like this clinic is the best in town. It's Toyland here.* Whoever designed the waiting room had comfort and entertainment in mind. Kids and parents could wait here all day without complaint. *Finding Nemo* played on the twenty-four inch flat screen television, a small playhouse stood in the corner, and toys of all shapes, sizes, and colors were everywhere. Who wouldn't want to be here? Even the moms looked happy.

She checked her time. Gad, she couldn't believe it. It had only been five minutes since she checked in, but it felt like hours. She'd give this doctor ten more minutes. After that...no. She had to wait and make sure the doctor looked at her ankle. Then she'd move on to her next big problem. Like finding the cottage she saw online and call the judge she found on Google. Based on the article she read, Judge Knight was honest and could not be bribed. She hoped so. If not, her escape effort and sprain ankle would be for naught.

Big Foot shifted from his position. Taylor couldn't stop herself this time. She plugged her nose up.

The boy playing with the pop-up book looked at her. "He's stinky."

"Pinch your nose like this and breathe through your mouth."



The boy did, but didn't exhale until his face turned bright red.

Without removing the fingers pinching her nose, she told the kid to breathe.

The kid laughed. "You sound funny. He's stinky and you're funny."

"Shhh, we don't want to wake him up," Taylor whispered. "See his boots? They're huge because he is Big Foot. And Big Foot, when awakened, is a meany."

"Is he gonna eat me?" The boy's chin quivered and he began to whimper.

*Oh dear.* "Don't cry. He's not going to eat you." Luckily, the nurse called the boy's name before he started crying. The boy's mom didn't waste any time grabbing his arm. The two followed the nurse in a hurry. Taylor was about to take the vacated seat but one of the mothers sat the baby carrier on the chair.

"Well, I'll just have to endure."

Big Foot must have bionic ears because he slowly opened his eyes. They were red-rimmed, deep blue, and staring at her. He lifted one brow then grinned.

Taylor's heart turned over in response to his stare. *Lordy, what beautiful eyes.* Now that she'd seen his eyes, she began to see the rest of him past the dirty clothing. His legs were long like those of an athlete. The dirty shirt he wore showed his flat stomach and contours of his chest. And his unwashed long hair, lord, long dark and curling at the base of his neck. Cripes, she was a sucker for wavy longhaired guys. *No, except Fabio. His hair is thin and gross.*

All of a sudden, she didn't mind sitting across from him anymore. Big Foot,

despite his appearance, was not bad looking at all. In fact, his compelling blue eyes, rakish grin, confident set of his shoulders, and long thighs qualified him as a handsome man—in a rugged way. Her gaze lowered to his mouth. Not small and not too big either. Perfect for kissing. Enough to cover hers. Taylor decided she liked his mouth, too. If he didn't smell like month old garbage, he would be perfect. She kept on staring. It was rude; she knew it. But she was staring for precautionary measure. In case Big Foot suddenly turned into a seven-foot handsome gargoyle, she could run out the door right away.

A walking sin. Yes, that he was. Any man who had the ability to mesmerize, to stun, to muddle a brain and to make a woman's body tingle, must remain hidden in a religious residence. Especially this one. He was a temptation. Why, in a short time, he had her imagining wicked things about him. Like seeing him naked. Sparkly clean or not.

The sexy lips began to smile. Taylor looked at him. Gad, how did she miss it? This man was the best of the best of the Abercrombie models. Oh, she bet he would look even better on the show, Dirty Jobs, wearing jeans splattered with mud, shirtless...

The man's lips quirked up as if trying to stop his smile.

*Man, what great mouth you have.*

"Thinking about kissing me?"

Taylor blinked in surprise. “What?”

“I asked if you’re thinking about kissing me.”

“Kissing you?” Handsome maybe, but gentleman he wasn’t. “Of course not. No, no. I was thinking more along the line of showers. We, I mean, you should...in need of one.” *Crap, brain. Work!*

“Ah, so you’re having fantasies about us.”

Taylor’s cheeks burned. “What fantasies?” He was fantasizing seeing him naked, but not with her. So rude. If her feet weren’t hurting, she would kick his shin.

“Us. Taking a shower together.”

“You’re nuts. Are you sure you should be in this clinic? Really, you obviously don’t belong here. This place is for kids, therefore, conversations are rated G.”

“I am a frequent visitor here.”

“Why, are the doctors here using you as an example of what a dirty person looks like?”

“No. But the doctors always tell the kids to eat their veggies so they would grow up as big, strong and handsome as me.”

Taylor looked at the receptionist who kept glancing at the man with a dreamy look on her face. “The doctors here must be nuts to take you in as a patient since you’re obviously over eighteen and arrogant.”

“Arrogant?”

“Not very many would call themselves beautiful or handsome.”

“But I am handsome.” The man smiled showing his white straight teeth.

“Says who?”

“Can’t remember their names.”

“They must be blind.”

“Man, I thought I’m hot.”

“Hot is Christian Bale.”

“Have you met him?”

“Once. He said hi, I said hello. He smelled nice and...well, his hair was kind of like yours but clean.”

“Tough competition.”

“Very tough.” She picked up a Parenting Magazine, turned the pages without seeing the articles. Her mind focused on the man sitting across from her staring boldly as if she was some kind of an interesting movie.

“Did you dream about kissing him the way you did when you were looking at me a minute ago?”

“No.” She snapped the magazine close. “And will you stop saying that I dreamed of kissing an icky, stinky, jerk like you. You still must be dreaming.”

“Icky? You’re no sparkling clean goddess yourself.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“What happened to you? Looks like the Greek gods tossed you out of Olympus and landed on a barge full of garbage.”

The woman’s jaw slackened and her eyes grew rounder before they turned into slits to give him the I-will-strangle-you look he often got from his sister when he riled her. Bors couldn’t help it. He laughed. Damn she was pretty. Who was this woman? Definitely not from here. He and his brothers knew all, if not most, of the hot woman in the area. But not this one.

New in town? Must be visiting someone for a week. He glanced down at the black oblong shaped case sitting on the floor and then looked back at her charming face. Her scowl went deeper. Yeah, a visitor.

Bors was used to charming women’s panties with his smile. He’d never met one that didn’t find him funny or handsome. Okay, he stunk and he needed a haircut, but man, he was still a hunk, right? Apparently, not for this woman.

If it weren’t for the pain on his arm, he’d think he was dreaming of facing an angel: tempting curved mouth, thick dark lashes, exquisitely dainty nose, and dark brown-rimmed coffee eyes that reminded him of Starbucks Frappuccino. Her cheeks resembled a flush of sunset on snow with the most delicious light brown skin. Oh yeah. Darn beautiful.

Her dark hair with flecks of gold and dark brown hung carelessly over her shoulders. Windblown or finger-brushed? He didn't care. He could stare at her forever.

She must be of a mixed race. Euro-American maybe. He couldn't tell. One thing for sure though, the woman was a freaking goddess. Her green top hugged her body. The design meant to expose her shoulders, but he wasn't quite sure if the designer's intention was for her breasts to look ready to pop out. Not that he minded looking. The brown silk ribbon tied around her midriff emphasized the size of those perfectly molded tits. Man, she looked delectable.

He'd had his share of women. In all honesty he liked them, enjoyed their presence, especially in the bedroom. He loved their womanly scent, their voice, their soft fingers and silky thighs. He particularly loved the look of a woman after sex. They glow like fireflies at night.

But this woman sitting across from him made him think of nice things. Wickedly nice things like licking ice cream off her lips, taking the first bite off a freshly baked brownie, lying naked on the grass with her sitting astride him, leaning forward with her hair touching his face, waiting for a hot and wet kiss, and the erotic feel of crisp sheet beneath him with her on top and again naked. His mind supplied the vision of what he would do to her and quickly overindulged. As quick as a finger snap, his body turned hot. His dick hardened. In a matter of

minutes he'd developed an intense lust for her, which to his estimation she didn't return. She looked annoyed and in pain. Bors looked down at her feet. One ankle was red and a bit swollen.

The woman grimaced. "You're staring."

Bors shifted from his position. "I know. Can't help it."

"It's rude."

"Better than what I'm thinking right now."

The woman stuttered while she colored prettily. "What? Good god. A pack of buffoons must have raised you. Got to be. Lusting after a wounded woman...unbelievable."

Her reaction was what he wanted. To invoke anger to take her mind off her foot. "Lusting? Who said anything about lusting?" *You have no idea, baby.*

"You just said...never mind."

"What happened to your foot?"

"Twisted it. Now it's broken."

Bors looked at the woman's black shoes. They were scuffed, dirty, and one heel barely attached to the shoe. Despite the damage, the shoes looked new.

"If I were you, I'd remove that darn thing. Hell, it looks useless to me."

"My foot?"

Bors grinned. "Your one heel. It's broken."

“And walk without it.”

“I would think it’s better to walk without it.”

“And you know that, how? You wore shoes with a missing heel before?”

“No, but with your ankle red and swollen—”

“Swollen? My ankle is perfectly fine.”

“Wow. Sorry, I didn’t know that’s your ankle’s normal size,” he remarked with sarcasm.

“Please leave me and my ankle alone.”

First, she was wounded. Now she was fine? A proud woman. Bors leaned forward without taking his eyes off the most amazing and beautiful dark green eyes he’d ever seen. Eyes that spoke defiance, courage, intelligence, brevity, and secrets. Yes, secrets. He’d seen enough pair of eyes to know. In his line of work, all he had to do was look at the person and he’d know if he or she was lying. And the woman sitting in front of him eyes betrayed her.

Tristan and Edmund’s admirers were mothers who’d take their kids to the clinic for minor cuts just to see the handsome doctors. But Miss I Am Fine here didn’t have a child with her. She cradled her purse instead of a baby. “If you’re fine, why are you here?”

The woman glanced to her left then to her right. Yup, not so good in keeping secrets at all, he thought.



“To see the doctor.”

“I know that.”

“Okay, my foot hurts.”

“Were you running away from a boyfriend you dumped, or was a mad woman after you because she caught you making out with her boyfriend?”

“Your question is convoluted and highly devious. I shouldn’t answer you, but I won’t have you thinking you are right. For your information, I would never consort with a man who is already involved with another *and* I don’t have a boyfriend to chase after me. And my swollen ankle, as you nicely put it, why I broke it is none of your business. So, just leave me alone. And why don’t you just go back to sleep. You look tired.”

With his body in full alert, no way he could go back to sleep. No boyfriend, huh? She must be one of those women who never dated a man without a tie or polished shoes. The delicious looking woman in front of him raised her chin a bit. Feisty. She may look rumped, but damn, he loved staring at her.

Her ankle looked swollen, but definitely not broken since she could still move her foot. Bors peered closer and made a move to touch the tip of her shoe to make sure. The woman made a low screeching sound of a trapped mouse, getting the attention of everyone in the room. Even the whiny kids stopped making noises.

“Good god, woman. Normally, people scream when they feel the pain.”

“I am anticipating the pain,” she hissed.

Beautiful, maybe, but she was a nutty. He leaned back against the chair again and studied the woman. Everything about her was expensive. Her matching sapphire earrings, ring, bracelet, necklace and shoes spelled money. Even her shoulder bag screamed dough. She looked like a shiny dime in a basket full of pennies. Trendy, smelled so nice, and agitated. Now, what was she doing here in a pediatric clinic?

“Your foot is not broken.”

“How do you know? You’re not a doctor.”

“I’ve seen enough broken bones to know. See that part of your ankle?” He pointed at her red ankle.

She leaned forward to look. Their heads were so close, Bors got a whiff of her shampoo. Vanilla and something else. Whatever it was, it smelled really good.

“Yeah? What about it?”

“You just sprained it. Definitely not broken.”

“Well, maybe it’s not broken, but it hurts like hell.”

“I bet. What you need is a cold compress, rest your foot and the soreness will be gone before you know it. Here, you can prop your foot on my seat.” He spread his legs to make room for her foot.

“You trust me to place my foot in between your legs.”

“You can’t hurt me.” *Worse than I am in right now.* He wanted to stand up and pull his pants down a bit to make room for his swollen dick, but he didn’t want her to notice his discomfort.

“Believe me. I am capable of making a man go down on his knees—big or small.”

*Oh, crikey!* “Whenever you change your mind.” He tapped the space in between his legs. “If I were you, I’d just stay at home, rent a movie, eat popcorn, brownies or Oreo cookies. A Crunch ice cream bar is good while watching a good movie. Have you tried Avocado shake?”

“No. I would rather eat artichoke & ripe olive tuna salad. Or couscous, lentil & arugula salad with garlic-dijon vinaigrette. Or dandelion salad with goat cheese & tomato dressing.”

“Did you say dandelion. My god. What are you? A bear? And how can you say no to an avocado shake? Man, I tell you avocado with milk, sugar, and ice is a delish.”

“So you want me to go home and eat until I look like a blimp to match my swollen ankle.”

“Baby, you’re gonna need more than a case of ripe avocado to fatten you up.”

“Are you saying I’m skinny?” She huffed then bent down to rub on her sore ankle.

Man, what was it about women and their ankles and weight. Bors knew he touched a sensitive topic. Based on his experience with his sister and sister in-law, he learned never to mention anything about a woman's figure unless you were complimenting them. He decided not to answer the woman. Instead he moved forward, laced his fingers together and rested his elbows on his thighs.

"If you're in real pain, I could twist the doctor's arm to see you right away." The woman looked up. If he moved a couple inches closer he could kiss her. Awesome thought, but he didn't succumb to it. He bet this woman wouldn't hesitate to sock him if he did. Although a kiss for a punch would be worth it. Gawain would agree with him, he bet.

"You're a brute, a bully, a..." she snapped her fingers, "...a gangster."

"All of the above, baby. I'm a mean, nasty fighter. Just say it and I'll scare the doctor so he can see you now."

"You're not funny."

Bors grinned. "Or if you want, I could kiss your owwie away for you."

"Nice try. No, thanks. I'd probably catch rabies from you," she said and broke into an easy, friendly smile.

Bors wasn't ready for it. Her smile wiped away the memories of last night's job and melted his insides. He smiled back. A wayward strand of auburn hair covered the woman's left eyes.

Bors raised his arm to push it back, but the ripped part of his jacket touched his wound. Pain from his arm traveled all the way down to the tips of his fingers.

“Shit!”

“You owe the curse jar fifty cents, sweetheart.”

Bors looked up. Julie, his sister in-law, stood in front of him with her arms akimbo. Her round stomach protruded, and she looked lovelier than ever. “Hey love.”

“What happened?”

“Nothing worth worrying about.” Bors stood up to give Julie a hug, but she stopped him.

“I would give you a hug except you kind of smell.”

“I know. But you still love me.”

“Of course. Smelly or not. You’re covered with germs.”

“Do you think they have enough hand sanitizer here to wash me?”

“Ha. Ha. Sweetheart, you’re worse than Pig-Pen right now. Are you okay? A woman didn’t do this to you, did she? I swear I’ll gouge her eyes out, who ever she is.”

“Hush, love. It’s nothing.”

“Tell me what happened?”

“You don’t want to know. How’s the baby?”

“Already giving me a hard time. Kicking my bladder. I have to go to the bathroom every ten minutes.”

Bors leaned down then kissed Julie’s pumpkin-round belly. “Listen to me buddy. Don’t give mommy a hard time. She’s a wonderful woman and I love her. You’ll love her, too, when you meet her.”

“Excuse me.” Both Bors and Julie looked at the beautiful woman. She looked flushed, angry, and so damn enticing. Like a ripe apple you just want to take a bite off.

“Yes?” Julie asked smiling.

“I don’t mean to intrude, but I’m not just going to sit here listening to your husband sweet talk you. You seemed to be a nice woman who looks familiar to me and who obviously loves him, but this man you married is one fat jerk and in need of disciplining.” She turned to look at Bors. “You are one bad troll.”

The sound of a cell phone ringing interrupted the woman’s tirade. She reached inside her handbag, read whatever message was on the screen before shoving the cell phone back in her purse.

It didn’t escape Bors the way the woman’s face blanched.

“I’m sorry if I sounded like a shrew, but lady, you married a bad apple. Good day.” She slung her purse on her shoulder, picked up her case, then ambled her way out of the clinic.

“She called you a Troll. Not hunk, handsome, sexy, or Mister Irresistible.”

“Yup.”

“My, I didn’t know a woman immune to a Knight’s charm exists.”

“She exists.”

“And the word Troll makes you smile.”

“Couldn’t help it.”

“Either she is blind or she prefers the same sex. Do you think she’s a lesbian?”

“No. Her vanity resembles yours and Kirsten’s.”

“I’m not vain.” Julie swatted his stomach. “Why did she call you a troll? What was that all about?”

“I think she likes me.”

“But she called you a fat jerk.”

“I offered to kiss her sore ankle.”

A knowing smile curved Julie’s mouth. “So you did it on purpose. I should have known something was a foot.”

“I did what on purpose?”

“You know what I mean. You used the super sweet endearment *love*. I expected the bees to attack and swarm us. You purposely avoided mentioning that you are an uncle to this baby. Bors Knight, you flirted with her and pretended you

are this baby's daddy to irritate the woman. Why?"

"To see how she would react."

"Well, you made her angry and she called you a bad apple and worse, a Troll."

"Yes. Because she likes me."

"Oh, god. Men."

"Has she been here before?"

"You'll have to ask Tristan. I normally use the back door and not come here in the receiving room. I came out here because I heard you were out here and wanted to see what's going on."

"Now you saw. It's nothing. Just a minor cut. Don't you have anything better to do than hang out with my baby-puke smelling brother."

"Hey, be nice. I like hanging out here. I get to see the preview of my motherhood. Besides, I like bringing Tristan lunch. We want to spend as much time as we can before this baby comes out." Julie patted her belly. "I think this baby's going to be one spoiled Knight." Her eyes twinkled the way a happy and contented mother's eyes would.

He'd seen the look before. From his mother. Bors patted Julie's stomach. His parents would definitely go crazy when this first grandchild of theirs said hi to the world. His first nephew. The first Knight baby. "Will you do me a favor, love?"



“What is it?”

“Take care of this baby for me. And tell him Uncle Bors loves him.”

“Of course. We’ll all take care of this baby. Come now, sweetheart. Your cut is way too far away from your vital organs. So, are you going to stop that woman from leaving or would you rather see your brother first so he can stitch you up?”

## Chapter Three

Taylor's ankle throbbed as she slowly dragged her foot on the parking lot. Maybe the handsome Big Foot was right. She should just remove the stupid heel. Taylor stopped walking and removed the shoe with a broken heel. Ah, that's better, she thought. But she couldn't very well walk without limping. *Why get rid of the heel? Just get rid this damn shoe. Both of them. I don't care.*

She kicked off her other shoe and left the pair on the parking lot. The rough cement pinched her soles, but it was better than walking like Doctor Frankenstein's helper, Egor. She looked at Tweed's Pharmacy across the street. There must be a sound pair of sneakers there. Yeah, sneakers. Better yet, a pair of running shoes. She could run better and faster if Jean's men showed up here.

She fished her cell phone out of her purse and checked the short text message again. "You can't hide from me, Taylor. Come back and I'll forgive you. Wait longer and you will regret leaving. You can't stay away from me. And remember—know your place, girl." She read the message aloud. So Jean knew she ran away.

She thought about Ray, the gray-eyed bodyguard Jean assigned to her three

years ago. Taylor's nose began to sting. Her chest tightened. So Ray kept his word. He waited before informing Jean about her disappearance. She wondered what he told Jean. God, she hoped Jean didn't punish him. Ray was the only guard who cared enough to engage her in conversations. Not a friend by any means, but he treated her the way he would any other woman—with respect.

Later, she would call him. To let him know that she was okay.

Ray had thought it would be the best if they didn't discuss her destination. The less he knew the better. Jean could skin him alive, but Ray wouldn't know what to tell him about where she went. Calling Ray now would only place him in a bad situation, if he weren't already.

She could almost hear Jean's voice, angry and booming, yelling at everyone to find her. Numerous times, she tried to run away, but failed. One time she took Jean's BMW, although she didn't know how to drive. Instead of driving out of the driveway, she backed the car up and put a gaping hole on the garage's back wall. Not being able to drive sucked. It made it harder to escape. Now, however, at twenty-three with stronger backbones, she was old enough to make a plan. This was the farthest she'd made it without getting caught. And by god, she'd stay on the loose until she carried out her plan for Jean.

For years, she just stood and watched in the shadows while Jean ran his prostitution ring. Many times, with her hands clenched on her sides, she listened

to Jean's clients talk about their pick—the young virgins Jean found and took advantage of. Most of them runaways, seeking refuge and clinging to Jean's promise of shelter and protection. Little they knew they were getting into the beast's den. She'd been to Jean's hangar where he kept the girls instead of his Cessna 180 Airplane.

She had watched and listened in the shadows for a long time. Not anymore. It was time to stop Jean. Oh yeah, she could and would stand her ground. *Enough is enough.*

Enough. Taylor considered the word. Would a threat of divulging his girl trafficking business to the media be enough to stop him? *Well, I'll just have to find that out.* All she needed to do first was find the right person to help her. Jean was one powerful man. Without strong backup with an equal power to support her, Bruno Jean might not feel threatened. Unless prepared, Jean would probably just laugh at her because most likely the majority of Seattle officials had been to his hangar once or twice.

A plan. She needed one right now and she must act quickly. Jean would find her in no time.

But first things first. She must fix her stupid ankle. Big Foot was right. Her ankle wasn't broken. What she needed was a cold compress and to rest her foot. But she would not eat junk like a cow grazing in a meadow.

Taylor shook her head in disbelief. It was unbelievable how the man flirted with her. He was married, for chrimony sakes. But then that didn't mean anything really. She'd seen single, married, straight, gay, old, and young, bid on Jean's girls. Cheaters. Unfaithful pigs. Men, as far as she was concerned, were the same. Including Big Foot.

Married. What a troll. No surprise there. With a package like that, of course, he wouldn't be available anymore. And looking at the woman, he picked a stunning one, too. A beautiful pregnant woman who was probably crying right now because she found out her husband would flirt at every opportunity he got.

She looked at the store again. It was across the street, but she had to walk to the crosswalk to get there. Times like this, she wished she knew how to drive. She could have rented a car instead of hiring a cab. Why didn't she insist that she learn how to drive when Jean had told her not to even dream about driving? Well, why didn't she fight for her right to be free and live like a normal person? Because she was spineless. Jean knew it. Another reason why he shrugged off her threat.

When Jean said her place would always be at the back of the car, at the time, she thought Jean wanted her to know that it was her privilege to be chauffeured all the time. When she turned sixteen, she found out Jean's intention—to show her that he would always be in control of her life. She could go wherever he wanted her to go, but not alone. Ha! What kind of life was that?

Taylor turned toward the crosswalk two blocks from where she stood. Thinking about walking that far made her ankle hurt even more. She supposed she could just cross the road.

*It isn't like I will be crossing a major intersection. Surely, I could do it without getting run over.* She looked from the left then to the right. After the oncoming SUV, she'd cross. She was waiting for the street to clear when someone touched her elbow. Taylor jumped and screeched like a cat with its tail pinned at the same time. She turned around and found the handsome jerk she met at the clinic.

"Sheez, you scared me."

"Sorry. You were so deep in your thoughts you didn't even hear me. I bet you didn't hear the elephants trumpeting."

"What elephant?"

"See? I'm right."

"Whatever." Lifting her chin a bit, she looked at the man. Lord, he was tall, built like a gym rat, rugged looking, and...so handsome. "What do you want? You're not a stalker, are you?"

"Depends."

"Oh god." Taylor took a step away from him.

"Cool it. I'm only a stalker in bed."

"Oh god," Taylor repeated. She couldn't tell which type of stalker was

worse.

“You call god all the time.”

“Only when I’m facing a troll like you. So, can I help you?”

“Actually, I’m here to offer my help. Crosswalk is over there,” he jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

“I know that!” Taylor snapped. “You scared me just to tell me that the crosswalk is over there.”

“I didn’t mean to. Like I said, crosswalk is that a way.”

“So? Can’t I just cross here?”

“No.”

“What are you? Some kind of a traffic police?”

“Worse.”

“Lord, just what I need. A citizen’s arrest.” She noticed he was holding her shoes. “Those are mine.”

“I figured since you’re barefoot. You must have misunderstood when I said get rid of the heel.”

“I didn’t. It feels better to walk barefoot.”

“You’ll regret it if you stepped on something sharp. Where are you going? Did you leave your car at Tweed’s parking lot?”

“I wish I had a car.”

“You look like someone who could afford one.”

“Did I say I can’t afford a car?”

“Meow!”

“Please leave. You’re annoying.”

“Hmm. I’m not used to that word. Charming, yes.”

*Without a doubt, you are the most handsome man I’ve ever met. Too bad, you’re married.*

*Sucks to be me!* “Nice talking to you. Goodbye. I’m going to Tweed’s to find a pair of shoes.”

“You’ll definitely find a pair there. Shoes that are made specifically for seniors with bunions and swollen ankles.”

“What?”

“Babe, Tweed’s is a pharmacy, not Nordstrom or Neiman Marcus. You’ll only find medicinal shoes there. You still want to go there?”

“Yes. I don’t care about the type of shoes I find there as long as I can have something to wear right now.”

“How about if I give you a ride?”

Taylor raised her brow. *Is this handsome hunk for real?* “A ride?”

“Well, wanna drive instead? I have a truck.”

“Dude, you need a brain scan. Please leave me alone before your pregnant wife sees you talking to me and gouges my eyes out. Oh, and no thank you for the



ride. And no to driving your truck; I want to live. I maybe in pain but I'm not desperate enough to get in a car with a stranger, especially a married creep."

His mouth shifted to a curving smile, showing his perfect white teeth. "You're feisty, aren't you? Are you always like this high-strung?"

"Only when a creep is trying to pick me up."

"Bors," he offered his hand.

"My god, your name befits your manners. Boors."

"Bors, baby. With one O. You know, King Arthur's knight."

"I've heard of Tristan, Percival, and Guinevere's lover Lancelot. But not Bors. Were you the one who cleaned and sharpened the knights' swords?"

"Bors may not be as popular as the others, but I tell you I am the hottest of them all."

"God help us from vain men."

"You can shake my hand. I used hand sanitizer in the clinic and sanitized my hands and arms. The doctor in there is a clean freak. I don't think I'm contagious."

Taylor stared at his hand, almost twice the size of her own. She debated whether to tell him her name or not. What if Jean had already issued an APB on her? But then he might not. After all, she was Jean's secret daughter only the select few knew about.

"Not used to shaking people's hand or you don't know how."

Taylor scrunched up her nose. “Of course I know how.” She just didn’t like shaking men’s hand, especially those that frequents Jean’s office and she never failed to let them know that. Her disgust for those men always seeking company of young women showed each time she faced them. Jean might have kept her like a prisoner in her own home, but he failed to keep her from voicing her opinion. Considering they weren’t in Jean’s living room, she decided to keep her thoughts about men to herself. “Sorry. I’m just not used to meeting a tall man with big...boots.” God, what a lame excuse.

“Six-two is not freakishly tall.”

Taylor shook his hand and gave him the name only her mother used to call her. “Teej” The name was real. Her mother used to call her that. Short for Taylor Jean. A nickname that went into the grave with her mother.

“Please to meet you, Teej. By the way, the woman you met isn’t my wife. She’s my sister in-law, Julie.”

“Uh-huh. And I’m supposed to believe you, why?”

“Because I’m telling the truth. I could call her if you want.”

“Not necessary. Well, nice meeting you Bors. As much as I’d love to chat, I can’t. Have to go. Busy.” Taylor punctuated her last word with a nod. What a lie. But she wasn’t here to meet drop dead gorgeous men. She met his stare and felt the urge to smile. Why? Perhaps the same reason why the receptionist blushed to the

roots of her hair. Because he was a single and sinfully sexy man?

“That’s it?”

“Excuse me?”

“Aren’t you a bit intrigued why I followed you?”

“No. But since you asked, maybe you want to apologize for being a knuckle head?”

Bors grinned. A devilish look came into his eyes. “That’s close.”

“Why don’t you just tell me?”

“I thought maybe you need some assistance.”

“Ah, so you’re a knight in dirty armor trying to save a damsel—”

“Without shoes.”

“Thus the reason why I am crossing the street.”

“Well, you can’t.”

“Just watch me.”

“Can’t let you cross the street.”

“Nice meeting you, Bors. I have to go.” She turned so quickly that her ankle buckled beneath her. Taylor would have landed on the ground if Bors hadn’t reach for her waist to stop her fall.

“Easy, babe.”

“Oh god. My foot is dead.”

“Hang on to your case.”

“What are you doing?”

“If you don’t want to ride in my car, I’ll give you a ride.”

“What? What?”

“I heard you the first time.”

Taylor’s mind focused on Bors strong hold on her waist that she missed his intention. Before she realized what was happening, the world shifted and turned.

“Put me down. Are you crazy?”

“I must be,” he mumbled, but Taylor heard him.

Bors’ arms felt strong against her back and thighs. Not knowing what to do with her other arm, she wrapped it around his neck. He smelled like garbage that sat in the can for a week. But she thought it wasn’t a good time to remind him of that fact. After all, he was trying to be heroic. “Why did your sister in-law think a woman hurt you?” Taylor pointed at the cut that must have hurt like crazy.

“She knows I would never let any man do this to me without killing him.”

“Do you always pretend she’s your wife?”

“Not all the time. Only if I want to keep beautiful women from fawning all over me.”

“You could wear a wedding ring.”

“Well, I didn’t say I don’t want them near me all the time.”

“You’re a profligate, you know that?” It was all she could say. Taylor shook her head. The only man she knew with such big ego was Jean, but he wasn’t nearly as handsome as Bors.

“Hard not to.”

She wondered how often he’d let women near him. Perhaps as often as he changes his underwear. “Do you get hurt a lot?”

“That’s what my mom told me. Especially when I was a kid.”

“You’re not a kid anymore and you still get hurt.”

“Once in a while. Just part of my job.”

“What do you do? Not a boxer, I hope. You’re too pretty to be one, you know.”

“I’m not a boxer. And what the hell do you mean I’m pretty?”

“Forget I said it. You know, when someone gives you a compliment, you’re supposed to say thank you.”

“Baby, you just insulted me by saying I’m pretty.”

“I guess trolls are not pretty.”

Bors replied with a snort. Taylor decided to keep quiet and watched where they were going instead. His stride didn’t break until they were inside Tweed’s Pharmacy in the middle of the shoes isle.

“Here we go. I’ll get someone to help you.” He put her down. “You okay?”

“Yeah.”

“Here.” With a slight nod, he motioned her to the stool, probably for patrons to sit on when trying on a shoe. When she didn’t move quickly enough, he put a slight pressure on her shoulders. “Just sit here and I’ll call someone.”

“Wait! I can manage. You don’t need—” Taylor found herself talking to Bors’s back. He left the aisle in a hurry without looking back. “—to bother.”

She sighed. What was up with this man? Did she really look like a hapless woman to him or were the words helpless invalid tattooed on her forehead and she didn’t know? When she picked Orcas to hide from Jean, she hoped to remain in the shadows. How was she going to accomplish that if a fierce looking warrior was following her?

Taylor put her violin case down beside her and scanned the rows of mostly white shoes. The kind nurses would wear in a clinic or hospitals. She spotted a Dr. Scholls walking shoes for women on sale for thirty-nine ninety-five. Sheez, she might as well get three pairs. Yup, she’d get that pair. In all her life, she never owned a pair of shoes that cost lower than fifty bucks.

“Miss?”

Taylor snapped at attention. Heart in her throat, she looked at the man in a white scrub. He was smiling at her. God, she thought it was Jean’s man calling her. Jean’s henchmen called her Miss Taylor but most times just simply miss.

“Sorry I scared you.”

“Oh no. Not at all.” Taylor smiled back at the man with brilliant black button eyes, graying hair, and a round middle his smock couldn’t conceal. Right away, Taylor liked him. His nametag told her his name was Dan, the head pharmacist.

“Bors told me to come and see you.”

“He did? I told him not to. I am fine really. No need to fuss over me.”

“He told me you’ll refuse my services. The name is Dan, by the way. I’m the head pharmacist here.”

“Hi Dan.” She didn’t want to return the pleasantries, but then it wasn’t in her nature to be rude. “I’m Teej.”

Dan smiled, shaking his head. “Nice name.”

“So how did this happen?”

*I’m in a hurry to get in the taxi. Ran on cobbled street and broke my heel then twisted my ankle. No wonder the Romans wore leather sandals and not heeled shoes.* “I broke the heel of my shoe.”

“Will you let me take a look?” Dan placed a small plastic storage container he carried on the floor. “You can scream anytime.”

“I don’t have to wait until I feel the pain?”

Dan laughed then sat on his haunches. Handling her foot in a gingerly way,

he began examining it. Though Dan's hands were gentle and warm against her skin, he didn't evoke the same reaction when Bors touched her. Her heart didn't flutter wildly in her chest. The tingling from somewhere deep in her stomach that traveled along her spine giving her goosefleshes was missing. With Dan's touch, there wasn't electricity present at all.

*Lord, I must be going nuts thinking about electricity and tingles right now.*

Yeah, she should focus. There were important things she must take care of right now. Nodding to herself, she paid attention to what Dan was doing. Two seconds later, her mind went back to the Bors. Was he gone? He just handed her to Dan and then took off without saying goodbye? Why, drat him. He should have at least told her if he weren't coming back. She must say thank you to him. It was only right. Now she owed him a thank you.

"Where is Bors?"

"He went back to the clinic." Dan didn't look up when he replied.

So that was it then, she thought. He was gone. Good. No, great. She wanted him gone. Yup, she could care less if she wouldn't see him again. Taylor sighed, hearing the falseness in her own thoughts.

"Well, good news. You suffered from a minor sprain, which means you stretched your ligament just a bit. Not bad. That's why you can still put pressure on it and walk without crutches. No jogging or jumping for now though."



“What’s the bad news?”

“You will need to wear this wrap. It will provide ankle support.”

“Well that’s not bad.”

“And I suggest you wear these flip flops. Not fancy, but they sure looked comfortable. No shoes for a while. At least until your ankle is not tender anymore.”

“Couldn’t I wear shoes with the wrap on?”

“You could. But removing and putting your shoes on is such a hassle and could be painful. I’ll say that maybe tomorrow the soreness would be less. Okay, let me wrap this around your ankle and you are good to go.”

“Well, the pain is kind of less now than earlier.”

“Some people can’t tolerate pain. Others, like the athletes, a broken nose and fingers doesn’t bother them. They could go on playing until they really hurt themselves so badly they couldn’t play anymore.”

“So, you’re saying I’m a baby.”

Dan laughed. “No. Sensitive. Did you play sports in high school or T-Ball when you were a kid?”

“No.” *How could I? I’m never allowed to go anywhere.*

“No sports at all?”

“Nope.”

“Can you catch a ball?”

“Maybe if I use a net as big as the moon.”

Dan smiled and shook his head. “I bet you’re good at something. Like playing an instrument?” He glanced at his violin case.

“I play the violin.”

“There you go. Me, I’m good at wrapping bandages.” He began wrapping the brace around her ankle. He overlapped the elastic wrap by one-half of the width of the wrap. The wrap felt snug and kind of warm. It covered her toes all the way up to the top calf muscle. Taylor watched the whole process. If ever she sprained another ankle, at least she would know what to do.

“That should do it.”

“Thank you.”

Dan helped her put the black t-straped rubber-soled sandals on. It felt comfortable and fit her perfectly. “Wow. You got me the right size.”

“Bors picked these.”

Taylor was about to ask how Bors knew her size when she remembered the high heels she left on the clinic’s driveway. She looked down at her slippers. Bors picked them. Wow. Aside from her mother, no one ever picked something for her. Not even Jean. Instead of going to the mall, he would always ask her what she wanted for her birthday, Christmas, or Valentine’s day. Whatever answer she gave him, he would pass it along to his secretary.

But Bors...nice. The price tag showed the flip-flops were on sale. Three dollars and ninety-nine cents. Okay, cheap sandals, but it was the thought that counted. The Dani Jeweled T-Strap sandals she ordered through Zappos dot com had cost her a hundred and five dollars and it, too, was on sale. Expensive, yes. However, it didn't give her this, this...thrilled feeling when she bought it, unlike these sandals. *Oh well, maybe I'm making something out of nothing here.* She wasn't used to receiving kindness from other people. So, she must be overacting.

She wiggled her toes, feeling the soft rubber sandals and thought about the life of luxury she left behind. No more living the cushioned life Jean had provided her. And she wouldn't dare go back even if she lived in a shoe.

But for her mother's life, she wouldn't taste luxury. It all started the day after she witnessed her mother tumble off the balcony and landed ten floors below to break every bone in her body. Jean began showering her with gift offerings every teenager could ask for. Except for one thing—freedom.

She knew why Jean treated her like a princess. It was a bribe. For her silence and cooperation to stay in the shadows. To keep the world from finding out that Congressman Jean had an illegitimate daughter whose mother jumped off the balcony to end her misery.

In all honesty, she enjoyed the extravagant living although she only had Maud, her nanny to share the joy of it. Once she told Maud that she shouldn't find

happiness from the wealth that surrounded her. Maud scoffed and told her to enjoy her life while she could. In fact, Maud said that she should milk Jean and take the money for herself. It was a way to make him pay for what he'd done to her mother. For driving her to booze, drugs, insanity, and eventually death. She jumped at the idea and started using the debit and credit cards Jean gave her whenever she got the chance. She became a top donor for Seattle Symphony, PAWS, Seattle Children's Hospital, and schools. Anonymously, of course, but it was her way of sending the money back to the taxpayers. Money was no problem to Jean and to her as well. But despite her easy access to Jean's money, she never put money under her name. Every penny Jean saved in the bank was dirty and she couldn't stomach associating her name with it. If her mother was alive though, she bet she wouldn't hesitate to use Jean's money. Not to enjoy spending it without care, but to irritate Jean. A flash of sadness stabbed at her heart at the memory of her mother.

"If you don't like the color or style, you could look at the other ones. Bors thought you'd like black."

Taylor smiled at Dan. "I like these."

"Good. So do you still want to look for running shoes?"

"No." She'd have no use for them now. "Thank you, Dan. I'll go and pay for the wrap and these." She looked down at her feet then wiggled her toes. "You're

right. They're comfy."

"Okay. If you need anything, I'll be at the pharmacy. Go to aisle three and you'll see it at the end. You'll manage from here?"

"Yes. Thank you." With her violin case in hand and her purse slung over her shoulder, she hobbled towards the direction Dan pointed. *I lingered here long enough.*

Taylor didn't have to wait in line. The cashier, who smiled brightly at her, rang the items. Taylor handed her the debit master card. God, what would she do without her plastic? One look at it, anyone could tell it had been swiped many times. It was a wonder the scanner could still read the bar code considering how often she used the thing. But she shouldn't depend on Jean's funds. Once she found her footing, she'd find a way to make a living. Start teaching music or work as a music teacher or something. Anything. It was time she earned her own money. Besides, as soon as she and Jean reached an agreement, she bet he'd cut her loose and that would mean breaking away from her plastic.

"It didn't work." The petite cashier said. "Sorry."

*I spoke too soon.* "Could you swipe it again?"

"Sure. I could enter the card number manually, too. Let's see here. By the way, I like your tan. What kind of tan lotion do you use?"

Taylor should feel insulted, but she didn't. The cashier had no way of knowing that her vanity only goes as far as whitening her teeth and keeping her

waist line smaller. Her skin that held a summer glow, however, was a gift that she inherited from her mother's genes. She smiled at the cashier before taking in her sugar white skin, debating whether to tell the truth and embarrass her for making a wrong assumption, or pretend that she really used a tan lotion and send her running to the store. What a dilemma. Perhaps she could evade the question and give her ideas instead. She'd read about Designer Skin products. Expensive and available only online.

"Have you heard of a Designer Skin body wash? You can get it online."

"Is it expensive?"

"Fifty and over, I think. You have to sign up and create an account to see the prices."

"Must be really pricey if you can't see the prices. Oh," the cashier's face fell as she looked at the register's screen.

"What's wrong?"

"Inactivated."

"Inactive what?"

"Your card. It's red flagged, which means the card maybe stolen or you're out of money. It says call the bank if you have questions. Do you have another one?"

How could it be? Last time she checked there had to be about seventy-five thousand in that account. Taylor swallowed. Good god. Could Jean have anything

to do with this? Did he call the bank? If yes, what lies did he say to them. No, no, no. *This can't be happening. It's too soon. I still need my plastic.*

"I'm sure it was just a glitch. Washington Mutual is now Chase. I bet the change has to do with that."

"Oh yeah. I heard people complain about that. So no other cards? Do you have another one? Credit card?"

"Yes." She opened her wallet, pulled out her Visa debit card then handed it to the cashier. "I think this one will work. It's also a debit card."

"Okay. Banks and credit card companies are really slick now. They could trace every single transaction in and outside the country. I tell you, as soon as I swipe this card, they'll know—"

Taylor snatched the card back. "Never mind then. I think I have cash." *I am one stupid person.* Why didn't she think about this before running away? Man had already landed on the moon. Computers were invented. Of course, Jean could trace her and learn her every freaking single move.

She dug in her purse for cash. Oh my god, oh my god! Pennies and Tic-tac? She checked the pockets where she stuffed her receipts. No luck. She remembered giving all of her cash to the cab driver. Blood began to pound in her ears.

*I'm screwed.*

## Chapter Four

Taylor had never been in a situation like this. She attempted to cover her embarrassment with a smile.

“No luck, huh? How about a check?”

Taylor thought about it already, but if she couldn’t use the debit card that meant her checks would bounce. “No. No check.”

The cashier gave her a pitying look. “So, how are we paying today?”

“I guess *we* are not paying today.” *What am I going to do now?* If she knew this would happen, she could have kept her heels. “I ran out of cash.” The truth was she never carried cash in her wallet. *Who does nowadays?* She couldn’t even remember the last time she saw a hundred dollar bill. Maybe she should try calling her bank. They must have made a mistake. Or so she hoped. “Let me call my bank. Do you mind if I wear these for now. I’ll stand over here. I’m not running away.”

“Fine with me. I don’t think you could go anywhere with your foot wrapped like that.” The cashier grinned.

“Thanks.”

Drat. This was Jean’s doing. He inactivated her account. She dialed the one-



eight-hundred number at the back of the card. After pressing extension numbers one after another, she finally got a real live person to answer her. The bank representative who introduced himself as Allan spoke with a thick accent. She wouldn't be surprised if *Allan* worked in the call center located outside the country and his name wasn't really Allan. The man asked for her social security number, birth date and a zip code, and then put her on hold. When he came back on the line, he apologized for the wait. Nice, Taylor thought. But what the man said next made her grit her teeth. The account was frozen. She didn't have to ask the questions. It was clear—she was freaking broke. Thanks to her father.

“Shit. God damn it. Freaking freak!” She hung up her phone. Well nothing left to do here. She removed the slippers and placed them on the counter. “Well, I'm returning the flip-flops.”

“Why? You don't like the color?”

Taylor turned around. He was back. And why did that make her want to shout for joy, despite her present predicament? Who the heck knew? He still wore his leather jacket, but she noticed through the hole, a white bandage covered his cut. “You had your cut taken care of.”

“Yeah. So what's wrong with the flip-flops?”

“She doesn't have money to pay. Her cards are cancelled. She called her bank, and then she said shit, goddamn it, freaking freak. So I am assuming the

bank account is cancelled, too,” the cashier explained.

Taylor wanted to strangle the woman.

“How much, Paige?” Bors reached in his back pocket and pulled out his brown leather worn wallet.

“Oh no. You are not paying.” She grabbed his arm. “I am not a pauper in need of your help. Here,” she tugged at her elegant ring with a row of alternating blue sapphire baguettes and glistening diamond quartets. The ring was a gift from Jean for her eighteenth birthday. “Take it, Paige, as collateral. I’ll get some money and I’ll be back.”

“Wow. I would take that if I could. That must have cost a thousand bucks.” Paige’s eyes were huge in awe.

Taylor wanted to correct her. The ring had cost Jean at least fifteen hundred to have it made. But that would be bragging. “It definitely cost more than a pair of flip-flops.”

“Yeah. But this isn’t a pawnshop. There is one around though.”

“Wear your ring. I don’t think of you as a pauper, Teej.” He took the flip-flops from Taylor’s hands then bent down to help her put them on. “Put these on.”

“Bors.” She sighed his name.

“Teej,” Bors replied with a grin. His warm large hand cupped her ankle and caressed it with a command.

Left with no choice she slipped her feet into the soft cushion of the flip-flops. “Thanks.” Taylor felt like Cinderella. She would have found the situation romantic if the circumstances were different.

“Come on.” Bors gave the money to Paige before taking Taylor’s arm to lead her outside the pharmacy.

“I’ll pay you back.”

“Consider it a gift.”

“Thank you.”

Bors nodded. “Where are you heading?”

Good question. Before she left Seattle, she Googled the Orcas Islands. She saw the Oyster Bay Cottage, a private getaway and she hoped the last place Jean would look. Damn it! With her cards cancelled, how could she even stay in a Bates Motel? Jean knew she didn’t have anywhere else to go. And by canceling her cards, he expected her to crawl back in his filthy home. Frustrated and feeling helpless, she felt icy fear twisted around her heart.

When she saw the opportunity to escape, she took it without thinking. What was she going to do now? She had nothing except for her purse. Tears welled within her eyes. Before they started flowing like the Niagara Falls, she swallowed back a sob. “Well, thanks for the rescue, Bors. I’ll call a friend from here.” She lowered her violin case that seemed to double its weight.

“You didn’t answer my question.”

“I’m going to my friend’s cabin.” *I wish.*

“You don’t look happy at the prospect. And are those tears?”

“No. Of course I am to see my friend. How about you? Don’t you have a place to go? Women to chase?”

Bors grinned. “That’s what I’m doing right now.”

“Funny.”

“Your friend is from here?”

“Here? Yes.”

“I grew up on this island. I probably know him or her.”

“Doubt it. She’s new here, too. Well, good day, Bors. Thanks for the slippers.”

“You sure?”

“Yes.” The look Bors gave her nearly undid her. It had been a long time since someone looked at her with concern in his eyes.

“If your friend doesn’t show up, call me.” He handed her a business card bearing two sets of cell phone numbers. “The first number is mine.”

“And the second one?”

“My supervisor’s. Call either one and you’ll reach me.”

Taylor stared at the card. It was simple. The numbers were embossed and

printed in black ink. But no name, business name, fax number, or physical or website address. Odd, she thought. “Thank you.”

“How about if I wait until your friend arrives?”

“Oh no. You’ll end up waiting...I mean, you don’t have to. I’m good. You can go.”

A G550 SUV Mercedes Benz, the exact kind Jean drove, pulled up on the curb. Taylor gasped, realizing a shiver of panic that Jean had found her. Instinctively, she inched closer to Bors, then slowly moved towards his back. If Bors noticed her action, he didn’t say a thing. He just stood there, looking at the car.



Teej surprised him by hiding behind his back, but he didn’t show it. When she touched his jacket and he felt her tremble, he didn’t move. Who did she think was in the driver’s seat? And why did she hide? That little fact didn’t sit well in his stomach. No woman should feel fear for her safety or her life.

Not perfectly clear, but little things made sense now. First, her broken heel, her pale face when she checked her cell phone, and lack of money. For a woman wearing expensive jewelry who evidently shopped at Barney’s New York instead of JC Penny’s, it was confounding the she didn’t have money in her bank or three dollars in her purse. It was obvious. She was running from someone.

Bors reached behind him to hold Teej's fisted hand. He gave her a reassuring squeeze, but didn't let go. He wanted to let her know that it was okay. *Damn it, who was after her?*

"Teej, I know the driver," he said without looking at her. Teej didn't say anything. He wasn't sure if she heard him.

The driver got out of the car. "Damn, Bro, you look horrible. Aren't you tired of sleeping in a dumpster?" Gawain sauntered toward them with a grin on his face and angled his head trying to see who was behind him.

"Glad to see you, too, Gawain. Shouldn't you park your car on the parking lot? You're blocking the shoppers." Bors felt Teej's hold on him loosen, and her hand relaxed beneath his palm. Still he didn't let go.

"Who's going to arrest me? You? Fuckin' eh, you rank." Gawain punched his shoulder.

"You owe the jar a dollar. What are you doing in town?"

"Bors, it's Friday. I always come home every Friday afternoon. Unlike you and Percy, I have no excuse not to come home. And Mom's big six-o is on Sunday. Or you forgot?" Gawain raised his brows in silent question.

Damn. How could he forget his mother's birthday? Simms said he'd be here Sunday—to attend the party. Sleep deprivation had been eating his brain away. Maybe he should take Simms advice and take a nap.

Teej tugged her hand. He stepped aside to reveal her to Gawain. “Gawain, this is Teej. My brother, Gawain.”

Visible relief was obvious on Teej’s face as she looked at Gawain, and then she broke into an open, enchanting smile. “Hello, Gawain.”

“Please to meet you, Teej. I didn’t know my brother is acquainted with the goddess Venus.”

“You mean a goddess that was tossed out of Olympus and landed in the garbage dump?” Teej looked at him. “That was how your brother described me.”

Gawain shook his head. “Don’t mind him. He’s not use to facing beautiful women when he’s sober and outside the realm of bedrooms. Simply clueless.”

“Is that why he looks like he just won the contest, ‘Stomp the Garbage?’”

Gawain let out a hoot of laughter. “Funny, Teej.”

Bors joined his brother. He threw back his head and let out his own laughter that grabbed the attention of shoppers. When he looked at Teej’s and caught her impish smile, he felt like basking under the afternoon sun. God, she was even lovelier when smiling, he thought. Those gorgeous green colored eyes met his own, sending blood rushing down to his cock like a waterfall.

Suddenly, he felt uncomfortable. From his sudden erection and the fact that they were standing outside, in broad daylight, where everyone could see the bulge in his pants. The urge to shift his cock so it wouldn’t hurt too much was strong

but he couldn't very well do that, so he shifted his stance instead.

Thanks to Gawain's cell phone, the ringtone made Teej look away.

"It's mom. Excuse me," Gawain winked at Teej, which she returned in an exaggerated wink of her own. Gawain grinned, looked at Bors with his eyes lowering a fraction. A subtle hint.

"Fuck."

Teej's eyes watched him with a critical squint. "You're mouth is as dirty as you look."

"Sorry, goddess."

"Well, nice meeting you both, but I have to get going."

"Where are you—"

"Wait, Teej." Gawain held up a finger. "Hello, mom. Yeah he said the F word. We're both in town. Julie met her, too, huh. Better believe it. First impression, Mom. I got the grocery list. Love you, too. I'll see you in a few." He thrust the phone at Bors. "Mom wants to talk to you. You're in big trouble." He said the last sentence in a singsongy tone, like a child.

"Bro, you don't interrupt a conversation by raising a finger. Walk away and talk on your cell."

"But it's Mom. And she heard you." To Teej, he said, "We each have a curse jar at home. We pay fifty cents each time we cuss. Bors' is always full. He's the



badass one in the family. Better stay away from him. I'm the cool one. Better stick with me."

Teej laughed shaking her head.

Bors glared at his brother before taking the cell phone from him. He made a mental note to rearrange his brother's face later. Freakin' ass had to tell Teej about his curse jar. He could at least wait until Teej had gotten to know him. With the cell phone on his ear, he looked at Teej. Yeah, he wanted her to know him and vice versa.

His mother's sigh on the other line took his gaze off Teej. "Hey, Mom. How are you? Good. Yeah. I'll be home in a few. I'll try, Mom. Just today." Gawain was keeping Teej company, making her laugh. But he could see her eyes scanning the parking lot, watching people coming. "Mom, I'm fine. No. Tristan did a good job. I love you, too." He handed the phone back to Gawain. "Thanks."

"Well, hope to see you again, Teej," Gawain said. It was a statement, not a question.

"Same here, Gawain,"

"Wait, our mom's birthday is on Sunday. You're invited to come."

"Thank you, but—"

"Don't worry, we don't bite. I'll see you home, ugly face," Gawain hit Bors' shoulder with his and went inside the store.

It was a childish gesture none of the Knight brothers' outgrew. Bors faced Teej. Her brows arched up. "Where exactly are you going?"

"My destination is none of your concern."

"Uh-huh. How you hurt your foot is not my concern also, right."

"You know, I really don't know why you're wasting your time with me. It's nice of you to ask and keep me company, but I believe it's time for us to part. I have important things to attend to right now."

"Such as?"

"Oh my god! You are one nosy troll."

"Only when I believe it's necessary."

"We hardly know each other, and if you haven't noticed, we are not in a bar chit-chatting and getting acquainted."

"Tell me if I'm wrong. You don't have a destination, no friend to call, and someone's after you." Teej's eyes lowered and his face lost a bit of its color. If all suspects were this easy to read, his job would be a hell of a lot easier.

"What are you, a detective?" Teej let out a deep sigh that bespoke tiredness and a heavy load she was carrying. "No one is after me. Look, I really appreciate your concern, but I don't need your help."

Bors nodded. Even he knew when to concede. "We have a spare room at my parents' house. If you need a place to stay, that is. Bluff Road. Call a cab. My

parents' home is right at the end of the street. Easy to find. Or you can call me. If you rather that I call you..."

"Thank you. I have your card."

This was the first for him, too. Women never hesitate to give him their phone number. Damn, he must be losing his charm. "Take care, Teej."



*Take his offer, Taylor. You have no money, no place to stay, and he is so...deliciously handsome.*

Taylor shook her head. Perhaps Bors' intention was good. But how would she know? All her life, she learned that men never offer anything without expecting in return. Why would Bors offer his help when they didn't even know anything about each other? But then she heard him say love you to his mom. She liked his brother, too, who also possessed charm. But...

Damn buts.

Skeptical, cynical, and ambivalent about her life. Young women her age already had their own family, raising wild kids. What did she have? Nothing. Because she was raised under the shadow of mighty Congressman Jean and didn't have enough sunshine to grow. Unbelievable. So this was the result of living with Jean. Not only didn't she trust anyone, but was also unsure how to give it and when.

She really must solve her problem with Jean so she could start planning, building her future, and learn to live life without restrictions.

Taylor watched Bors car peel out of the parking lot and disappear around the corner. What a guy. He looked like a villain in his scraggly dirty look but diffused warmth and...friendliness. The sound of her cell phone brought her back to her present predicament. Afraid it was Jean calling, she decided to ignore it.

She spotted a pawnshop beside Baskin and Robbins store and contemplated whether to pawn her ring or earrings when someone tapped her shoulder. Taylor screeched, then bolted.

“Teej, it’s me.”

Taylor turned around to find Gawain frowning at her. “Gawain. It’s you.”

“Sorry. You’re a scaredy-cat. Did my brother leave?”

“With stubborn reluctance.”

“Anyone would feel the same way, leaving a beautiful woman like you. Are you sure you don’t need a ride?”

Taylor nodded. “Thank you.”

“Okay, I’ll see you Sunday.”

He didn’t give her a chance to say no. He quickly walked to his car, hopped in, waved goodbye then peeled away.

*If I don’t show up, they’ll probably forget that they invited me.* Turning her ring

around her finger, she picked up her violin case and walked toward Ali's Jewelry Repair and Pawnshop.



Oyster Bay Cottage was everything she expected it to be. Tucked away in a wooded, waterfront site, it was a lovely two bedroom, two-bath cottage style home. The wood and beamed ceilings and hardwood floors gave it a warm comfortable feeling. Thirty-foot-long, all glass sunroom highlighted the dramatic view of Mt. Baker and the nearby islands. Furnished in an antique style, with a king bed in the master bedroom and two twin beds in the guest bedroom, as well as a double bed futon couch in the sunroom, it made the rooms look so romantic.

It had a fully equipped kitchen, large dining area, and a wood stove/fireplace in the living room. At the back of the house, she found a private access to the beach where a small boat moored at the dock. Perfect. Except it was too pricey. The money she got from pawning her ring would only go as far as three days rent. After that, she would have to pawn some more jewelry. Not good. How was she going to live like this?

She must act quickly. Contact the judge to help her before her money ran out. What a predicament.

Taylor opened the glass door and walked out to the balcony. A crisp summer breeze blew, caressing her skin. Thick and towering forest of giant

evergreen trees ensconced in shaggy moss danced ever so slowly. Lodge pole pine, rocky mountain juniper, garry oak, and douglas fir trees were just a few of the larger forest species that she recognized. The Olympic Mountains, so green and majestic, offered a startling vista.

Linda said they played a major influence on weather patterns in western Washington, and the San Juan Islands in particular. Most oceanic weather fronts approach the state from the southwest and the Olympic Mountains served as a barrier, which forced the warm moist air to rise, cool, and form precipitation, leaving the clouds dry creating less moisture in the San Juan Islands. No wonder tourists flocked the islands all year long. The weather here was more akin to a desert than the temperate Seattle and Bellingham.

Washington States wet reputation didn't fit the Orcas Islands. It rained less here compared to the west side of the Olympic Peninsula.

Taylor hugged herself as she scanned the view. One could do so many things around here. Whale watching, kayaking, diving, hiking, bird watching. Right now, she could stand and watch the sky change colors. But wouldn't it be more fun if she were with someone. To laugh and share the view?

Perhaps soon, when she was free from Jean's claws, she'd be able to enjoy life here. She took out the piece of paper with a phone number written on it. Linda gave it to her when Taylor asked if she knew Judge Knight.

Judge Arthur Knight. Strong name, she thought. Linda swore that Judge Knight was the best oyster one could find at the beach. Among his peers, he was known to be harsh and unbendable, incorrupt and incorruptible, which made him unpopular. Like a cypress tree. No matter how strong the wind, it wouldn't break. Because of that, he'd been getting death threats from left and right. But Judge Arthur Knight wasn't fazed.

The epitome of a public defender. Sounds like the perfect candidate for her. Perhaps Taylor came to the right place after all. For the first time since she left Seattle, her mood seemed suddenly buoyant. With one last look at the glistening blue green water, she went back inside the cottage and closed the door behind her.

Behind the thick trunk of a cedar tree, a man came out of his hiding, lowered his binoculars then smiled.



He must take the siren's image off his head, for fuck sake. Teej may look like a goddess, but she was one snarky loony. If she didn't want his help, so be it. Damn her pride. He bet if she were in danger, she wouldn't even call nine-one-one, not if she could help it. Well, he should be glad. Less soul to help meant more time to focus on his current case.

Once he closed the lid on Jean's case, he would take a long break. Stay in his newly built home or maybe take up Tristan's invitation to go kayaking with him.

Anything that would take his mind off his case and Miss I-Am-Fine-My-Ankle-Is-Not-Swollen.

He loved his job and was passionate about it, but countless nights of hunting for scumbags like Jean had a debilitating effect on him. Not even a good movie could put him in a semi-sane mood. Except for Teej. A few minutes with the woman and she had him smiling already.

Bors parked his car beside Kirsten's Volvo and just sat there. Troll. Teej called him a troll. He could almost imagine his family nodding in agreement with her. Smiling, he got out of the car in time to see his mother emerge from the front door.

"Someone had you smiling. Care to tell me who?"

"I'm smiling because I'm home, Mom."

The twinkle in Katherine's eyes told him she thought differently. "If you say so, darling."

Bors reached Katherine in two quick strides. Wrapping his arms around her, he closed his eyes. Feeling his mother's familiar small hands pressed against his back made him thank his luck he was still alive. Nothing could be better than this. Nothing.

"Good to be home, Mom. Good to be home."

"You love my cooking that much, huh?"



“No. Because I love you all the way to the moon and back.”

“Darling, you’re going to make me cry.”

“Son, don’t suffocate your mother.”

“Oh hush, Arthur. I hugged my kids when they smelled worse and I didn’t mind at all.”

Bors released his mother. He planted an affectionate kiss on her forehead then stepped back to look at his father. “Hey dad. How are you?”

“Better than you.”

Bors smiled sheepishly. He offered his hand to Arthur, which his dad shook with a firm grip. “You always look better than us, dad.”

“Need money?”

Bors laughed. He and his brother had thought if they complimented their father about his work or looks that they would get additional allowance or gas money. But Arthur was too keen and swift to buy their tricks. “No dad. Just telling the truth.”

“Hush boy. What the hell happened? Julie told me you came in the clinic. Must be bad if you have to drag your ass—”

“Arthur.” Catherine laid a hand on her husband’s shoulder.

“Self to the clinic. Everything okay?”

“Just peachy, Dad.”

“You made your mother worry, son. Where’s the cut?”

“Arthur, how about inviting him in, give him time to clean up and we’ll grill him later. I want to hear the whole story also. Are you in pain, darling?”

“No, Mom. Tristan did a good job fixing my owwie.” He smiled to his parents.

“Okay. Go do what your mother said, son, and come in the kitchen when you’re fresh and clean.”

“Who’s home?”

“Your sister. Gawain will be here soon. You saw him at the store. Percival, Tristan, and Julie are on their way.”

“Good. My throwing arm has been rusty. Time to beat the boys. I’ll be down right away.”

“Not right away, darling. Take a nap. Rest. Take your time. You look like you need one. Oh, Teta and Cinnamon are in the kitchen.”

“I think I might nap after all.”

“Oh, honey. She’s a sweetheart.”

“She’s a cool gun-toting woman, Mom. But not that sweet.”

“But you’ll beat everyone who gives her a hard time.” Arthur commented.

“Hmm...I think it’s the other way around.”

“Bors Knight. The right Knight I want to see.”

Bors turned around. Teta wore her signature *Grandma jeans* with the waistline almost up to her midriff. Her blouse, tucked inside her pants, showed the rolls on her sides. She carried her handbag under her armpits. Bors couldn't think of how to describe her. "Ah, Teta. The right woman I long to see."

"Shut your mouth, boy. Good lord, you look worse than a dead duck stuck in the swamp."

Bors decided not to ask about how the duck ended up in the swamp. "Love the hairstyle. It's becoming. Not that I didn't like the beehive, mind you." The purple short curls framed her moon shaped face.

"Time to change. Purple, I think, is eye-catching. By the way, thanks for *Small Fry*." Teta patted her chest. "I'll use this instead of my big boy if I have to. Save me some bullets."

"Good." Bors looked at his parents. They gave him the *I told you so look*. They told him that Teta would never give up her gun. But he thought if he gave her the smallest, but powerful stun gun that could go through thin shirts and sweaters, she would. "Looks like you're going somewhere."

"Yup. The boys at the OISC are waiting. They're going to show me how to shoot clays with a rifle. *I'll* show them how to shoot. Thanks for the membership. I knew you were good for something. I'm off. Cinnamon's in the kitchen."

"Thanks for the warning." Cinnamon, the golden retriever, belonged to Julie.

But Teta loved the dog and cared for him.

Teta waved her hand out the window as she drove off, leaving a trail of black smoke from her exhaust pipe.

“The membership at the Sportsmen Club is great for her. She needs firearm instructions and safety training,” Katherine said waving back at Teta. “Did you show her how to use the stun gun, dear?”

“Gave her the instructions.”

“Oh, lord.”

Bors thought about Teej. She used the expression a lot also. He grinned at his parents then quickly made his way toward the stairs. His parents kept all of the Knight kids’ rooms the way they had left them. Always clean when he came home, nevertheless the same. And he loved it. They could come back anytime and they’d have a place in this house, no matter what. As he took the steps two at a time, his eyes wandered on the pictures on the wall. It was like going back in time when he and his brothers and sister were little: his first grade picture, riding his first BMX, Tristan when he was in the hospital, Kirsten smiling showing her missing two front teeth.

When he made it to the landing, he lingered and looked at the most recent picture. The whole family was out in the yard, happy. Especially Tristan. It was the day his brother proposed to Julie. Tristan, unshaven and with dark rings

around his eyes looked like hell, but the mark of joy was written all over his face.

Someday, if he were to bring a woman here, he wanted his whole family to be around. Only his high school sweetheart had made it into this house a couple times. No one else. But this afternoon, he offered to bring Teej here. The crazy, irritating woman he met only today. The one who had the gall to call him a Troll. The one who freaking gave him a boner in the middle of the day.

He was still gawking at the pictures when Kirsten's bedroom door opened. His sister immediately covered her mouth and nose.

"Hey, Princess. Still searching for your Prince?"

"Yousningk."

"What's that? I stink?" In one swift move, he lowered his head and wrapped his arms around Kirsten's waist, tackling her. Kirsten ended up on his shoulder, screaming.

"Let me go, you pig!"

He went back downstairs where he deposited her on the couch. "What have you been eating? Air? You weigh nothing."

"You're mean. I just showered now I smell like..." She sniffed her blouse. "Yeww! Garbage! I'll get you for this, Bors."

"Keep trying, brat."

"Julie told me you stink. I thought, so what, you always stink. But not this

bad. Man, you really raised the bar this time. Not only that you have a bad BO, you also—Mom!”

Bors didn’t give Kirsten a chance to escape. He hugged her again, raised his arm and, laughing, he smothered Kirsten with his armpit.

“Bors, darling. Stop it. Be a good boy and shower.”

As soon as Bors let go of Kirsten, she punched him on the arm, narrowly missing his newly stitched cut. Bors hissed from the pain.

Kirsten’s eyes grew big. “Oh my god! I’m sorry. Let me see.”

“I’m fine, Princess.”

“No you’re not.”

“Shut it. Mom.”

Kirsten got the message then nodded. “Sorry, Bors.” With a repentant face, she gave Bors a hug.

“Okay. Let me go. I don’t want your cooties.” Pinching Kirsten’s nose playfully, he went back upstairs.

## Chapter Five

*Ungrateful girl. Why can't she be an obedient daughter?*

Sitting on his leather recliner by the fireplace, Jean held his long stemmed wine glass with his right hand and the cell phone on the other. So, his daughter went as far as the Orcas Island to escape him. What did she think she'd accomplish by running away from him.

He gave her everything, but it wasn't enough. What the fuck else did she want?

Just like him, Taylor had a mind of her own. Stubborn to the core. Unlike her mother: weak, a drunk, and a fucking whore. Trisha Monte Carlo, former Miss Italy, had been nothing when they'd met. A young woman aspiring to become a model, he had helped her find her footing in the modeling business. Trisha took the rest of the steps on her own.

With her stunning beauty, it had not taken her long before she got what she had wanted. But a crown had not been enough for the bitch. She also wanted young men in her bed. When she became pregnant, he sent her back to Italy where she had their daughter. A spitting image of her. A beauty and a pain in the neck,

but the only one he loved in the world.

Taylor was already twelve when he asked Trisha to bring her to U. S. The moment he laid his eyes on her, he knew she'd be his world. He provided for them. But after three years, greedy bitch Trisha wanted more. Of course, he didn't give it to her. Marriage wasn't on his list of things to accomplish. Trisha had become unreasonable and turned her attention to alcohol. He tried to get rid of her, but she refused to go back to Italy.

She became a full-blown cocaine addict and alcoholic, so he tried to cut his ties with her. The bitch became enraged and swore she'd contact the local television news station, King 5, to reveal his secret. They argued out in the balcony so Taylor wouldn't hear. He threatened to take Taylor away from her. That was when she became belligerent and shouted her counter-threat, that she'd kill herself if he did. He didn't buy her shit. It was too late when he realized the bitch wasn't bluffing. Before he could react, she had leaned forward and down she went.

Taylor, at fifteen, witnessed her mother going off the balcony, with him standing there, arms outstretched. That was all she saw. He tried telling her the whole story, but Taylor shut him out. What she thought about what happened she kept to herself. Not once had she talked about it. Her silence served as pinpricks on his skin. He wanted Taylor to be the daughter any father craved for, but she remained withdrawn. The only time she would talk to him was when she gave him



her opinion, when he wanted her to keep quiet.

Jean often times wondered if he should have just let Taylor and Trisha stay in Italy. But then, he wouldn't have Taylor to keep his morning bright. He regretted the night Taylor last saw her mother. High on drugs and screaming like the fucking lunatic she was. Would she still be the same outspoken, defiant daughter, expressing her disapproval about his business and everything he told her if that horrible night hadn't happened?

Possibly.

Taylor expressed her disdain about his friends so many times that he knew she would leave the protective nest he created for her. He knew she was just waiting for the right time to escape. It was the reason why he practically kept her under lock and key. All these years, he tried his best to keep his daughter close to him. Not only to keep her mouth from flapping, but to protect her from the cruelty of the real world. He didn't want her to turn into Trisha. A wielder of beauty, and a whore. He cocooned and protected her the only way he knew how—inside his home.

He'd been surrounded with filth. But with Taylor around, he knew not all was dirty. Taylor was his symbol of cleanliness, of purity. Was she a pain in the ass? Yes. But she was his beacon of light.

Now, she'd escaped. For what, to tell the police about his business or her

interpretation of her mother's drunken suicide? Good luck on that. Finding a politician, a man in uniform, or anyone in service who had not been inside his home would be worst than finding a cab to fly to the moon.

So this was how she'd repay his generosity. Running away.

*We shall see how long you'll last out there, Taylor. Without money, where will you go? You have nothing but your beauty. You'll come back to me. To your daddy.*

For now, he'd keep the tail on her. If she started talking, she wouldn't be able to see American soil again.



Tapping the phone on her palm, Taylor considered her next move. She'd reread the judge's number over and over, wondering if Linda exaggerated her accounting about Arthur. She said Arthur Knight had given her this card personally when she came to him for help. Linda assured her Judge Knight wouldn't mind her calling his personal cell number.

Where was the harm in trying, she thought. Taylor checked the time on her cell phone. Almost eight. *What's the cut off time? Nine-thirty? I think it is. Yeah, I can still call the judge.*

Taking a deep breath, she dialed the number and listened to the soft ringing sound while her heart pounded against her ribs. What would she tell him? First, she would introduce herself then request a meeting. If he asked what for...Lordy,

should she tell him the truth right away? No, she shouldn't ask him to help her make a deal with Jean over the phone.

Resolve waning, she pressed the end button. She should at least think about the best way to do this. A deal like freedom in exchange of her silence should be discussed in person, not over the cell phone. If Linda was right about this judge, she didn't want to lose her chance to get his help if she started blubbering like an idiot on the phone.

Taylor was still thinking about the right approach when her cell rang. She looked at the number again. Shocked, she stared at the caller's number. *Lord, the judge is calling me back.*

Heart in her throat, she answered the phone. "This is Taylor."



Feeling fresh and free of odorous garbage, Bors joined his parents, Kirsten, and Gawain outside for shortbread cookies and coffee. Dinner at the Knight household was often followed by homemade dessert and coffee while sharing the events of the day. Tonight though, except for Percival who cocooned himself in his room and Tristan who decided to snuggle with Julie early, everyone was keen on finding out everything about Bors. Especially about Teej.

"Paige told me you bought Teej some three dollar slippers. No wonder she didn't want to ride with you. You're a freakin cheapskate."

“She has a sore ankle, dolt. Dan said she should wear slippers.”

“I saw her go into the pawnshop.”

“What?”

“Yup. Oh, Mom. I invited Teej for—”

Kirsten threw a piece of cookie at Gawain’s face the same time Bors kicked his shin.

“Oww! The fuck.”

“Quarter, stinkbug.”

“You two provoked me.”

“Because you’re stupid.”

“I was just...oh, well.”

If his parents noticed, they didn’t say anything. One of the many good things about his parents, they never pried or intervened unless necessary. The Knights respect each other’s privacy, opinion and his parents knew not to snoop.

“Did you say this Teej is a beauty, Gawain?” Arthur asked.

“Oh, Dad. She looks like a doll kept in her original packaging. Smooth and heavenly looking. Just beautiful. And she likes me.”

“How did you know that?”

Gawain looked at Bors. “She didn’t call me a troll, bro.”

Gawain and Kirsten teased him relentlessly. They only agreed to stop

tormenting him when he gave up his share of the cookies. When his siblings left the circle, the topic of conversation changed. It was only then that he was able to talk to his father about Jean's special woman.

"I can think of only two things why Jean is intent of finding Taylor Monte Carlo. He's in love with her or she knows too much. Ask yourself, son. Why is she so well protected? Jean is a very influential man. To cross him would be comparable to asking for a death penalty, and yet she ran away. Which raises another question. Why would she run away? Afraid of Jean, or does she have a secret lover, protector somewhere? Maybe she's a real beauty like Helen of Troy so Jean doesn't want to lose her."

"Or Taylor's a fag. I couldn't find any record that Jean had been involved with a woman. The man's got a clean background."

"Or the record's been wiped out. You won't find Arnold Schwarzenegger's video of him smoking weed now. Those who occupy powerful seats can manipulate or delete whatever they want to hide. I agree, the Internet is a great source of information, but it could be damaging also. Thus the reason why you are after Jean."

"Right. It's the best place for pedophiles, and predators of all kinds to lurk around."

"You know, I find it interesting that nobody knew about Taylor until now,"

Arthur said while his eyes fixed on the table. His chin rested on the palm of his hand the way he often did when he sat behind his massive table in his home office while thinking or reading. Arthur, always a thinker and analyzer, never failed to amaze Bors. “Think outside the box, son. I believe Taylor is a treasure chest. She knows something, and Jean will do anything to keep Taylor from talking.”

“Simms thinks so, too. That’s why he wants me to find Taylor.”

“I assume you have all the information to do just that?”

“Simms is supposed to email me the file.”

“You’re always welcome to use your dad’s office, darling. Right Arthur?”

Katherine touched her husband’s hand and smiled.

Bors gave his father a sideways glance. He knew how much his father valued his privacy, but all of the kids were always welcome to come in his office any time of day. Still, none of them made it a habit of barging in.

“Of course, you can use my office, son. Percival checked my computer today and updated the security.”

“Thanks, Dad.”

Arthur’s cell phone sitting on the glass-topped table rang. He checked his watch, then frowned. “Isn’t the cut off time seven-thirty?”

“I thought nine o’clock,” Bors looked at his own diver’s watch. “It’s almost nine.”

“Must be important, darling. That’s your personal cell phone. Outside this family, only few people have your number.”

Arthur picked up the phone, but by the time he said hello, the caller hung up. “Well, he or she must have realized it was too late to call.” He looked at the screen. “Hmm...206. Seattle area code.” Ever curious, Arthur hit star sixty-nine. “Hello. Hi. You called? Yes, this is Judge Knight. No, it’s not late. It’s okay. Can I help you? A meeting. Correct me if I’m wrong, but did you say your name is Taylor? No, no. I just want to know who I’m talking to. I know every single person I’ve given my personal cell number and I don’t remember giving it to you. No problem. I can meet you tonight, Taylor.” Arthur held Bors gaze, then nodded.

Bors understood. His whole body went on alert. Taylor? Why the hell was she calling his dad? He met Arthur’s knowing eyes. A silent message passed between them. Damn. They were right. Jean was looking for Taylor because of what she knew. Taylor left Jean to squeal on him. And his dad would be squealed on. Why else would she call him?

“No, I wouldn’t say you’re an idiot, but you’re bumbling,” his dad said. “Where are you, Taylor? Calm down. You don’t know if you can trust me? I understand. You don’t know me, after all. Ah, yes. Linda. Well, Taylor, my public office is closed and I don’t conduct my meetings outside my office. But my home is fine. No, it’s not that late. A cab? No, no need to hire a cab. I’ll have my son fetch

you. No, you did not make a mistake. One thing we hold dear is trust. Without it, the Knight family is nothing. Good. My son will be there. Okay. Good. Hello? His name is Bors. Bors Knight. Hello?”

Bors waited patiently as Arthur hung up his cell phone. His father always moved methodically, never in a hurry, but never, ever late. “Lost connection. No need to go looking for Jean’s woman after all. She’s staying at the Oyster Bay Cottage. Pick her up and bring her here, Bors. She said she doesn’t have a car and she can’t walk.”

“Right now?”

“Chance, dear boy. Don’t let it slip out of your hand.”

“Right.”

“Tonight dear?” Katherine asked.

“Darling, sorry I offered our home, but she sounded scared and I don’t trust what’s out there. Jean’s men could be on her tail right now. Son, what do you think about calling for a backup.”

Bors thought for a moment. “If Jean’s men had already found her, they would not wait. They’d pick her up. I think I can get her without any problems.”

“She sounded like a woman to me. Not a transvestite.”

“Arthur, do you think bringing her here is...oh, never mind. I trust you, darling.”



“Thank you. Bors knows what to do. I don’t think we should wait until tomorrow, son.”

“Yeah. Tonight would be great. Dad, she said she doesn’t have a car?” Teej didn’t have a car, had a sore ankle, and no money. But she wouldn’t be able to stay at Oyster Bay. It would cost her a fortune.

*Oh, hell!* Gawain saw Teej go in the pawnshop. *I’ll be damn. She must have pawned her jewelry.* What Simms said came back to him. Taylor played for Seattle Symphony. Teej carried a big case. Not the kind that Kirsten had in fifth grade, though. His mind refused to believe that Teej wasn’t Taylor, but his gut told him that the woman he carried and bought slippers for was one and the same. Taylor or Teej—Jean’s woman.

He fished the cell phone out of his pocket. “Dad, could you give me Taylor’s number. I’ll call just to listen to her voice.”

Arthur eyed him for a few seconds before he retrieved Taylor’s number. “Sure.” He dictated the digits to Bors.

“Thanks, Dad.” He dialed the number wishing he’d hear a different voice on the other line. After two rings, Taylor picked up. *Fuck.* His wish weren’t answered. He listened to Taylor say hello two times and waited for her to hang up. She didn’t. Bors wanted to laugh at what she said, but the realization that the beautiful loony he had met earlier today was connected to Jean had his mood souring in a hurry.

"I'll go." *Taylor is Teej.* Jesus Christ. Jean's woman had him dreaming about her.

"She answered?"

"Yeah." He couldn't forget her voice. Sweet and so...so Teej.

"Got to act quickly, son. She's a woman." Arthur added.

"And your meaning?" Katherine asked.

"Changeable mind. Like the wind. You never know what direction it might take. This is an opportunity our son shouldn't pass up."

"Ah."

Bors decided to take that moment to interrupt. He could almost see where this was going. His mom winning the argument. He didn't want to be around when that happened. "Be back soon."

"You might want to check your email and see if Simms managed to send you Taylor's picture. At least you know who you are looking for here."

"Dad, I already met her." Bors stood up and fished the key out of his pocket.

"Really?"

"When?" Arthur and Katherine asked simultaneously.

"This afternoon." Of all the women in the world, why did he have to go after Taylor? The woman who had, in a very short time, penetrated his skull to stay in his brain.



“Hello. Hello. Judge Knight?” Taylor looked at her bars. None. Damn phone. Sighing, she tossed her phone on the couch. Too late to back out now.

She’d already pushed the rock down the hill and no way could she stop it. Squaring her shoulders, she stood in the middle of the room. There was nothing left but to trust Judge Knight. He sounded sincere, stern, and quite offended when she asked if she could trust him.

*We shall see. Politicians, officers, and men in general use the word trust loosely. How will I know if Knight is different? Gah! Going to his house...Oh my god. Please let Linda be right about Judge Knight.*

Arthur said trust is too important to him. Without it, he and his family would be nothing. But all men who’d come in and out of Jean’s office said the same. Promised and sworn in to do their job the best they could and that they could be trusted. What made Judge Knight different? Other than she liked his voice, she knew nothing about him. Well, the world maybe littered with fork-tongued men and liars from the depths of hell, but there were still some good ones left. She hoped Judge Knight was one of them. Taylor took a deep breath and let it out in a whoosh. She would just have to believe she could trust him—for now.

Judge Knight said something about his son coming to pick her up when she lost the cell signal. Damn cell phones.

The sound of crunching gravel reached her ears. Someone was outside. Could it be the judge's son? No way. How close was this cottage to the judge's house? Bet not that close. When she came in here this afternoon, she saw only cabins. She ambled to the window and then peeked through the white shutters. No headlights and she didn't hear the sound of a car's engine. It must be her imagination playing tricks on her.

She'd been so used to being followed all the time that even now, alone for the first time, she couldn't help but feel a presence of someone watching her. But for sure, she heard someone walking outside. Or maybe an animal looking for food. What kind? Critters of the night, or animals like Jean's men. No way they could have had followed her here. If they did, they'd be on her face right now, forcing her to get in the car. They trained to operate that way.

Her stomach rumbled the same time her cell phone rang. She didn't recognize the number, but the first three digits were the same as Judge Knight's number. She answered but whoever was on the other line didn't reply. "Hello? I know you're there. I can hear you breathing. If you're trying to call a sex phone line, you dialed a wrong number," she said. "Fine. Goodbye."

She hung up then peered back outside again. Seeing no one, she went back to the kitchen, walked over to the refrigerator and opened it. It was empty except for the leftover salad in a plastic container that she bought earlier. She never had a

salad that tasted like grass before. If she finished the other half, she might turn into a goat. Sighing, she closed the refrigerator. The kitchen was small, neat, and had everything she needed. Refrigerator, microwave, stove—except for food. She checked the cupboards, drawers, and cabinets. Yup, it had everything.

Shuffling sounds, like running footsteps made Taylor walk back to the living room. Someone was definitely out there. Peering through the shutters again, she noticed headlights. A car was coming toward her cabin. Could this be the judge's son? She kept on watching until the bright headlights shone on the long graveled driveway, and then she saw it. A family of raccoons was outside. Nervous laugh escaped her lips. Damn raccoons. As soon as the smallest masked animal disappeared in the bushes, her attention focused on the approaching vehicle. Taylor could see now that it was a truck, not a car.

Blood started pounding in her ears. *Alrighty, here we go.* Finally, the truck stopped. Taylor couldn't see who it was in the driver's seat. Christ Almighty, she was an idiot. Tomorrow would have been a better day for a meeting. When the sun is up and she could see where she was going. But no, her impatience superseded her reasoning again.

Stomach churning, she recalled what Ray had told her. *Listen to your instinct. When in doubt, run.* Right now, her instinct told her to wait and see if this was Judge Knight's son here to pick her up.

Darkness once again covered her porch when the headlights went off. Keeping her weight on her good foot, Taylor waited for the inevitable knock. Two soft bells sounded and bounced around the room instead. “Not Jean’s men for sure. That’s comforting.”

She peeked through the peeping hole. It was dark. She forgot to turn the porch light on. Crud. Staring at her fingers wrapped around the doorknob, she turned it slowly.

“Yes?”

“Bors Knight. I’m here to—”

Taylor opened the door wider. “Oh my god. You’re Judge Knight’s son?”

“I thought with my name and Gawain’s, you’d figure out that Arthur Knight is my father.”

*Oh my god. Is this really the man I met earlier?* “No. Why would I think that? You weren’t really a chip off the old block.”

“Oh? And you know this how?”

“Someone told me Judge Knight is a kind and respectable man.”

“Therefore his sons are expected to act accordingly.”

“Right.”

“You, Taylor or Teej, talk as if you were raised under a rock.”

*No, raised under Jean’s thumb.*

“You don’t know a thing about me.”

“I know something.”

“What?”

“That you have no sense of finding out who is behind your door before opening it.”

“I used my instinct.”

“What the...what instinct?”

“You know, a woman’s intuition. I felt that it was safe to open the door. So I did.” He got her there. What if someone followed her here? A burglar, a maniac, or someone Jean ordered who knew how to use a doorbell instead of force. Taylor bristled from Bors intent look. “So, you’re here to give me a ride?”

“Anytime you’re ready.”

“What’s up with you and giving me rides?” Taylor sighed. “Let me grab my purse.” She turned, careful not to put pressure on her sore ankle. The pain medicine she took earlier eased the pain tremendously and she could probably walk without limping, but it she didn’t want to take a chance of hurting her ankle again.

“How’s the ankle?”

“Still sore, but not as bad.”

“Do you need to be carried or can you walk?”

“I am perfectly capable of walking, thank you. Just give me a minute.”

“With your speed, it’ll be Christmas before you get to your purse.” Bors walked inside then shut the door. “Where is it? I’ll go get it.”

An arm’s length distance was all that separated them. She could smell his scent. Fresh. Clean. Like the outdoors. Lord Almighty! Crisped white shirt with its front tucked in his low rider, dark blue wrinkled jeans that he must have found at the bottom of his hamper and yet looked incredibly sexy in it, scruff but clean boots peeked through his hem, clean ruffled hair, and a fresh masculine scent. What a transformation.

Earlier, she had a glimpse of how handsome he was. But nothing prepared her for this. Without his coat, she could see the outline of his body packed with muscles. Not large like the guys in body building contests. His six foot-two frame was too tall for her own five-foot-five one. He reminded her of the delicious model she saw once in the dressing room. *Potent, masculine, rough*. Qualities she admired in the heroes she often read about in her racy pocket books. However, something told her that behind those disarming, charming smiles, a formidable and dangerous man hid. It was as if he wouldn’t hesitate to hurt someone if need be.

Bors stood and stared at her. Man, how could a man possess those distinguishing attributes by merely wearing jeans with a tattered hem and a shirt? His eyes though, were different. They were too intelligent, too keen, as if he could



see beyond her skin.

“Do I pass muster?”

“What an impressive transformation.”

“From a troll to what?”

“A handsome grouchy...hmm...troll. Did I hurt your pride when I called you a troll?”

“I don’t give a damn if you call me an ogre. It’s better than pretty. Where is your purse? I’ll get it,” Bors snapped.

“Are you angry because the job of picking me up fell on your hands?”

“I’m not angry.”

“Yes, you are. You should have asked Gawain to come and get me.”

“For heaven’s sake, woman. It’s late.”

“Right. Come back tomorrow then. I am sure my meeting with Judge Knight would go well if we are both rested. Go. Leave. Goodnight.”

“What happened to your screws? They get loose when you fell and broke your heel?”

“There is no need for insults, Bors. I’ll get my purse. I am not a damn invalid.”

Bors scoffed. “You’re practically standing on one foot, Taylor. Or should I call you Teej?”

“Taylor or Teej is fine. You know, you’re too bossy. Dan said don’t put weight on this foot.” Bors’ deep scowl told her to just give up. “Fine, it’s in the bedroom. I left it on the bed.”

Bors walked toward the bedroom as if he’d been in the cabin before. He knew where to go. It didn’t take long before he was back with her purse in his hand.

“Is this it or do you need something else?”

“We are coming back here, right?”

“You are just going to meet my dad.”

“Right.”

“I’m busy and I don’t dally. Let’s go.”

“To meet Judge Knight, right?”

“Isn’t that the plan?”

“Just want to make sure. Wait, how would I know that you’re not going to, um...”

“To what? Ravish you? No, never crossed my mind. And for your information, I don’t go around ravishing women who don’t want to be ravished.”

“I’m not talking about anything like that, you toad. I asked because...wait. Never crossed your mind? Why, do I look that repulsive? For your information, Mister Troll of a Man, I’ve received more than a handful of proposals, proving I

don't look like a witch with a wart on my nose. And for you to say that I am unattractive? Such an insult."

"What the hell! Taylor, you could drive a man crazy. I didn't say anything about you being un—god." He shook his head and fixed his stare on the ceiling. "My dad is waiting. Could we go now? Or you need a minute?"

"No. I'm ready. Did you see the raccoons outside? They were so cute. At first, I thought I heard footsteps, but when I looked outside, I saw only raccoons."

She didn't expect his reaction. He changed his stance, stood tall with his feet wide apart like a cowboy ready to draw. And his face...turned granite like. "No, I didn't see the bandits. You're in Orcas Island. You're bound to see animals and hear sounds, especially at night."

"Thanks for telling me that. But you don't have to look like a mad dragon ready to spit fire at anyone."

Bors stared at her, his jaw muscles twitching. After a couple deep breaths, he shook his head. "I'm cool."

"Alright. That's all I need to know. I don't want to ride in the car while the driver is irritated with me." She ambled toward the door the exact moment her stomach chose to rumble. Her face heated right away. Damn, she should have eaten the grass salad.

"Did you eat?"

She whirled around to face Bors. He was still scowling. “Yes.”

“You could have fooled me. That rumble I heard is loud enough to disturb the dead.”

“You know, it’s rude to tell a woman that she is unattractive, or ask her age, or if she is hungry. You, Bors Knight, are one rude man.”

“And you, Taylor, are hungry but denying it. Let’s go.”

Taylor faced the door again, but before she could take another step or even blink, Bors stood right in front of her, right hand on his back beneath his shirttail. What in the world?

“Are you carrying a gun?”

“Why?” he turned to look at her.

“I don’t like men carrying. They either work for the government or they’re thugs working for those who work for the government, or gangsters who—”

“Work for the government. Got anything against men that protect your streets, your country?”

“Protect? You would think differently if you met the men who visited Jean. I hate men in uniform.”

Bors frowned and stared. He looked, searching her face for something. “In general?”

“Right now, yes. Until I find someone who deserves the word trust, my idea

about men is all in the general category. So why are you carrying a gun?"

"My dad is a judge who made enemies. I want to be able to protect him when necessary."

"How about Gawain?"

"My family, including my mom, all know how to shoot. Now, can we go?"

"Sheez, you're grumpy."

Bors shook his head at her then opened the door just a crack then looked at her. "How's your foot?"

"Chubby."

"God, you're a brat with a horrible attitude. You know, I think you should bring your violin, too, just in case the meeting goes longer than an hour." He nodded toward the black case sitting on the couch.

"Okay."

Bors grabbed the case. "Here. Hold it."

In one swift move, Bors lifted her off her feet. "I can walk, Bors."

"I know. But we can leave faster this way."

"Why are you in a hurry? You think I'll change my mind?"

"I don't think it. I know."

Taylor decided not to argue with him. Besides, it felt great to be held like this. She could get use to this treatment. She wrapped her arm around his neck

and rested her head on his shoulder. Bors smelled so good, a sigh escaped her lips.

## Chapter Six

Bors nearly dropped her on the floor. Taylor's warm breath licked his skin. Like fire, it traveled down his chest and all the way to his hardening cock. *Fuckin' eh.* Thankful he didn't have to walk far, Bors managed to open his passenger door. He wanted to throw her inside so he could keep their bodies separated, but he wasn't raised that way. Jean's woman or not, he'd treat her the way he treated all women—with respect. Careful not to bang her sore foot, he lowered her on the seat.

"Taylor, baby. Let go of my neck."

"Oh, sorry."

Bors felt her fingers skim his nape. Whether she did it on purpose or not, the effect was the same. He loved it. "Comfy?"

"Uh-huh."

"Good. Now, buckle up." Quickly, he walked around to the driver's side. Reaching for the gun tucked on the back of his jeans, he scanned the area. Whoever was here earlier must have skipped when he came. Taylor didn't just imagine someone. Every part of his bone told him what she heard was a man's

footsteps and not of an animal. It wouldn't be safe for her to stay here. He opened his door and slid in the driver's seat.

Someone's on her tail. If Taylor and Jean were intimate and she ran away from him, he would chase her to hell and back. The woman was too beautiful, with sensuality oozing from every pore of her body and the remarkable thing was, she didn't even know it. Her sex appeal showed each time she moved. It was natural, unpretentious, and goddamn it, bringing out the beast inside him.

And, she hated his kind.

"Fuckin' eh," he grumbled.

"Do you count the number of times you curse so you know how much money you have to put in your curse jar?"

"No. Hard to keep track."

"Wow. You curse that often, huh? What about when you curse mentally?"

"What about it?"

"Does it count?"

"No." He inserted the key in his ignition.

"So you pay only if your mother hears you curse."

"We all follow the honesty policy. If we utter a curse with or without Mom around, we're supposed to pay. Since we don't live with Mom and Dad anymore, we all keep a jar wherever we're staying. It's hard to keep track of how many times



I cursed in a week, so I just put all of my coins in the jar. That's why Gawain said my jar is always full." He slowly backed the truck up.

"Tell me if I'm wrong. Your mother required you and your sibling to put money in the jar to discourage you from cursing, right?"

"Uh-huh."

"But it obviously didn't work. Why keep the quarter dollar rule?"

"It helps pay her bills."

"Holy smokes!"

"I know. My father is happy with the rule also. We help pay the bills."

"I bet."

They were almost out of her driveway when his cell phone started ringing.

"Would you like me to answer that?"

"Do you want to fish the phone from my pocket?"

"No."

"Thought so."

"I just don't want you to miss a very important call. Especially from Judge Knight telling you to take me directly to his house. Right. Directly to his home office."

"That's where we're going, Taylor. To take you directly to my dad's." Taylor relaxed visibly. What, did she think he'd take her someplace else?

“Good. Then you can ignore your phone.”

“You don’t trust me, do you?”

“Can you be trusted? You have a gun tucked behind you.”

“I already told you—”

His cell phone stopped ringing only to start again. What the heck? He stepped on the brakes and reached for his phone. “Hey Dad. We’re on our way. What? Is she okay?” He listened to his dad’s calm tone, but he could sense worry beneath it. Tristan rushed Julie to the hospital. She was bleeding and contracting. Damn. “I’ll be right there. You sure? How’s Tristan? I bet.” He could imagine his brother falling apart with worry. “She’s with me. Yeah. I’ll call him later. Take care, Dad. Let me know when you need me.” He hung up the phone.

“Trouble?”

“Julie, the woman you met at the clinic—”

“Your sister in-law.”

“Yeah. She’s in the hospital.”

“Oh, no. Is she and the baby okay?”

“Yeah. The doctor is watching her right now. My family is there. Dad can’t see you right now, Taylor.”

“No problem. He can see me when he is able. I can wait. Family is number one. If you don’t mind rolling this truck forward again, I’ll be out of your hair and

you can go see your family. They need you right now.”

“Dad will probably see you tomorrow. He knows how important your case is.”

“Good. I’ll be in the cabin. He knows my cell. He can call me anytime. With my sore foot, I can go as far as the porch.”

“Are you okay? You’re not changing your mind about meeting my dad, are you?”

“Of course not. I really need someone to help me.”

“But you don’t trust anyone.”

“You wouldn’t understand.”

Bors turned to look at Taylor. Sure, Julie needed her family right now and they would be with her until the earth crumbled beneath their feet. But what about Taylor? Looks like she could use a shoulder to cry on. As far as he could tell, his shoulder was the only one available. He’d stay for a few minutes with her. Besides, tonight would be as good an opportunity as it gets. Question her, pry out some information about Jean and get her on his side of the law, then he would nail her lover on the cross. Jean. Taylor’s lover. He couldn’t imagine it. “Try me.”

“Why? My problem is none of your concern.”

“I’m a Knight, Taylor. When Dad asked me to get you, you became my concern. I don’t have to go. If you need someone to talk to, I’m available.”

“Why, are you a judge also?”

“No, but I am a good listener.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Uh-huh. Just ask Gawain.”

“Bet he’ll say, ‘He’s all bullshit, Taylor.’ Your brother is nice.”

Bors laughed. “You’re probably right.” He turned the truck around and left the driveway.

Taylor looked behind her. “Excuse me, Bors, but the cabin is right back there. Where are we going?”

“I have a hankering for Dick’s burger.”

“At ten at night?”

“Dick’s is open twenty-four seven. Have you tried it?”

“Seen it in Seattle.”

“But?”

“Never tried it.”

“Oh, baby. Dick’s burger is the best.”

“Better than Burger King?”

“What? Man, you really got to try Dick’s. Burgers there are freaking awesome, and it’s always open to serve hungry stomachs. Oh, and the milkshakes...” Bors glanced at Taylor then wiggled his brows. “You should try it.”

“I think you like anything that you can put in your mouth.”

Bors grinned. Taylor looked serious when she said the comment. He was sure she meant it literally, but he received it differently. “Anything I put in my mouth, babe, I enjoy.”

Taylor mumbled something with a pig in it. He couldn’t help it. He laughed.

“Bors, you don’t—” Her stomach rumbled.

The full moon provided Bors enough light to see Taylor’s face turn pink. “My sister’s stomach rumbles all the time, too. She eats a lot—always hungry—but never gains weight. What’s up with that?”

“Maybe she regurgitates after every meal.”

“No way. Is that why you’re skinny?”

“Excuse me. I’m not skinny.”



Just as he predicted, Dick’s was busy. Bors recognized most of the customers. Local teens, most wearing black T-shirts with wolves printed on the front. They must have watched a movie at the drive-in. He waited for a car to leave then took the vacated spot.

“I’ll order for us. What do you want?”

“I don’t know what to get. You said burgers here are great.”

“Oh yeah. Double cheeseburger or just burger? With or without onions,

tomatoes?”

“Umm, I’ll order double cheeseburger with everything on it. Wait, no pickles and onions. Just mayonnaise. Don’t like mustard. I want cheddar cheese, please. Oh, and make sure no peppers get in my burger. I like tomatoes. Umm, if they have Romaine lettuce, I’ll take that. Yup. That’s it. Please make sure my burger is cooked.”

“Baby, they don’t serve raw meat here.”

“You know what I mean. No red in the middle.”

Bors gave her a droll stare. “Are you sure you want *everything* in it?”

Taylor laughed. It was unpretentious, sounded like an angel, sexy, and damn arousing. “And fries. I like them salty.”

“Crispy, wilted or soggy.”

“Funny.”

“Drinks?”

“Diet coke, please.”

“Want it cold, warm, lukewarm, in a can with a straw or—”

“Ha. Ha.”

Bors stared at Taylor, entranced. It was too easy to get lost in those round coffee eyes and forget whom she belonged to. He must be going nuts because all he wanted at that moment was to kiss her. Before he acted on his thoughts, he opened

his door. “Be right back.”

Minutes later, Bors found himself again watching Taylor with fascination as she took a big bite of her burger. She might look sophisticated, but she eats like Gawain. She unbuckled her seatbelt, tucked her legs beneath her and faced him. Burger juice dripped down her chin. Her tongue darted out, reaching and swiping. Bors watched, his mind wandered and his body grew taut each time her little pink tongue danced like a windshield wiper down her lower lip. What would it feel like if it were his tongue licking off that juice? He bet it would taste divine. *Hell, yeah. It would.*

“So good.”

“I know.” He wouldn’t be surprised if she didn’t lick the wrapper. Either she was really hungry or she’d never indulged herself in something as simple as a cheeseburger.

“So which one’s mine. Chocolate or vanilla?” she asked while chewing. She was so Gawain.

“You can try both.”

“Really?” She dipped her hand inside the bag. “Love these fries, too. So crunchy.” Taylor picked up the chocolate milkshake, took a deep sip then let out a big ahh. She did it a couple times with the same reaction each time she took a sip.

Bors noticed the tip of her tongue touch the straw before she trapped it

between her teeth. The action was so freaking arousing. He began imagining her tongue touching the tip of his...Goddamn it.

“Yummy. Here, take a sip before it’s too late.”

He hesitated for a brief second before leaning forward to capture the tip of the straw with his lips. He tasted the chocolate and Taylor. Maybe he imagined it, but it didn’t stop his dick from hardening. “Yup, good. Do you eat like this all the time?”

“I love food. But I don’t indulge myself with greasy, mouth-watering burgers like this. My god, this is so good.”

“Better than tarantula salad?”

“Arugula, silly. It’s an aromatic green salad. You must have had it and didn’t even know. It’s popular in Italian cuisine. You should add it to your diet. Very low in calories and high in vitamins A and C.”

“No wonder you’re skinny.” He took a bite of his burger, trying to drown Taylor’s taste. Damn, if he weren’t careful, his attraction would sky rocket and might lose his control and kiss the damn woman to have a bit more of her taste.

Bors stopped chewing. Jesus. Not good. Mixing work with pleasure was never good. Worse, she could have had shared Jean’s bed every single fucking night.

Man, Snitch was right when he said Taylor was a goddess. Jesus, if she were



this beautiful, he could only imagine when she was naked. Bors gritted his teeth. No. He must stop his attraction. Taylor was a job, a key to Jean's jail. He must see to it that he got it. And he knew just how to go about it. Irritate her. If they stayed annoyed with each other, the attraction could be suppressed.

"When you called Dad, you changed your mind and hung up. Why?"

"I think you already know."

"You weren't sure if Dad's the right person to call."

"Not easy finding trustworthy people nowadays."

"You don't trust people in general or men?"

"I do trust a few."

"But none of them are judges, politicians...agents."

"Yup."

*Good to know. Lucky I didn't introduce myself as Agent Knight.*

If she continued opening up, he might nail not one congressman, but more men in uniform. "You very well shouldn't trust anyone without knowing them first."

"Are you saying that I should not trust you or your dad?"

"I'll leave it up to you. Trust is something we earn. Find out for yourself if we can be trusted or not. All I ask is you meet my dad."

"Why would he offer that I meet him at his house, and late at night?"

“Baby, if it weren’t for my mom, he would spend his entire life in his office so he could help others. Our home is the extension of his office, but not open to most people. So consider yourself lucky.”

“That’s what I heard, but you can’t blame me for having doubts. I’ve been surrounded with liars, Bors. Men who boast that they love their wives, their daughters, and are god-fearing, but I’ve seen them come in and out of Jean’s office. Smiling because Jean procured a vir—”

“Virgins?”

“Yes. So you see why it’s hard for me to trust men.”

*Like me.* Bors made a mental note to keep his identity hidden. “I don’t blame you.”

“You know, I have this idea that all men are the same. But after talking to Judge Knight, I think I’m wrong.”

“He’s one of a kind.”

Taylor sighed. “Listening to your dad’s voice, I could tell he’s different. That’s why I agreed that we meet.”

That was easy. He thought he’d have to paint a better picture to convince her. “How about me? I’m a troll, remember? And I chase women. Do you think you could trust me?”

“I think so. Something tells me that you’re different, too.”

“Something tells you? What the heck does that mean.”

“A hunch.”

“A hunch?” Jesus. She would trust a man because of a hunch. “Just like following your instinct,” he remarked caustically.

“Hey, don’t be sarcastic. Don’t tell me you never followed your instinct. Not even once.”

Bors shrugged. She was right. Remarkably, his instinct had saved his and Branyan’s life many times before.

“Okay, with you I don’t get the hibbygibbies.”

“And the instinct, hunch, hibbygibbies go together.”

“Kinda.”

“What’s hibbygibbies and how the fuck do you spell that word.”

“You could ask without cursing, you know. Forget the spelling. It’s not in the dictionary, I think. Maybe in the urban one. Anyway, I get the hibbygibbies when Jean’s friends are around, except for Ray. I feel icky, dirty, unsafe. Just feels weird. ”

Bors waited for more, but Taylor didn’t say anything else. She said she’d been around men. Well, she could have fooled him. Something about her bespoke innocence. Taylor proved to be a puzzle. And who was this Ray? Later, he’d find out and he bet he wouldn’t have to dig deeper. He had a feeling that Taylor would

volunteer everything he needed to know.

“Glad to know I don’t make you feel like a caterpillar is crawling on your skin.”

“Me, too. I wouldn’t be having this yummy dinner otherwise. You know what?” Taylor stared at him with a frown.

“What?”

“I think you pretend to be tough to scare people, but you aren’t really.”

“The hell I’m not. I am capable of murdering anyone.” *If it’s within the bounds of reasons.*

Taylor’s shoulders shook from undiluted laughter. It was marvelous and catching. “God, you should see your face. Sorry. Did I hurt your feelings?”

“No. You know what?”

“Uh-oh. Are you trying to get even?”

Bors grinned. “No, babe.”

“What?”

“You laugh like an angel, you have a face and body of a goddess, and you’re in trouble. Why did you run away from Jean?”



The once yummy hamburger suddenly lost its taste. Her mouth running away with her would be her downfall someday. God, Jean told her many times she

was an obnoxious, foolish and loquacious talker. A chatterbox who never stopped complaining and criticizing him. He said, too, that her mouth would lead her to trouble. Now it seemed, Jean was right. "I shouldn't have told you about Jean."

"Listen, when you told Dad your name he knew who you were running away from."

How? Through the grapevine? Good god, did Jean issue an Amber Alert on her? But Jean wasn't like that. He hated involving the authorities in his dealings. *Ha! Goes to show you. You can't keep a secret when you're a politician. Ears are everywhere.*

"So Judge Knight already knew why I called him?"

"He knows that Jean is after you. Believe it or not, Dad gets the feed twenty-four seven. Some of them are false; some are slightly true. Being a judge is not easy."

"What else does he know? And how come you know?"

"Aside from you're an escapee? Nothing. All Dad knows is that Jean is on the hunt and you are being hunted. I know because we talk. When you called, we were outside shooting the breeze."

"Shooting the breeze. Is it your dad's habit to discuss confidential matters to you?"

"We're tight, babe. You do realize that you made an enemy of a foul beast."

Taylor frowned. "I hope not. Others would see Jean as a beast, but...he isn't all that. That's why I contacted your father."

“He can only help you if you tell him everything.”

“Believe me, I know.”

“So are you going to answer my question why you are running away from Jean?”

“Bors, you maybe your father’s son, but you are not him. I will talk to Judge Knight alone.”

“Until he’s heard what you have to say, you’re going to need someone to watch over you.”

“Oh god! Another one.” For eight years, her constant companion was her bodyguard. The hell she’d want another one now that she was out. Super sexy hot or not, she didn’t want him watching her.

“What do you mean another one?”

“A bodyguard. I’m tired of being followed and watched from sun up to sun down.”

“Jean hired a bodyguard to watch you?”

“I’ve said enough.”

“Taylor, I don’t know how important you are to Jean, but the more I learn about you, the better Dad and I can protect you. Those who know how important you are to Jean might use you.”

“You mean find me and ask for a ransom?”

“Something like that.”

Only those who were close to Jean knew who she was. She was sure Jean pissed one or two of them off, but would they use her? Jean would never let them. She was sure of it. Taylor sighed. “I hope not. I think I want to go back to the cabin now.”

“Are you going to finish your burger?”

“No. It’s too big. It hardly fits my mouth. It’ll take me all night to finish this. Do you want it?”

“You betcha.”

“You can have it. Please take me back to the cabin.”

\*

Bors plugged in Doors CD on the console. Jim Morrison’s soft, low and haunting singing voice drowned out the silence in the truck and the sound of crunching rocks beneath his tires. Outside, nothing moved in the darkness. Even the tall tress seemed asleep.

Bors couldn't believe how quickly Taylor's mood changed. One minute she was a starving chatty woman, then she was a quiet somber one. He couldn't help but feel like a cad. He should have at least let her finish eating before he pressed her with questions about Jean. Keeping his gaze on the road, he switched his headlights to high beams.

“With the speed you’re going, it’ll be morning before we reach the cabin.”

He stole a glance at Taylor. A woman, alone with him in his truck, and she could hardly wait to go back to her cabin? Wow, he really ruined her mood. Or maybe he was such a bore. He hoped not. None of the male Knights were ever boring, especially around women. "I have to drive below the speed limit. In case you haven't noticed, it's too dark to see the road."

"Fine. But we're practically crawling."

"Wanna drive? Why don't you change the CD while you're at it?"

"You know I can't drive. But I can change the music?"

"Yes." Taylor made a move to press the eject button but he reached out and caught her hand in his. "Sike! Nobody touches anything on my dashboard."

"Are you always like this?" Taylor pulled her hand from his grip.

"Like what?"

"Frivolous airhead."

"Those two words are the same."

"Whatever."

Bors met Taylor's scowl with a grin. He'd rather see her like this than with a sad face. Her mood didn't matter to him, he told himself. It was simply that she talked more when in a pissy mood, and he wanted her talking. "Don't you like Jim?"

"Hard to like someone I don't even know."



“What? Everybody knows Jim Morrison. Man, *Light My Fire*? Baby, that’s classic. Haven’t you heard him sing until now?”

“Have you heard *Dawn* by Jean-Yves Thibaudet? No? Well not everybody loves Jean-Yves.”

“Wait, you have no case, Taylor. Jim is immortal, a god. One of the best singer, poet, artist who ever lived. Your Tibet is unheard of.” He changed his gear to first as he turned around the bend. A quiet night like this when animals were in abundance was as dangerous as the freeway during rush hour.

“Thibaudet. He composed the soundtrack for *Pride and Prejudice*.”

“Egad. How about Marcy Playground? *Sex and Candy* singer.”

“Never heard of him. Johann Sebastian Bach?”

“Of course I know him. We’re hella tight, baby. In fact, we had lunch the other day.”

Taylor punched Bors on the arm.

“Hey, I’m driving!”

“You’re not nice. I’m not talking to you. Just watch the road.”

Bors laughed. “You sound like my sister. Act like one, too.”

“Is she nosey like you?”

“Worse. She reads romance books with naked men on the cover.”

“Me, too. Oh, I bet I’ll like her. Anyone who appreciates romance with a

happy ever after—”

“You like looking at naked men, too?” Bors took a quick look at Taylor and wagged his eyebrows. “Good to know.”

She scowled. “I meant I like reading romance books. Most of them have hot guys on the cover. Not nude, mind you, but sensual and it provokes minds to think, to imagine.”

“How it’s like to be touched and hugged and fu—”

“Don’t you dare say that word!”

“What’s wrong with the word fussed over?”

Taylor scoffed, her arms crossed on her chest. “Bors, I know where your mind is heading. So don’t lie. Anyway, where are we?”

“Romance and hot covers.” *Dang, I’m actually discussing romance novels without feeling the urge to puke. Something’s wrong here.*

“Oh yeah. I particularly love the historical genre. There is something about glittering ballrooms, gowns, and men in their crisp coats and cravats that fascinate me.”

“Cravats. Good god. I assume the heroes are British noblemen.”

“Most of the historical romances I’ve read are set in England.”

“Have you heard those men talk? They all sound like they have plugged up noses. And they’re all stodgy.”

Taylor pinched his arm this time. "You are so prejudice."

"Oww!" He rubbed his arm where Taylor pinched him. "You're a crab."

"I'll do more than pinch you if you say one more bad word about the heroes in my novels."

"My sister and Julie are both romance books addicts. Julie is a published author. You must have read her books."

A soft gasp escaped Taylor's mouth before pushing his shoulder. "Your sister in-law? The one I met earlier? You're kidding, right?"

"No." Bors turned right around the bend in the road slowly then sped up a bit as soon as they passed it.

"What's her pen name or does she use one?"

"I thought you don't want to talk to me?"

She punched him again. "You're a troll. Fine don't tell me. I know you will anyway."

Bors laughed. "What makes you say that?"

"Because you like talking to me."

"Wow. You are a brat. Taylor, I'm not taking you back to the cabin."

"What? You're kidnapping me?"

"I wouldn't call it that. But I think it would be best if you stay someplace else."

“You think someone was outside my cabin. Not raccoons.”

“Sorry, babe.”

“Where are you taking me?”

“To my house.”

“But—”

Something crossed the dirt road. Taylor screamed. Bors stopped the truck abruptly, but not before he braced his arm across her chest. “Oh god! What was that?”

“A deer.”

“Not a bear, cougar, a big cat? Big Foot?”

“Saw it.”

“Big Foot?”

“No, sweets. I’m positive it’s a deer. Are you okay?”

“I think the deer isn’t. I felt the truck hit something solid. Do you think the poor thing is okay?”

“Are you okay?” Bors enunciated each word. His hand moved to cup her chin to turn her head, forcing her to look at him. “Taylor?”

“Yes. I’m fine. Did we kill it?”

“I hit it hard.”

What was that supposed to mean? That they killed the deer? Taylor

watched Bors get out of the truck then walk around towards the hood. She could see his face. He didn't look happy and the way his lips were moving, she could tell he was cursing. Not good. She wanted to know.

"Is it okay?" Before she thought better of it, she got out of the truck.

"Baby, stay in the truck."

"I want to see." Not minding her sore foot, she walked on the dirt road, stood beside Bors and looked down at the deer. Its head twisted in an odd angle and it looked painful. Blood oozed from its mouth and nose. "Oh my god." She couldn't stop staring. Suddenly, an image of her mother formed in her head. Bloody with a broken neck, her eyes red from the broken veins, and her teeth...

"Come on. Let's get you back in the truck. You don't have to see this."

A loud sob escaped her mouth. The dead deer became blurry as her tears gathered in her eyes. "Can we do something? Maybe take her to the clinic. Maybe we can save her. Maybe—"

Bors gathered her in his arms, running his hand along the back of her head gently. "Shhh...she's gone. I have to move her, though."

Why did she look? Her curiosity, a compulsion to know things had made her open the folder that contained pictures of her mother taken after she landed on the ground. The gruesome images haunted her for years. Finally, the images began to fade. But now, they were back, all because she had to look at the dead deer.

Taylor shivered. She shut her eyes tight to block the pictures in her head.

“Come on. We can’t stand here all night. You’re already shivering.”

Taylor nodded. He was right. She sniffed and looked up at Bors. “Sorry.”

“For what?”

“If I didn’t distract you, you could have avoided the deer.”

“It wasn’t your fault. She jumped in front of the truck.”

“But—” Whatever she was about to say was cut off by a loud bleating.

“Shit. There’s a fawn.”

Sure enough, a small fawn walked toward the mama deer. Killing a mama deer was horrible enough, but hearing a fawn bleating for his mother broke Taylor’s heart. “What are we going to do? We can’t leave the baby here.”

“It’ll survive, Taylor. They live here.”

“We have to take the baby with us.”

“No. Babe, if that’s a puppy, I would. But it’s a deer. That thing knows where to go.”

## Chapter Seven

Through the rearview mirror, Bors found himself staring at the brown-eyed fawn. His eyes were watery from sneezing, but it was the fawn's bleating that was beginning to rub on his nerves. He told Taylor that the fawn could be carrying some kind of a disease or ticks. But she wouldn't be deterred. She kept fixing the rags that he placed on the back seat urging the fawn to use it, but the animal just kept moving away from it. After the third try, Taylor quit trying.

One thing he learned from the short time of meeting Taylor was that she was one stubborn woman. She would try everything to get what she wanted, including pleading and wrapping her arms around his waist until he acquiesced to taking the fawn to the cabin. With her arms around him and chest pressed just below his, he thought about standing his ground. But when he saw her tears, well, he crumbled. Damn tears. So freaking powerful.

The fawn cried again. He sneezed. He didn't like staying in the truck or inside the house. It would be like having an infant walking around without his diapers on. The best place for the little thing was outside, but he didn't want to face Taylor's frown. No, he wasn't afraid of her, he thought. It was the opposite.

Whenever the woman frowned, he had the insane need to pull her close, kiss her frown away and hug her tight.

Bors sneezed again. Damn fawn. He wondered who was more miserable. The fawn or him. He ran his fingers through his hair. He was born and raised on this island, but never in his life had he come this close to a fawn. But it was common knowledge—you don't go near the animals. You leave them alone. What an itty-bitty thing.

“Are you crying?”

“No, babe. Its just my eyes are itchy.” He covered his nose with his sleeve in time before he let out a loud sneeze.

“Bless you.”

“Thanks.”

“What should we feed him? You shouldn't have eaten my left over burger.”

“I think we should let him out. He's crying because he wants to go home.”

The fawn bobbed its head.

“See? He agrees with me.”

“How did you know that?”

“Wouldn't you be crying, too, if you were in that little thing's hooves? Babe, we can't keep him inside. I doubt he's potty trained.”

“Oh, I didn't think about that. How about if we put him in the bathroom as



soon as we get to your house?”

“Good idea. That way that thing could flush the toilet and wash his hooves.”

“Were you born sarcastic?”

“Realist. He’s a fawn. Have you seen a pet fawn?”

“No.”

“Me, either. I can tie him outside and he can wait on the porch until—”

“That’s barbaric. That fawn is not used to wearing a leash. He’d be miserable.”

Bors wanted to tell her that the fawn was probably more terrified being confined inside the house compared to being tied outside, but thought better not to say it. “PAWS will probably be at my place in an hour.” And in the meantime, he would just have to endure his allergies.

“Thank you.”

“You’re short of choking me to make me agree with you.”

“I can’t believe you’re able to find someone to come and get Fawn this late.”

Lord, she named the animal, too. Bors sighed. “PAWS rep is happy to help us.” He had to use the Knight name to get someone to come for the fawn at this time of night, and he hated doing that. He rubbed his eyes. Damn allergies.

“Thank you for dinner.”

“You’re welcome.” He sneezed so loud it was a wonder the truck’s roof

didn't come off.

Taylor rummaged in her bag. "Here." She handed him a tissue. "Oh god, I hope you're not getting sick. I think a runny nose is one of the many symptoms of Swine Flu. If you start coughing, feeling lethargic and feverish, losing your appetite and started living in the bathroom then you better see a doctor."

"I'll try to remember that."

He noticed she tucked her legs again. A habit, he thought. "You rented a nice cabin," he commented to change the topic.

"I know."

Bors glanced at Taylor trying to get comfortable. He doubted that she was aware how sultry she looked sitting on his passenger's seat. "It is a beautiful cabin *and* the most expensive rental place on the island."

"I made the reservation before my bank account froze. I can't afford the place." Taylor looked down, her hands flat on her thighs. "I shouldn't ask you this. We just met. But, you already know my circumstances. Do you know a cheaper place where I can stay?"

"My offer earlier about my parent's extra room still stands."

"I hate to impose. And if what you said earlier about people wanting to use me against Jean is true, I wouldn't want them to come for me when your parents are around."

“Alright. You can stay at my house. I stay in my condo in Seattle most of the time. You use my house here. You’ll have everything you need in there.”

Taylor chewed her lower lip. “Are you sure?”

Heck, the woman who held the key to Pandora’s box staying in his house? He’d never been so sure in his life. “Yes.”

“I don’t know what to say.”

“Thank you would be nice.” Man, why couldn’t he stop offering people help. He mentally counted his promises. Perm for Astrid, OISC Membership for Teta, and now his home for Taylor. It was surprising he didn’t work as a social worker.

“Thank you. I already owe you one and three dollars for my slippers. I’ll repay the favor, Bors. Promise.”

“I’ll ask for the payment—later. We’re almost there.” He took the Cayou Valley road. Ten minutes of misery and they’d be at his home.

Simms said Taylor wasn’t available for anyone, was guarded, and rode the limo wherever she went. He would bet his badge that Jean controlled her accounts, too. She was Jean’s precious gem. But what kind? Mistress, masseuse, secretary, or another woman Jean kidnapped but became emotionally involved?

“What is your connection with Jean?” He sneezed the same time Fawn let out a loud bleat.

“I’m not supposed to tell anyone?” Taylor twisted around. “Hey, Fawn.

We're here. No worries."

*Worry about me! I'm dying here can't you see, I'm allergic to the damn fawn.* "You are going to tell my dad, aren't you? Might as well tell me."

"Isn't it considered breaching of confidentiality when Judge Knight shares his work cases with you?"

"He's my dad. But whatever we discuss at home stays at home, Taylor." Since she had already told him her trust with men in uniform was nonexistent, Bors did not to divulge what he did for a living. Perhaps if he kept his real job from her for now, it wouldn't hurt. Yeah. It would be wise not to tell her he worked for the FBI. Later, if necessary, he'd tell her the truth. "I want in on your case because I'm a servant to anyone in need of help."

Taylor's expression changed from surprise to a critical squint. "What's that supposed to mean? You're not a priest, are you?"

"Hell, no." He turned right to Quarry Lane. This dark, people from out of town would not find this place at night, but he knew the area inside and out. He flipped down his high beam when an oncoming car appeared.

"So what kind of a servant are you? What do you do?"

He turned the high beam back on again and tried to keep his attention on the road. "I trap vermin." There. That was close to the truth.

"So that explains why you were dirty and smelled...funny. What do you do

after you catch them?”

“Shoot them if necessary. Incarcerate them, punish them for their sins.”

“You’re talking about various small animals or insects that are pests like cockroaches or rats, right?”

*Jean, rats, what’s the difference.* “Yeah.”

“What a dirty job. Like the police’s or Jean’s.”

“My job may be considered dirty, but no fucking way that I’m like Jean.”

“I didn’t say you’re like Jean. All I’m saying is that the FBI, politicians, lawyers, they are all tangled in the same ugly, dirty business. They all have dirty hands. I’m just making comparisons.”

“There is a big difference between Jean and me, my dad and others. Big difference. Insult me and the others all you want. But not my father, Taylor.”

With the bright full moon, he saw Taylor’s face pale before she looked down and fell silent. Christ, he shouldn’t have reacted to her comment like a grumpy old...troll. She was just making a statement. And didn’t she tell him her aversion to men in uniform? Damn, he scared her.

“Sorry. I’m an ass.”

“I lived my life meeting people like Jean, Bors. I didn’t mean to make the comparison.”

“I should apologize. I didn’t give you the hibbygibbies, did I?” He took a

brief look at her.

A sad frown flitted across her face. “No. I talk before I think. Sorry for the insult. It wasn’t intentional.”

“I’m not sure if this’ll help, but listen. I’ve been working for the same agency for years. I know countless men who lost their lives protecting people...catching vermin, ruined their marriages because they are so devoted to their job. Perhaps you know men in uniform that are dickheads, but not all are like them. Dad made enemies left and right because of who he is. If you don’t feel comfortable talking about Jean and your association with him, I’m fine with that. Just so you know though. I will find out.”

“Why do you have to involve yourself in this?”

Bors winked at Taylor. “Because, like you said, I like you.”

“Yeah right. What is there to like about me?”

“What? What’s wrong with liking you? You always rise to the occasion when I tease you. You’re fun to be with, you brought home a fawn, and I’ve never met a woman who would leave her shoes in the parking lot and walk barefoot. ”

“So I’m odd.”

“I’m just saying you’re...fascinating.”

“Fascinating. Me?”

“Yeah. You fascinate me like the...” Bors snapped his fingers fast trying to

think of who he should compare Taylor to. “I know! The Yanomami of Amazon Rainforest.”

“Oh my god!” Taylor pinched his arm. “You’re mean! I don’t poke my face with sticks like them or walk naked with my boobs hanging like ripe papayas. And for your information, I don’t usually walk barefoot. Now, why are you looking at me like that?”

“You just gave me a horrible visual of a naked woman with her boobs like papayas. God, not sexy.”

Taylor laughed. “Serves you right for comparing me to the Yanomami.”

“Excuse me. You compared me to a Troll, remember?”

“Yeah. But I have a pretty good reason to do so. You know some men, including Gawain, ooze with sex appeal. You, on the other hand, ooze bossiness. Deny it all you want but you are a bully, Bors Knight.”

“I am.”

“Don’t be offended. I know you said you’re dad is trustworthy. But I have to ask. Are you eager to know more about me and Jean because you are what you said you are—a vermin catcher or because Judge Knight is after my father and you’re curious to find out the reason why I ran away?”

Bors stepped on the brakes. The truck fishtailed, but he had it under control in a hurry. Poor Fawn though, ended up on the floor of the truck. He thought he

heard Taylor say *my father*. He lacked sleep, but his hearing was still sharp.

“What’s wrong with you? You scared poor Fawn.”

“Forget about that thing. I want you to repeat what you just said.”

“Which part?”

“The father part.”

“You heard me. Congressman Bruno Jean is my father. I am Teej to my late mother. My real name is Taylor Monte Carlo Jean.”

For a moment, he just stared at Taylor. Digesting chili peppers was easier than what she just revealed. A part of him rejoiced that she wasn’t Jean’s woman, but another part hated the fact that her father was the same man he wanted to bury alive.

Bors rubbed his face with his hands. Damn it. Thoughts that she was Jean’s woman served as a barrier, a hurdle to stop his attraction with her. Now, the hurdle, like dust blown in the wind, disappeared with her admission.

Taylor is the one he’d been looking for. Someone who would come forward and expose Jean’s dirty laundry. As Jean’s daughter, she knew more about Jean than anyone in the world. With Taylor, he was a step closer to trapping the man he hated with passion. He should shout eureka. Finally, here was the answer to his wishes. But how come he didn’t feel excited about it. Oh, he knew. Because he was fucking attracted to her. *This is bad. So fucking bad.*



Okay, she is Jean's daughter. That fact should be enough to squash his quickly growing attraction. She shared the same blood with Jean. But for some insane reason, he felt like grinning like a stupid idiot. Why? Because now he knew Taylor didn't share her bed with Jean and she was no mistress. So what? What the hell was wrong with him? *I'm fucked up.*

He looked at Taylor, who was staring at him with a brow arched high. Good god! This goddess came from Jean's loins? How could Jean be her father? The man was an animal. A fuck-ugly man inside and out.

"Wow. Powerful Congressman Bruno Jean's daughter is in my truck."

"Yes."

"I don't believe you." He started driving again.

"Why?"

"You're too damn beautiful to be Jean's daughter."

"I should feel complimented, but the way you said that I'm beautiful, it sounds like it's a sin."

*Yes it is.* The damn woman had no idea what kind of sinful thoughts he'd been having the moment he laid eyes on her. Right now, she looked like a sweet candy sitting in his truck with her arms across her chest glaring at him. Bors decided to focus his mind on a safer topic. "I never heard anything about Jean having a wife, more so a daughter."

“It’s because neither one of us exist. Jean made sure of it.”

“Why?”

“Because I’m illegitimate. Bad for his candidacy, his reputation as a helpful god-fearing congressman.”

*Reputation?* “You know your father has a bad reputation. You said it yourself.”

“I know. That’s why I want to talk to Judge Knight. To help me figure out how to save my dad.”

Bors nearly choked on his own spit. Fuckin’ eh. So she wanted to talk to Dad to help her save Jean? He just had a conversation with his dad about how to trap Jean. Now, here was Taylor who wanted to ask the opposite.

*This is not good. Not good.*

“Maybe he’s not really your father.”

“Do you realize that you just implied that my mother is a slut?”

“I apologize. It’s just I’m having a hard time believing that Jean’s blood runs in your veins.”

“Believe it. He is my father. The only one.”

“So you look like your mother. If you tell me she’s Miss Universe, I’ll believe you. We’re here.” He parked the truck and reached for the garage door opener he hid in the glove box. Fawn would have to wait in the garage until PAWS rep arrived.

Taylor shrugged. “No. But she was Miss Italy. Trisha Monte Carlo.”

“Isn’t she looking for you right now?”

“I wish. But no. She died when I was fifteen.”

“I’m sorry, baby.”

“Me, too.”

When he met her eyes, he saw pain flickered there. He could not imagine losing his mother at a young age or at any age. Bors leaned closer to Taylor, cupped her cheek with one hand, then kissed the spot in between her eyebrows. He realized what he’d done, but it was too late.

*This woman is a danger to my sanity.*



She couldn’t understand his actions after telling him about her mother. She supposed kissing her was his way of expressing his condolences. Well, whatever made him do it, she didn’t know. All she knew was that he warmed her heart.

“Are we going to put Fawn in the garage?”

“We don’t have to. I see headlights behind us. Must be the PAWS rep. We’ll wait here.”

Sure enough, a man in a van arrived and pulled beside Bors’ truck. While Bors talk to the man, she stood beside the truck. Her eagerness to see inside Bors’ home bubbled under the surface like a boiling pot of soup. The way he described it

made her think about the house on the prairie.

It was dark and late. From where she stood, she couldn't really see the whole house and the surrounding, but she could feel the cold air and hear the sound of night critters. God, she missed her bed. She yawned.

"Hey, sleepy. Fawn's gone."

"I didn't get to say goodbye."

"We'll see him again. Ready to come in?"

"Yes." Her sleepiness went away as soon as Bors opened the front door and turned on the lights. Bors was right on when he said full round logs were used to construct the house, but he didn't say it was beautiful.

Standing by the door, she could see the breathtaking view of dark glistening water and shadows of mountains through the expansive windows. A huge fireplace of native blue stone occupied one wall of the living room, and on the floor in front of it was the softest looking rug she'd even seen. The room held a romantic aura. It was amazing.

"Wow. How come you don't live here?"

"I work in Seattle. Commute is a bitch. So I bought a condo there."

"Homey. If someday I decided to buy a home, I want to feel like what I am feeling right now standing here."

"And how do you feel right now?"

“I don’t know how to say it really. It feels like, you know, when you’ve been walking for a long time and then you finally arrive at your destination. That’s how it feels like. I could sit here all day and feel content. What a fantastic looking home.”

“Thank you. You couldn’t see it because it’s dark, but this house is located at the end of the private road sitting atop a spectacular rock bluff. The circular drive in front is the only way a car can come in and out of this place. There is a medium-bank switchback trail to the beach below. I’ll show it to you if you are interested tomorrow or whenever.”

“Oh, I’m interested.”

“Aside from the view, you know what I like about this place?”

“What?”

“No neighbors and no lawn mowing necessary. We are nestled in moss-covered glacial rock.”

Taylor wondered if he realized he just said we. “I love it.” She ambled her way toward the glass window. “Even at night, the view holds one breathless.”

“You should see the sunrise. There is nothing like it. Wanna see the whole house or are you ready to call it a night. You look dead on your feet.” Bors moved the hair from her temple and tuck it behind her ear. “I think you should rest. You have bags under your eyes and I can see the beginning of your wrinkles. You look

like my grandma.”

“Shut up!” Taylor punched him on the side.

Bors caught her hand and didn’t let go. “You’ve had an exciting day today.”

Taylor didn’t resist when Bors laced their fingers together. “Yeah, I haven’t had this kind of excitement since...I don’t know. Thank you for letting me stay here.”

“I am lending it to you. Starting tonight, this house is yours.”

“But you’re staying here, too, right?”

“Want me to?”

“Yes. Please stay.”

Bors nodded. “Master bedroom is through there. Two guest rooms are on the second floor. Both have private view balconies facing west, so you won’t see the sunrise, but the sunset. You’ll like it. ”

“Thank you. How about your bedroom? Is it facing East or West?”

“West. As much as I love the sunrise, I hate for it to shine into my bedroom early in the morning.”

“I wouldn’t like that either. Are you sure about this? I mean, you’re home for the weekend and you might want to entertain. I don’t want to be a bother.”

“Like I said, this house is yours for as long as you need it. I’ve never brought anyone here, Taylor. You’re the first.”

“Oh. Well, thank you,” she said, surprised. “I promise I won’t break anything.”

“And no throwing football in the house.”

“Promise.” Laughing, she felt herself quickly drowning in the hot blue of his watchful smile. “You know I didn’t know Orcas is one of the islands of San Juan. I’ve seen the beauty of this place when Jean once took me flying and I’ve been wanting to come here since then. But I never thought I’d find someone here who’d carry me across the street, pay for my slippers and offer his house to me. Thank you.” Standing on tiptoe, she touched her lips to his. It was a chaste almost like a childish kiss, but the effect was potent. Strong enough to render her speechless.

“Why did you do that?” he asked the question as if she poked him with a stick.

“Bors, it’s just a kiss.”

“No, baby. This is a kiss.” His lips came down on hers. Urging, caressing, forcing her lips open with his thrusting and insisting tongue.

Taylor forgot everything. Jean, her lack of funds, why she was on the run. The sensuous probing of his tongue made her shiver and her knees weak. Taylor clutched at Bors shoulders, feeling heady and good as she felt herself entering the underworld of swirling heat and, by all god and holly, lust.

Bors’ deep kiss turned demanding and devouring, stirring desire she never

felt before. She'd been kissed and touched, but not like this. Bors' kiss made her want to rip his clothes off and touch his skin. Oh, she wanted more. More of his taste, more of his kiss, more than this.

Giving herself freely to the passion of his kiss, she leaned against him. Bors groaned and cupped her face as he inhaled deeply. She loved it. When he moved his hand to run along the length of her arm then down to the rise of her butt, any reservation about kissing a man she barely knew flew out of her head.

With the heat radiating from Bors' hard, athletic body, Taylor could tell that she wasn't the only one affected by their kiss. Groaning, Bors gripped her butt tight and pulled her hard against his erection. In response, she spread her legs and cradled him.

Jesus! He'd better slow down. But damn, she was so hot and willing and so responsive. One more kiss. Yeah, just a few more minutes of this cock-rising kiss then he would stop. But his body dictated an altogether different decision. Truth be told, he didn't want to stop. Taylor was so beautiful, hot, sexy, and she made him burn. God, he wanted to feel her heat, bury his cock deep inside her until he touched her womb. He'd been thinking about it, wanting to do it since he met her at Tristan's clinic. Now, it seemed it would finally happen.

He was hard, in pain, and ready to explode. The subtle scent of her



shampoo, the little erotic sound she was making, her equally aggressive responses to his kiss, and the grinding of her hips filled him. Fuck, she was pushing him to the limit. He'd never had a woman that felt so right in his arms, so uninhibited as if her sensual side had never been tapped before.

Bors thrust his hips, and Taylor groaned. So fucking good.

Her hands cupped his face before she slowly moved them up to comb his hair. When her fingers played with the hair on his nape gently, raw need hardened his body even more. Her fingers were light, but the sensual touch was as good as her hands touching his cock. Hell, she was pure pleasure bound in a delicious body.

"Taylor, baby," he breathed. "I want you. I want to feel you. Taste you. Please say you want this, too. I'm not going to force you if you say no."

"Yes," she replied in a soft whisper. Her eyes opened and locked with his. They were glowing with passion, with arousal he knew too well. "More, please. This is good."

*Thank you for small blessings.* "Oh yeah. I'll give you more. Are you ready for a good late night ride to ecstasy?" he asked hoarsely. He didn't wait for an answer. He reached down to cup her pussy through her jeans. She felt hot and almost wet.

"Hmmm..."

"Like it? How about this?" He unbuttoned her jeans, unzipped the short

zipper, opened it wide then snaked his hand inside her smooth underwear.

Taylor's reply was a short gasp followed by a moan as he brushed his fingers against the pubic hair between her thighs. Watching her, he dipped his middle finger inside her. Taylor's teeth clamped her lower lip. She was slick and so fucking ready.

Too fast. His body told him not to slow down, and he didn't want to. But he would pleasure her, make sure she reached her orgasm first. Deeper, he inched his finger slowly inside her heat. She felt so tight and hot. "Fuck, babe. You feel so good."

Taylor's fingers dug his shoulders. "Bors, oh god."

"Yeah, I know. Good, huh?" He began to pump his finger in and out while kissing the column of her neck. She tasted good. "Lift your blouse. I want to suck your breasts."

Taylor let go of her hold on his shoulders then lifted her blouse. "Bors."

"Higher, baby. That's it."

"Bors," she repeated. "I—"

He didn't let her finish. Through her white silk bra, he sucked her nipple. He nearly lost his control.

"Oh god."

"Fuck." He couldn't take another minute of standing there, kissing Taylor.

He pulled his finger out of her and in one swift move, he picked her up and took her to his room in a few quick strides.

The bed was made. The housekeeper he hired came yesterday to clean up. What perfect timing. Carefully, he lowered her on the bed and followed. He took possession of her mouth and once again touched her heat. This time he penetrated her not with one, but two fingers, and buried them inside. Or at least he tried.

Taylor cried in pain. The sound, like a cold rain dripping down his back, made him stop. He looked at her eyes shiny with unshed tears. *She couldn't be.* Hoping he wouldn't hurt her again, he moved his fingers, searching for the proof of her virginity. Her hymen prevented him from moving further. "Oh, fuck!"

"I, it's just—"

"Why didn't you tell me?" He shot off the bed like a catapult. "I could have hurt—No, I hurt you."

"Not really."

Shit. In the hallway, their position prevented his fingers from moving deeper. That was why he didn't feel her still intact maidenhead. But in bed...Damn it. No wonder she responded to his touch like a flame licking a gasoline. She was a freaking virgin in heat.

"You should have told me."

"I tried, but we were kissing and...and I didn't want you to stop."

No wonder she acted so uninhibited. She'd never fucked a man before.

"You've been kissed before?"

"Yes," she pouted. "I'm not that ugly."

"Then how? Why? You are too damn beautiful to stay innocent. Men should have been all over you, showing you pleasures in bed."

"Not easy if you're Jean's daughter, being watched twenty-four/seven."

Taylor buttoned her jeans then sat up. "I'll go to my room now."

Bors noticed her wrapped ankle. Going upstairs would be difficult for her, and no way in hell he was going to carry her. Not without taking her to another bed where he could have his way with her. "Use this room until your ankle is better. I'll get your bag."

He didn't wait for her to protest. He left the room in a hurry. Knowing Taylor, she would protest until she won. Bors opened the back door to calm his nerves and his raging dick. The cool wind helped, but as soon as he stepped back in, his body came to a full alert. Fudge it, he was in for a good fucking night. Why in hell did he ask if he could stay? Well, because he wanted to. And in all honesty, he liked what had happened. Only it shouldn't.

## Chapter Eight

Morning came too soon. Or was it already afternoon? Taylor stretched on the huge comfortable bed. Last night, after depositing her bag and violin on top of the dresser, Bors left the room. He didn't say where he planned on sleeping, but she figured it wouldn't be a problem with him.

She stared at the white ceiling as memories of what happened in the living room came back vividly by humiliation. Lord, how could she act like a harlot? With a simple touch and kiss...no, it wasn't just a simple kiss. It was a hot, consuming, and heart-stopping one. But still, she nearly gave up her virginity to a man she just met. Ugh! What was wrong with her? Fine, Bors had an irresistible charm that she couldn't stop herself from responding to, but couldn't she use restraint?

*I want you. Feel you. Touch you.* Those were the words of a wicked earl or duke or a scoundrel she often read in her romance books. And each time, the ladies would respond with a sigh and gave everything to the hero because she was in love or halfway in love with him. How many times did she dream of hearing those words being uttered while in the arms of her hero? Too many times to count. Last

night, it finally happened. But for all the wrong reasons. Bors...well, he could be her hero. He saved her from starving all night and offered his home. Yeah, he could be her hero, but she wasn't in love, only lusting.

Darn it all. How was she going to corroborate with Judge Knight if she was intimate or close to becoming intimate with his son? In her twenty-three years, she'd never been as close to a man as she was last night with Bors. Yeah, heavy necking and petting with the second chair violinist, but he kissed so methodically, like he was playing his violin, afraid to make mistakes. Bors, on the other hand, burned her with his touch in a matter of seconds. He touched her skillfully as if he knew her body already.

Of course. The man was experienced and he wasn't ashamed to admit that he liked women. She wondered how many virgins he had bedded in the past and recently.

Gah! Well, she made a mistake. It wouldn't happen again.

The sound of a door closing turned her mind back to where she was. Bors' home. Taylor sat up. Her gaze wandered around the room. Everything spoke of masculinity. From the wood headboard to the wood paneling above the fireplace. The sitting area faced the curtained wall. Taylor got off the bed. She had a feeling she already knew what was behind the curtain.

Taylor looked for the pull. It wasn't hard to find. She pulled the rope and

watched as the curtain revealed a view she could only describe as god's paradise. Unlocking the glass door, she stepped onto a private view balcony, which sat at the edge of the bluff overlooking the water. A table with a glass top and two chairs occupied the balcony. This could be a unique and romantic dining spot, she thought.

The sun afforded her the view of the water, lush green mountains and painted sky. She could stand here all day never tire of looking at the panorama. Taylor wondered if Bors spent many hours here taking in god's wonderful creation.

Sighing, she went back inside the room and closed the door. Well, time to face Bors. She couldn't very well hide here all day simply because she was too embarrassed about what transpired last night. Besides, they were both mature adults and both knew not to mention anything worth not mentioning. Maybe they could talk about his job of catching vermin. Not in a million years would she have guessed his profession. He walked like a predator with a swagger. More like a...a what? An agent. Like the handsome guy in the movie Quantum of Solace. What was his name?

Without bothering to wear her slippers, she went out to the living room while combing her hair with her fingers then tied it with a hair tie she found in her bag. The open rafters and seven skylights welcomed the sunlight adding bright

cheeriness to the home. Taylor looked around. In broad daylight, she understood what Bors was talking about. No one could come in and out of this place without going through the circular drive. From where she stood, all she could see was the open view of the water. The house was indeed sitting on a bluff.

Bors' truck was parked in the driveway. She could hear him talking. Taylor followed his voice. It was coming from the direction of the kitchen. Or she thought it was the kitchen.

She didn't want to listen, but for some reason, she had a feeling that whoever Bors was talking to, they were discussing her. Just outside the door to the kitchen, Taylor stood.

"How is she, bro? Good. I agree. She won't get any rest if you guys stay at Mom and Dad's. I can imagine Teta giving you a hard time. Julie's her baby. So you heard, huh? No. We're in my house now. What? Of course not. Fuck you." Bors laughed. "I'm not that bad."

Taylor noticed he put a stress on the word bad.

"Goddess divine, bro. Without a doubt. No. Shut the fuck up. Too complicated." Bors' laughter bounced around the room. The sound was as sunny as the living room.

Taylor cleared her throat to let Bors know her presence before he said anything that would make her burn from embarrassment. "Good morning," she



greeted and walked into the room. She found Bors leaning against the kitchen counter, holding a cell phone.

“Hey, gotta go. Stop. You’re a pervert. Love you, too, ugly fuck. Give my love to Julie.”

Bors hung up the phone and slid it inside his jean pocket. He braced his hands on the counter.

His eyes, Taylor noticed, changed from looking merry to glowing. She recognized the savage inner fire she saw there last night when he touched her. But that was last night. He stared at her for a long moment as if memorizing her, as if he liked what he was seeing.

Dear, she hoped she was right, because his perusal made her feel beautiful. Raising a brow, she studied him back. Beautifully muscled, well-built, the very picture of health, attractive, and he exuded masculinity. His jeans rode low on his hips and she could almost see his hipbones. His dark blue shirt with a round collar was a bit snug on his chest and shoulders. He looked powerful. Taylor slowly lowered her gaze. His muscled thighs seemed to go on forever. When she reached the hem of his bootleg jeans, she noticed they were frayed and touching the floor. Frayed or not, his jeans looked good on him. God, he should be an Abercrombie and Fitch model. Bors just stood there, devilishly handsome and obviously enjoying the attention.

She couldn't believe they came so close to making love last night. A part of her reveled at the thought, while the other part suffered from emotional discomfort. Taylor sighed. There was no denying it, she was attracted to Bors.

The silence lengthened between them making her even more uneasy. Finally, he broke the silence with his short, "Morning."

The huskiness and sensuality in his tone reached her heart, soul, and that part of her that was presently getting warmer by the minute. When she found her voice, she asked in a low and throaty tone, "Who's the ugly fuck?"

He wanted her. After a long cold shower and waking up last night sweaty, groaning, and spurting seed on the bed sheet, he still wanted her. What was he going to do about it? Bors stared at the woman standing by the kitchen doorway. His gaze roved and appraised her. With her rumpled shirt, yoga pants hugging her long slender legs, and mussed hair, she had all the self-consciousness of a woman who just had a fantastic tumble in bed. Except, they didn't exactly tumble last night.

His dick pulsed at the thought of their missed union. Damn, he wanted her so badly it hurt, even though he knew it was wrong. He never mixed work and pleasure, especially with the daughter of the man he wanted to toss in jail or kill.

He'd had women in the past, but never felt this kind of craving. If he could

call what he was going through right now that. Yes, Taylor was one hot woman with compelling, magnetic eyes. But so what? The last woman he dated won the Miss July title. So why was he acting like a teenager walking with a boner toward Taylor? Was it because she was fun to be with, immune to his charms, a virgin? Or did it have to do with the enchanting animation of her character, the way she carried herself with confidence, and those beautiful big eyes? Whatever the cause, his strong physical attraction with her had his cock turned hard as a rod.

Bors shifted his position before he embarrassed himself. "I was talking to Tristan."

"And you call him that. Is it because his name sounds better than yours?"

"My, my. Are you always like this in the morning? Trying to pick a fight?"

Taylor laughed. "No."

"Did you sleep well?"

"Yes, thank you."

Good at least one of them did, he thought. Last night, it took him hours of tossing and turning before sleep finally took him. He quickly found out that sleeping alone when a beautiful woman occupied another room downstairs was the toughest test he had ever faced. At one point, he waited in the dark expecting Taylor to knock on his door. But she never did. That, too, was a first.

"Your bed is the most comfortable bed I've ever slept on. It's huge and firm,

smooth, and smelled nice.”

*Huge, smooth, and firm. Oh yeah. Oh god. Dumb ass she’s talking about your bed not your dick.* Bors groaned.

“Oh, you can have it back. My foot is not as sore as it looks. I can climb up and down the stairs with ease.”

She misunderstood his reaction. But he wasn’t going to share his thoughts. Not this time. Bors nodded. He noticed she wasn’t rambling anymore. Instead, she walked as if approaching her lover, her hips gently swaying. *Boy, I would give everything to feel those hips move against mine.* He was fully aroused now. *Oi! Too damn early, Bors.*

“I’m glad to hear you’re feeling better.”

“How about you? You look in pain?”

*Wrap those lips around me and I wouldn’t be.* Those lips of hers were distracting him. They were full and the color of cherry red. Perfect for kissing and sucking. She said she’d been kissed before. He wondered how many men had done it to her. Maybe a handful? Were they good? Did she enjoy the kiss and did it make her hot?

Jesus. What did he care about her past? He turned around to hide his annoyance. “No. I’m okay. You want coffee?”

“Yes, please.”

“How do you like it?”

“With everything in it.”

Bors turned to look at Taylor. She was smiling at him with a look of an innocent sleepy child on her face. “Everything in it, huh?”

“Yeah. With cream and sugar. Splenda and not real sugar if you have it. And half and half cream. Not a big fan of powdered cream. If you have it. Please.”

Bors laughed. Alrighty, he suppose when Taylor said everything in her food that would mean her preference. “Coffee with everything in it, coming right up.”

“Why did you pick this spot to build your home? I know this is a beautiful place, but don’t you want to be near the city, people?”

Bors placed two steaming mugs on the table. He sat down on the chair closest to Taylor with his legs stretched in front of him. “I was born and raised here. Love the San Juan Islands. This,” he nodded toward the glass window. “Is my and my brother’s playground. We have great memories here and we’ll continue creating more. If, someday, I lose my head like Tristan, I want my children to grow up here. I want them to know how it feels to climb up a tree, run and play hide and seek in the woods, and watch squirrels stuff their cheeks with nuts. Not glue themselves in front of television. I want them to get dirty, catch bugs, dig worms, and catch the sun in their hair.”

“In other words, you want them to be free.”

“Free from the trappings of the modern technology, yes. I’d rather see them

get muddy or wet than spend their time sitting on the couch flipping channels, or on computers, or texting their fingers away.”

“Your future children are lucky then.” Taylor spoke softly. The smile on her face was gone. “I wish I had the same experience as yours. The closest I got to nature was walking on the beach. I never had a pet. Mom didn’t like them. So I practically grew up alone, inside the house most of the time.”

“No friends?”

“Brace yourself, Bors. I’m home-schooled. From elementary to high school. Went to Cornish College of the Arts with a full time chauffeur. Took private lessons. My only constant company is my bodyguard who blocked anyone from approaching me. I never experienced being on a school bus. I watched life change through the limo’s tinted windows. Sad and pathetic, huh?”

That explained why naiveté oozed out of her. It added to her sex appeal. “Not really. I bet some people would find your experience exciting.”

“Yeah. Like people from the third world country. I guess you’re right. Compared to some, I’m still lucky.”

“Right. You were overprotected, but not mistreated.”

“No. Jean never mistreats me. At least not intentionally. But I wouldn’t wish for anyone to have a dad like Jean. I love him, but he’s not a normal dad. He’s smart but dense when it comes to me. He thought by giving me access to money that I’d

be the happiest woman in the world, not understanding that all I need is him.”

Of course, only a daughter would say something like that, he thought. “Being cooped up would drive me nuts. I don’t like being confined, trapped. So I understand what you’re saying.” Bors sipped his coffee, his eyes never leaving Taylor’s face. She is so trusting, so willing to open up. Taylor was deprived of companionship, of someone to share whatever it was women liked to share with one another. “What made you say he’s not normal? Was it the abnormal part that had you running away?”

“Yes and the fact that I want my freedom, Bors. To do things as I please. But, freedom is at the bottom of my list. I left to find help to save Jean.”

“And you have to run away to gain those things? Couldn’t you just tell Jean, ‘Hey, dad. It’s time for me to leave the nest.’ You’re an adult. My sister left home when she was eighteen. Kept on coming back, of course.”

“I’m sure your sister had a choice whether to leave or stay. Not I. I would have left home at the age of fifteen if I had the chance. Bors, unlike you and the rest of the kids growing up in a normal household, I was jailed in my own home.”

“Why would Jean do that?”

“I have a pretty good idea about it.”

“What, you know too much about Jean and his unsavory business that he’s afraid you’ll send him to jail?”

“You’re too smart for a vermin catcher.”

“Thank you. I’ve been telling my siblings that I have a brain but they won’t believe me.”

“Trolls have brains, too. Like the Bridge Troll.”

“Ha.ha. About saving Jean, don’t know how you plan on doing that. If it is your conscience that’s telling you he needs saving, would a confession help?”

“Are you suggesting I confess to you?”

“If you feel like it. Unload to me. Besides, I’m interested in learning more about him.”

“Still trying, huh. I contacted your father to ask for his assistance, not you.”

“I know. But I might be able to help. Want me to knock some sense into your father? I bet you, it’s easily done.”

“I don’t want to see him hurt.”

*Fuck! I want to make him suffer.* “It’s sound advice.”

“All I want is for Judge Knight to help me make a deal with Jean.”

*There is no dealing with that asshole. He should be sent straight to hell to burn for eternity.*

“Ah, a deal to help Jean. Let’s hear it.”

“My silence in exchange of Jean’s agreement that he would stop his unsavory business.”

*Oh goodie. This has just gotten better and better. Not!* Bors wondered if she



understood that even if Jean stopped with his fucking business, he would still have to face time. He, being an agent, understood her though. Relatives often times were blinded by their love and found it difficult to accept the truth. Damn it, he didn't want her silence. "Jean will not agree to it."

"Why"

"He knows you."

"He treated me like a prisoner because he believes that I will tell on him."

"You have a cell phone, yes?"

"Yes."

"I am assuming it's the kind with an internet and all that apps crap."

"Yes."

"If you really want Jean to go to jail you could have done so in many different ways, Taylor. Jean knew that. So to offer him a deal about your silence is crap. Jean has a totally different reason for jailing you."

"You don't know that."

"Oh, yes I do."

"I would squeal on him if he didn't promise to stop running his business."

"A bluff. You wouldn't squeal on your dad."

"How do you know that?"

"You told me, baby. Evil, dirty, fucking son of a bitch. Those are just a few

that we could attach to Jean's name. But you still love him. He is your father. You will not send him to jail."

He knew when an opponent was defeated. And looking at Taylor, he knew he defeated her idea.

"You're right. I love Dad."

"He will not buy your threat because he knows you. Do you have a plan B?"

"Yes."

"Let's hear it." He should take the opportunity and offer Taylor his own deal. Jean's confession in exchange of a life sentence with a possibility of parole. But he'd wait. For now, he'd let her speak her mind.

"I'll tell him that he won't see me again."

"Sounds plausible. But depends on how close you two are."

"We don't play cards or watch TV together, if that's what you mean by close. But we do have an invincible bond. Jean will do everything for me and I for him. His fatherly affection runs deep. I can feel it."

"Then you might have a chance of stopping Jean."

"I am hoping Judge Knight could help me. I need him to figure out how to better help Jean without him ending up in prison."

Jesus Christ. He wondered if she would run away from him, too, if he told her he'd rather slit Jean's throat and toss him in the garbage bin for the rats to feast

on. She'd probably clobber him in the head then run back to Jean to warn him. Bors pinched the bridge of his nose. Of all the people, why did she have to be Jean's daughter?

*Holy mother of shit!* "You know, baby, he broke the law, hurt people, and stole innocence. But you still want to help him find a way to escape punishment? He needs to face the consequences of his actions."

"If you suffer your people to be ill-educated and their manners corrupted from infancy then punish them for those crimes to which their first education disposed them. What else is to be concluded but that you first make thieves and then punish them? In Jean's case, a corrupt politician."

"Wow man. You just quoted my best friend."

"Your best friend?"

"Yeah. Sir Thomas Moore. He wrote *Utopia*. I had lunch with him, too, the other day. With Bach."

"You're never serious, are you? I never read *Utopia* until the third chair violinist, Carrie, told me about the movie, *Ever After*. She said it's good. So I watched it. After that, I ordered *Utopia* online and read it. The beginning bored me to death, but it's a good read. Well, how did your lunch with Moore go?"

"Boring. He's English and drinks tea instead of coffee."

"You should be a comedian and not a vermin catcher."

“Love the job.”

“Dad loves his job, too, I think.”

“Power and money. People are often blinded by those two. Obviously, Jean is one of them for him to enjoy his job. Babe, there is no excuse for your father’s actions. Therefore, he must be punished. By the way, he is a thief. He stole girls’ innocence by exposing them to vultures and snakes and robbed them of a chance to enjoy life, the love of their parents. Oh and the parents—imagine their suffering. You lost your mother. Imagine those parents losing their daughters.” What a low blow to use her mother, but Taylor must open her eyes.

“I know, Bors. That’s why I want to make a deal with him. Before it’s too late. I want to save the part of him that is still good.”

It is too late, Bors wanted to say. Jean’s soul was as black as the nights in Orcas Island, but not as beautiful. But the pain he saw in Taylor’s eyes stopped him from doing so. “What are you going to do if he agrees?” He couldn’t believe he asked the question. As far as he was concerned, Jean would sit his dirty ass in jail. All he needed was evidence against him.

“Move on. Start my life that’s been stalled for years. Maybe go to Italy and find my mother’s family.”

“Leave the country?”

“Yeah. I’ve been wanting to travel. I could start with Italy.”

Somehow, the mention of her leaving the country sounded worse than her wish for Jean to just end his unsavory business and skip jail. He wanted her here. Sitting in his kitchen, talking with him, quoting Thomas Moore. Hear her play her violin.

Since the builder applied the last finishing touch to this house, he'd never even spent an hour here. Too quiet and no one to share it with. Now, Taylor appeared in his life, and all he could think about was to keep her. Why? Good god, he had no idea. How in the world could a woman unravel a man's mind in such a short time? He stared at Taylor and wondered what spell she cast on him.

"What would you do if you're in my position?" Taylor asked, clueless about the inner turmoil he was going through.

"Me? I won't make a deal with him. I'll use all kinds of chemicals to eradicate him. Beat the shit out of him then toss him in jail. Squish him like a cockroach. Those are just a few off the top of my head."

Taylor sighed. "That's why I am asking Judge Knight and not you."

"Baby, I suggest you sit on your decision about talking to my dad. What you want to tell him and how far you would go. Dad is a good judge. The best of the best. Having said that, you might not like his idea of help. Are you going to tell him what kind of a man Jean is and how many innocent victims suffered because of him? If you do, you will be putting my dad in a position. A bad one. And you might

want to think about what I said. Your dad committed crimes, therefore he must face the consequences.”

“I thought about that.” Taylor sighed. “I’m glad we’re having this discussion.”

*Wish we weren’t.* “Baby, I may belong in a different quadrant, but we still roam in the same circle. I hear stuff. I know stuff, which means other people, too. Letting Jean go—”

“See? This is the reason why I must talk to your dad. It’s only a matter of time before someone squeals on him. I’m trying to be proactive here. You catch vermin and yet you know about Dad. Imagine the police, FBI, politicians?”

*I am FBI.* Jesus. He’d been busting his butt trying to trap the man and here he sat with the woman who knew everything about Jean but wanted the opposite. *I need a Tylenol or maybe a walk in the woods.* Bors downed the rest of his coffee. Time to change the subject before he started interrogating Taylor and let her know that he’d been after her father for quite some time now.

“You know, I think you are right. I’ll think about what to tell your dad.”

“Sit on your ideas for a week. We’ll brainstorm and then we’ll talk to Dad.”

“I like that idea.”

*A week with you. Hell yeah. I love the idea.* “Cool. Want another cup?”

“No, thank you.”

“I think we should talk about good stuff.”

“Like what?”

“How about breakfast? At least if you get nauseated listening to me talk about vermin, you’ll have something to throw up.” Later, he would talk to his dad. Maybe he could suggest a way to handle his situation without blowing his mind off.

“Eewww! Okay, breakfast sounds good.”

“Eggs and toast or pancakes and bacon.”

“Eggs and toast are fine. I’ll help.”

“Sunny side up or scrambled?”

“Scrambled. I don’t like it gooey. When it comes to food, I like mine cooked. Can’t stand blood in my food. That’s why I don’t like going to Outback Steakhouse. They don’t cook my steak the way I like it.”

“How do you like it?”

“Burned, baby!” Taylor laughed. “Sushi? God, don’t know how people could eat raw fish.”

“Alright. Maybe you should cook your own eggs, huh? Show me how you like it. Up you go, princess.”

“Right on. We are cooking.”

Taylor was up in a hurry. When she walked past him, he hit her rump

lightly. "Keep moving. I'm hungry."

Bors placed the jug of milk and carton of eggs on the counter. Taylor stood beside him, watching. "You could get the bowls. In the cupboard on your left."

"Okie dokie." Taylor sounded like a child presented with dough to play with. He wouldn't be surprised if she started dancing. "What else?"

*Take off your clothes so I can make love to you.* "Beater. Drawer in front of you. How many eggs can you handle?"

"I can eat two."

*Good lord. Focus Knight. Focus.*

Cooking with Taylor reminded him of the time when Kirsten was just five helping their mother bake cookies. The kitchen was a mess, but no one minded. It was the same with Taylor. He didn't care that she managed to drop two eggs on the floor, break another two into the bowl full of milk but he had to throw it away because they'd be eating bits of eggshells. His pet peeve. If he were to guess, Taylor had never seen a kitchen or worked in the kitchen in her life.

He wanted his breakfast before lunchtime. But the thing was, watching Taylor laugh as the eggs splattered all over the floor was more satisfying than the best food in the world. He enjoyed hearing her laughter and the way she apologized with a smile but with no sign of contrition at all.

"You never cooked before?"



“No.”

Bors leaned his hip against the counter and watched Taylor beat the eggs as if they had all the time in the world. “They said, don’t know exactly who, that the best way to a man’s heart is through his stomach. How are you going to catch a man if you don’t know how to cook?”

“I bet it was a man who quoted that. I don’t think any woman would want a man to love her base on what she cooks. And why should she go through his stomach? If the man can’t love me for who I am, accept my shortcomings, then the heck with him.”

“Good point. But what about kids. How are you going to feed your kids someday?”

With a satisfied sigh, Taylor faced him. “Well, I am hoping by the time I am a mother, I would have learned to cook a dish or two.”

“How are you going to learn?”

“Watch the chef’s on You Tube. Or feed the babies Sara Lee’s microwavable dishes. You like to cook?”

“Mom told us kids to learn at least the basics because we love to eat. So yeah. I know a dish or two.”

“What’s your favorite dish?”

“Pork Chop delight and white rice.”

“Sounds yummy. Will you show me how to cook it?”

“I don’t work for free. You don’t have any money. How are you going to pay me?”

“I’ll play for you. You should take it. ‘Cause I’m good.”

He knew what she meant. Her violin. But again, her words took on a different meaning when he looked at her. Bors swallowed. The air around them felt charged with an invincible electricity, causing sparks of attraction to build between them. It made him hungrier, but he no longer craved food.

He wanted something more fulfilling, satisfying. A food made in heaven. He wanted another taste of Taylor.

## Chapter Nine

Pushing off the counter, he took a step closer to her. Damn, all he did was look in her eyes and he was hooked, dangling like a hapless fish. But nothing dangled about him right now. Everything was hard, throbbing.

Wrapping his hand on the back of Taylor's neck, he pulled her closer until their mouths were only inches away. He waited for her to say something, to push him away. Instead, Taylor closed her eyes. She wanted this, too.

Angling his head a bit, he kissed her partly opened mouth with his tongue touching her lips. Taylor responded with a kiss of her own that made his heart pound hard, sending blood down to his fully aroused dick. He tried to go easy and not give in to the fire of their kiss, but Taylor made it difficult. Her hands wrapped around his neck, moaning erotically while pressing her lush body against his.

"Taylor, you have to stop because I can't."

"You do it," Taylor answered quickly then continued sucking his lower lip.

Fuck. How could he stop? "Baby?"

Taylor moaned her reply.

Ah, fuck it. There was nothing wrong with a morning make-out. He left her

mouth to nibble at her earlobe. God, her skin was so smooth and smelled of a woman—sweet. “Leaving the ball in my court is never a good idea, love.” His lips brushed her ear lobe as he spoke before sucking it gently.

Tucking her curves against his contours, he slid his hand up inside her shirt to fondle one perfect breast. Her nipple pushed against his palm. Bors squeezed gently, then moved his hand around her back to unclasp her bra. Just one lick. All he wanted right now was to feel her hard nipple inside his mouth. The moment the bra loosened, he eased it aside.

“Bors...”

“Hmm?” He traced her neck with his mouth, hoping she didn’t change her mind. Before she could, he lifted her top and trapped her nipple between his lips. His cock throbbed at the sweet feeling of suckling her.

“Oh my god.” Taylor arched her body, thrusting the hard nipple into his mouth.

Bors tongued the swollen flesh before he began torturing the other. Taylor whimpered and gripped his hair hard. *Yes, better than eggs and toast.* But he was still hungry. With his mouth worshipping her breast, his hands busily lowered her thong and pants. Taylor’s soft whimpers urged him on. He wondered if she realized she was already naked.

“Taylor, baby, you’re beautiful.” With his lips, he traced the path between

her breast and down her belly until his mouth was directly above her pubic bone. He looked up to meet Taylor's eyes.

She was breathing hard through her mouth. "Bors..."

"Yeah?"

"You shouldn't do this. It's just, oh god, this is—"

"What?" Without taking his gaze off of her, he lifted her leg and anchored it on his shoulder. He rubbed the bare skin of her ass then slowly moved to her front where his fingers traced her already wet slit.

"This is wicked and wicked things only happens to—"

He spread her labia then began licking her.

"Bors!"

Taylor gripped his hair as she screamed his name. He felt a tug and pull, but she didn't shy away or stop him. Bors cupped her warm and smooth ass as he concentrated on loving the very center of Taylor's untouched pussy. Her taste, her soft cry of ecstasy, and the grinding of her hips urged him on. With his flattened tongue, he licked her repeatedly until she was slick with her own juice. He dipped his thumb inside her tight passage then pumped it slow.

"Bors, please. Oh my god."

"Come in my mouth, baby."

"Bors..."

He sucked her engorged slick clit and didn't stop until Taylor cried out her orgasm and her throbbing passage relaxed around his thumb. Bors was about to explode right there while on his knees. He nuzzled Taylor's sex and licked her clean. Once Taylor's foot touched the floor, he pressed his mouth on her mound before pulling her thong and pajama bottom up.

Kissing and nipping his way back up Taylor's body, Bors tried to control his heartbeat. Taylor's scent clung to his skin, her taste in his mouth driving him crazy.

Barely two days and he was already hot and panting for her. A feeling no other women had evoked from him before. He circled his arm around her and held her snugly against him. "Baby, what did you do to me?"

Taylor rubbed her face on his shirt. "I didn't do anything. You did."

Bors grinned and kissed the top of her head. "Ah, Taylor. You don't have to do anything to make a man forget the world, except making love with you. You're a goddess that exudes sexiness, eroticism, and naiveté, which by the way, makes you more appealing. You, my love, are one powerful woman." *You even made me forget that you're Jean's daughter.*

"You're just saying that so I won't be embarrassed for what...what we did."

"I'm telling the truth." Bors cupped Taylor's face. "Look at me."

"Why?"

The way she asked the muffled question made him laugh. She sounded like his sister when in her bratty mood. “Because I want to see your beautiful face.” The moment Taylor lifted her face, he forgot to breathe. It glowed like a rose that had just bloomed and was still wet from the morning dew. Beautiful. So beautiful.

“I’m looking.”

Bors shook his head. “Baby, you’re an angel.”

“A goddess before. Now an angel. I’m really going to think you’re bullshitting me.”

“No, I’m not. Hey, how you responded to what I did is just the way a passionate woman would have done it.”

“I’m passionate.”

“Uh-huh. Do you regret letting me touch you?”

“No.”

“Why did you let me?”

“Because, for some odd reason, it seems like I’ve known you forever.”

Bors’ heart swelled. The thing was, he felt the same way, too. He angled his head then kissed Taylor so deep he didn’t want it to end. But the sound of the car or cars coming reminded him that his siblings were here.



Through her kissing induced state of mind, Taylor heard the car doors closing. At first, she thought she just imagined it. But when voices reached her ears, she finally woke up and realized Bors had company. Putting pressure on Bors' shoulders with her hands, she ended the kiss.

"You have company."

Bors sighed. "My siblings. They're here to talk about our mom's birthday party."

"Why didn't you tell me? I'm still in my pajamas."

"They won't care."

"But I do," she tried to disentangle herself from Bors, but he tighten his hold on her waist. "Let go."

"Baby—"

"And stop calling me baby. They might think we are more than, um, new friends."

"Let them think what they want."

"Why are you so nice to me?"

"Because this is what I am. Nice." Bors grinned at her.

So he was back to being himself. Arrogant, full of himself, charming. God almighty, she liked all those things about him. "I have to brush my hair, teeth, and wash my face."



“You’re fine.”

“No, I look like—”

“Told you, boys. We’ll find him in the kitchen...not alone. Hey, brother dear.

Did we interrupt something?”

This must be the sister Bors mentioned, Taylor thought. What was her name again? Kirsten or Kristen? Taylor didn’t move. With Bors’s height and build, she doubted his company could see all of her. But he turned around, exposing her.

“Hey, brat. We’re just cooking. Morning, guys.”

“Morning, dick—Teej? That you?”

Still standing behind Bors, Taylor poked her head out and wriggled her fingers at Gawain when all she wanted to do was run into the bedroom and hide. Or at least comb her hair. “Good to see you again, Gawain.”

Bors stepped aside showing her to his siblings.

“Last time I saw you, you were behind Bors. Now you’re standing behind him again. Is he trying to hide you? That could only mean two things. First, he didn’t want anyone to see you because he is one selfish dick. Second, he’s afraid someone would steal you away from him.”

“I doubt you are right on both.”

“So this is Miss Teej.”

Taylor shifted her gaze to the other brother. Like Bors and Gawain, this one

was drop dead gorgeous, with the same blue eyes and dark hair. Lord, she'd never seen so many perfectly sculpted men and woman in one room in all her life. "Hi. I am... you can call me Taylor, if you like."

"I missed the opportunity to meet you yesterday, but my wife had the privilege. She said she wanted to meet you again. Hopefully under totally different circumstances." Tristan plugged his nose up.

"Your wife is charming."

Tristan beamed. "Thank you."

"How is she doing?"

"She's resting."

"Are you guys making breakfast or having a food fight?" Gawain winked at Taylor.

"Bors is showing me how to beat his eggs."

Everyone stopped talking. Then, all of a sudden, they all started laughing. Taylor just realized how her words sounded to them and felt mortally embarrassed. "I don't know how to crack them," she added, trying to repair her error.

"I'll show you how," Gawain said. "I can show you how to properly beat—" He nearly fell forward when Tristan smacked his back.

"Bro, I think Bors got that issue covered."

“Taylor, come tomorrow for our mom’s party.” Kirsten nearly shouted the words to be heard.

“Thank you, but—”

“She’ll be there.” Bors took her hand. “Taylor, let me introduce you to my sibs. This is Kirsten, Doctor Tristan Knight, you met Gawain yesterday, and that one in the back who can’t take his eyes off his iPhone is Percival. Guys, this is Teej, also known to me as Taylor Jean.”

“Hey,” Percival said. “You have such a powerful last name.” He winked at her then went back to pushing buttons on his iPhone.

Taylor flinched at the comment but didn’t say anything.

Bors’ siblings turned to look at Percival, who totally ignored them. When they looked at her again, suddenly, they seemed uncomfortable. They looked like they wanted to ask something but couldn’t. Do they know about her, too?

“Should I call you Taylor or Teej?” asked Kirsten.

“You can call me Taylor.”

“I love your hair.”

“Really?” Self-consciously, Taylor smoothed her hair with her fingers. How could Kirsten love her uncombed hair?

“God knows how many times I tried to do that messy hair bun thingy, but it’s not working for me. You know, I would give away one of my brother’s just to

have beautiful hair like yours. What's the secret?"

"Don't brush your hair. Just tie it."

"That's it? Oh, I'll try that."

"Which one of us are you going to give away, brat?" Gawain tugged a lock of Kirsten's hair.

Kirsten swatted Gawain on the hand, then tucked her loose hair behind her ear. "You, Gawain, if you don't stop leaving chicken bones in the refrigerator."

"And who's going to fly you back and forth when you're late for your meetings in Seattle or wherever it is you're going?"

"I can hire other pilots, stinkbug."

Taylor listened and watched in fascination. She'd heard people call others names, but not like the Knights. Somehow, their name-calling didn't sound like insults, but endearments. She was impressed. In such a short time, her uneasiness triggered by Percival's comment about her last name went away.

"They're not bad when they're asleep. Except for Gawain. He could wake the dead with his snores," Bors whispered loudly.

"Do you snore?"

"Not that I know of."

"Yes you do, peanut." Gawain snorted, crossing his arms across his chest.

"That's why he always wakes up alone. No woman could stand his snores. Sounds

like a broken train. Bet you heard him, Teej.”

“No. He didn’t snore last night.”

Kirsten’s eyes bulged and then she bit her lower lip. Percival stopped texting or whatever it was he was doing and looked up to raise his brows at them. Tristan grinned while Gawain let out a loud hoot.

“Well, Bors must be busy showing you how to beat—”

“Gawain, shut the fuck up.”

“Hey, you guys, donuts are getting cold. Coffee’s on the coffee table,” Percival announced waving his phone in front of his brothers.

Taylor had a feeling he did it on purpose to stop an oncoming squabble.

“Bors, you really have to stop cursing. Dumbass.” Percival shook his head then resumed thumbing his iPhone.

“Hey, Einstein, what’s the coffee doing on the coffee table. Kitchen is over here. Such a puke bucket.”

“Puke bucket?” Taylor asked Bors.

“You don’t want to know.”

Everyone moved into the kitchen and took their spots except for Bors, who kept his hold on her hand. “Are you trying to defend me from my brothers?”

“No. I’m just telling the truth. If you sounded like a train, I would have heard you.”

“Baby, when you said you didn’t hear me snore. They think it’s because—”

“We’re busy with one another?”

“Yeah. Or because you were dead tired from our hot lovemaking.”

“Or, because this house is too big and the rooms are so far apart I wouldn’t hear you.”

“I know how the Knights’ minds work, baby.”

“So? You don’t like them thinking that we’re busy.”

“No, I don’t care if the whole world finds out that we’re busy.” Bors swept her hair back. “Do you care about what they think?”

“Not really. I like your brothers and sister. They’re funny. You’re parents must be the best looking parents in the world to produce such handsome kids.”

“Hmmm....are you saying I’m handsome?”

Before Taylor could give her reply, Gawain interrupted them. “Hey Taylor, we have all kinds of donuts. What do you like?”

“Any kind. Whatever you have there is fine.”

“Cool. You can take a pick. Caramel Kreme Crunch, Glazed Raspberry Filled, New York Cheesecake, and Cinnamon Apple Filled.”

“I’ll take the caramel without the crunch and the glazed but not raspberry. Cinnamon sounds good, but I prefer a regular kind and not filled.”

Everyone turned their heads to look at Taylor.

“What the hell!” Gawain peered inside the paper bag.

“Are we supposed to eat the crunch and leave the caramel for her?” Tristan asked.

“I’ll lick the raspberry and leave the glaze,” Percival said, grinning.

“How are you going to do that, button toes?”

“Like I said, brat. Lick the raspberry.”

His siblings’ reaction was so precious Bors laughed so loud. Taylor scowled at him then punched his arm. She looked annoyed and pretty at the same time. He couldn’t help it. He pulled her against him and hugged her tight.



“What the fuck do you mean she isn’t staying in the cabin anymore?” Jean wanted to shake his runner. No, he wanted to shoot his balls. What an incompetent ass.

“When I came back this morning to check on her, the sign was up. The cabin is open for rent again. I asked the landlady. She said Taylor must have left last night. It was the agent Knight who called this morning to tell her that Taylor would not be staying in the cabin anymore.”

Two days and Taylor already went with a man she hardly knew. Worse, the man was the badge flashing FBI agent, Bors Knight. Judge Arthur Knight’s son. Seattle’s best FBI agent. The one who’d been on his tail for months now. Did

Taylor contact him and he helped her with her escape plan. Had she been stabbing him in the back?

This was one reason why he kept her practically under lock and key. She was too gullible and freaking beautiful for her sake. Men, like the agent, would be all over her when exposed outside, and she was too naïve to know their intentions. He was only right to protect her, but she, like her mother, was too stubborn to see his reasons.

Fuck! He must bring her home before her soul became corrupted. She was his only light, the only part of him that was clean and untouched. He must bring her back.

“Convince Taylor to come back here. Do everything you can if you want to keep any parts of your body.”

“Yes, Congressman. What about the agent?”

“Do whatever it takes to get rid of that gun and badge wielding son of a bitch. I don’t give a shit about him. What I want is my daughter back. If you have to get rid of any obstacles, do it. As long as I can have my daughter back in this house. And you better make it happen or I’ll have your neck. Do you understand?”

“Yes.”

“But remember, I hate troubles. So don’t bring anything at my door.”





The guests, including Simms, were already mingling about. Some were dancing, and a few were trying to converse with his father who never left his mother's side. Bors watched a couple who'd been standing by the refreshment table. It was only seven at night, but he was sure the couple would be drunk before they started singing happy birthday.

A low-key party was Kirsten's idea. Hiring a band was Tristan's and the dancing...Kirsten's. What food to serve was Gawain's. His only contribution was to pay for the expenses, which Percival gladly offered to split with him.

He bet the large family painting from a photo Kirsten dug out of their mom's album would make their mother cry. It was taken in the woods. Just before Tristan's horrible accident that nearly killed him. The painting, another reminder of how grateful they were to have one another, would join the other's on the wall.

The soft early summer wind blew, making the tiny white lights wrapped on the tree branches wink in the dark. Bors snagged a wine glass from a passing waiter. He paid his attention to the singer and his band tuning their instruments. He knew all of them. Had their records and their background checked. With a father like Judge Arthur Knight, one could never lower his guard, especially in a time like this. Not to mention that he had Taylor to keep an eye on.

Of course she insisted that he shouldn't. That she would be fine. Silly woman.

Katherine caught his gaze. She waved. Her faced beamed beautifully. Bors blew her a kiss and then mouthed, I love you.

“She’s beautiful, isn’t she?”

Edmund, Tristan’s best friend and business partner, looking sharp in his black sports coat stood beside him. “I know. Inside and out, man.”

“Your father is one lucky man to find a woman like Katherine. I don’t know how she could raise boys and still smile as if she and Judge were newlyweds. Most women I’ve met at the clinic had only one or two children but already looked like they’d deliver a dozen. Do you know Katherine’s secret?”

Bors thought Edmund should know the answer to the question already. But he supposed not all pediatricians, especially a bachelor who grew up with no parents around, would understand that a mysterious alchemy fused his parents together. They were an entity, moving together in synchrony. Loving each other like roots in healthy soil, sun and green grass, stars and moon. They live off each other’s energy. True, his dad was lucky, but so was his mother.

“It’s no secret, bro. They feed each others’ soul.

“Soul mates.”

“Yup.”

“Hey, Bors. Looking good, bro. Edmund, stop glaring at my sister, will you?”

“I’m not glaring, Gawain.”

Gawain snorted then nudged Bors' shoulder. "Did you hear this guy?" To Edmund, he said, "You should look in the mirror. If you want to dance with her, fine with us. Just don't touch her wrong because friend or not, I'll fucking kick your ass."

"Do you think Kirsten would let anyone touch her without her permission? She may look like a newly bloomed flower every time I see her, but I know she could kick anyone's ass if needed."

Bors tried not to laugh, but Gawain burst out laughing. "Newly bloomed flower? Fuck, Edmund. You sound like an old Englishman in one of Julie's books. Have you told her that yet?"

"No."

Gawain elbowed Bors. "Good. Now you have your chance. She and Taylor are coming this way."

Without warning, Bors's chest constricted as he met dark brown eyes that shimmered with merriment and innocent naiveté. Damn, it was a wonder that she remained a virgin. Taylor was every man's fantasy. A seductive siren with unpretentious charm meant to make a man lose his head. She awakened the primitive side of him that wanted to toss her on his shoulder and carry her off somewhere.

Bors held her gaze. His mind told him she was Jean's daughter and he must

stop mixing work with pleasure. Nothing good would come out of it. But his body screamed something else. Right now, he didn't care if she held the key to Jean's cell. Only how soon could he bed her. If Kirsten hadn't picked Taylor up at his house to come here with her earlier this morning, he would have kept her in bed all day. Yeah, he would have made love with her multiple times. Being around her was like standing underneath a strong current pulling him towards her. Somewhere deep in his bones he knew Taylor shared the same feelings as he. They were both attracted to each other.

Kirsten's exaggerated clearing of her throat reminded him that he'd been staring at Taylor like a teenager. With a mental kick on his ass for letting a siren muddle his brain, he forced himself to look at his sister. "Looking good, sister. But what happened to your straps? They're missing."

"This is a green strapless cocktail dress, dear brother. Love your dress shirt. Blue suits you. But what happened to the smell? I smell something clean and nice."

"I think you're talking about Edmund."

Kirsten gave Edmund a once over. "Glad you could make it, Edmund."

"Thanks for inviting me. You look, um...just...fantastic."

Bors wanted to whack the man on the back. He looked like he swallowed a frog and had a hard time breathing. Obviously, Edmund was in love with his sister but too chicken shit to say so.

Percival and Tristan joined them asking Kirsten about the plan.

“Okay, guys. The singer is ready to announce the first dance. After Dad, Tristan will dance with mom. Next is Percival, followed by Bors, then Gawain. I’ll dance with Dad. Edmund, you take Taylor to the dance floor while Gawain dances with mom. That would be the cue for the others to start dancing. Got it?”

”No.” He didn’t mean to blurt out his disagreement, but he did. His siblings, Edmund, and Taylor looked at him questioningly. “Taylor can’t dance,” he explained.

For the second time, he felt so stupid and overprotective. And it was all because of the woman glaring at him, one brow raised, lips pinched, and arms across her chest.

“Why not?”

“Your foot is still sore. You can’t dance.”

“I can’t?” Taylor looked down at her foot.

“Your foot will swell again.”

“But I am fine now.”

“You’re still wearing your slippers.”

“Because you insisted.”

“Because you must. And you don’t have shoes to wear.”

“Kirsten offered to lend me her shoes.”

“And I said no.”

Someone snorted. He heard a chuckle and shuffling. They had an audience, he knew, but he didn’t care.

Bors met Taylor stare for stare. Pink tinged heightened the color of her cheeks. She was heaving while chewing her lips. He wondered what was going on in her pretty head.

“Taylor, I think it’s best if you just listen to me.”

“Or what? You’ll squash me like the vermin you catch?”

“Vermin?” Gawain asked.

“Crooks could be called vermin.” Edmund answered.

Bors ignored everyone. His siblings knew better than to blab about what he did for a living. He kept his gaze on Taylor. “Taylor, if you refuse to listen, I’ll tie you to a chair.” *Or my bed.* “You don’t want that, babe.” *Oh yeah, I bet you would.*

“Bors, don’t be obtuse.” Kirsten pinched his arm.

“I’m not. Taylor is being difficult.”

“Me? Are you always this high-handed?”

“Only with you,” Gawain answered, cutting the thick tension in the air.

“Now, what is Taylor talking about vermin?”

Bors looked at Gawain. He narrowed his eyes hoping his brother would get the message. “Bro, shut the fuck up.” He shoved him none too gently.

Gawain just laughed, shaking his head.

The singer announced it was time for Katherine and Arthur to take the dance floor, saving Bors from having to explain about the damn vermin. He made a mental note to talk to his siblings about it.

The noise died down. The band began to play and the singer crooned a familiar song of Frank Sinatra's, Unforgettable. Bors watched as his father led his mother onto the dance floor that only this morning was their football ground. His parents danced while the stars twinkled and the moon smiled. It was if it was just the two of them in the world.

It could be the aura or the love that oozed from her parents that had Bors taking Taylor's hand. Gently, he leaned her back against him. Taylor didn't resist. Somehow that made him smile. He rested his chin on top of her head and watched his parents with admiration.

But with Taylor in his arms, all he could think about was her vanilla scented skin, the heat of her body, her round bottom pressed just below his groin. God, he wanted to dip his head and kiss her exposed shoulder and every other part of her body. He wanted to make love to her.

He stirred. Bors buried his nose in her hair, trying to think of something else other than the soft body in front of him. He couldn't see Taylor's face, but he could tell the way her shoulders shook that she was laughing. She felt him. He wrapped

one arm above her breast and locked the other one around her waist, trapping her inside his embrace. She responded by moving her ass.

A bold move for a virgin, he thought. “Minx. You’re not helping. It’ll be my turn to dance with Mom soon,” he whispered in her ear.

“Serves you right.”

Bors smiled. If they were alone, she’d be flat on her back right now. “You’ll pay.”

Taylor turned her head and looked at him. With a twinkle in her eyes, she asked, “Promise?”

Bors chuckled then kissed Taylor’s temple. He loved to banter with her and hold her like this. Maybe forever.

*Dream on, Bors.*



## Chapter Ten

She'd never seen anything like it. The Knight boys, all tall with commanding presence, and who could demand instant obedience with their stare, had held their mother the way one would a soft flower. It was touching and so sweet. By the time, Katherine danced with Gawain, her cheeks were wet and her nose was red from constant wiping. Taylor noticed the women, especially, were crying, too.

The display of affection, respect, and warmth filtered her thoughts back to the days when her mother used to hold her in her arms, dance and sing with her. The memory brought a dull ache in her chest. Her mom was a gentle loving mother. Sadly, fate didn't give them a chance to spend more years together.

The music, voices, dishes, and everything else around her began to fade as the memory of her mother came back. She considered finding a spot where she could be alone when Edmund touched her elbow, bringing her back to the cheerful party.

"Kirsten is calling you."

"What? Oh. It's my turn."

"To dance?"

“To play my violin. God, I’m nervous. I’ve been playing for years. Don’t know why I’d be nervous now.”

“They won’t bite. The Knights are not as bad as they appear to be.”

“I kinda got that. Maybe we’ll get to dance later?”

Edmund glanced at Bors while he shuffled his footing. “Maybe.”

“He won’t bite.” She parroted Edmund’s words. “I think he’s all bluster.”

“The Knights are protective of their women, Taylor.”

“I see that, too. But, you see, I’m not Bors’ woman.”

The look Edmund gave her showed he believed differently. She was saved from explaining when Kirsten waved at her smiling, shining like a star in her strapless dress. “Ladies and gentlemen, we have a special guest today who agreed to play for us. I had to bribe her with Julie’s signed books to say yes. Okay, without further ado, I give you the very beautiful Miss Taylor Jean.”

Taylor walked toward the makeshift platform berating herself for forgetting she said yes to Kirsten. Dang it! She liked to condition her mind and body before playing.

Since she had already tuned her violin, she would just have to do her scales quickly then play her piece, and she’d be done. Reaching behind a speaker where she hid her opened case, she reached for the violin without looking at the audience, who seemed to run out of anything to say.

*Why are they so quiet?*

Tuning done, Taylor faced the audience. Among the small crowd, she spotted Bors standing beside an older man who also carried himself with self-confidence as if he possessed something powerful that nobody knew about. Bors, just like the others, stared at her intently. God, those blue eyes, even at a distance, could make her heart skip a beat. Tucking her violin underneath her arm, she caught Katherine's eyes, still wet from tears and brilliant with happiness.

Taking a deep breath she stood in front of the microphone. "Thank you Kirsten for this opportunity to play for a beautiful and well-loved mother. Everyone can see what a great wife and mom you've been, Katherine. I wish you joy, cheer and endless love. Happy birthday. I'll be playing Lover's Waltz by Jay Ungar. This one's for you."

She shook her hand holding the bow and focused her eyes on a tiny light in front of her. The moment her bow touched the strings, she became one with her violin. In her mind, she could see each note come to life each time she struck them. They traveled from the violin to her ears and all the way to her heart. It was as if she plucked them from the music sheet like apples from a tree. Taylor closed her eyes and let the music float around her, driving all her worries, troubles, and pain away. At that moment, nothing mattered but the beauty of the composition.

When she hit the last note, the world gradually penetrated her

concentration, like waking up from a dream. She opened her eyes and smiled at the crowd clapping, smiling at her. She noticed, too, that they were all in pairs, which meant that they danced while she played. All except for one standing directly in front of her, his gaze unwavering, as he continued to stare. . Bors.

“Bravo!” Gawain yelled.

Someone whistled, eliciting laughter from the crowd. The singer thanked Taylor then joked that he and his band must work harder because Taylor just raised the bar. Everyone laughed. Bors didn’t. What the heck was wrong with him? He was looking as if he just had seen someone he’d been looking for and didn’t want to blink for fear of losing her.

The thought, like her music, brought a wonderful and heart stopping feeling of euphoria. For some insane reason, this time she didn’t think Bors’ stare was rude. The day she met him at the clinic, he accused her of dreaming about the two of them naked. She wondered if he was doing it now. She smiled at the thought and broke their eye contact.

When she left the stage with her violin, she headed toward Katherine. The older woman opened her arms for an embrace. Taylor hugged her and again wished Katherine a happy birthday. She talked to the other guests who expressed their wishes including the man she saw earlier standing beside Bors.

As soon as she found the chance, Taylor went into the partly lit kitchen and

placed her violin case on top of the counter. Instinct told her to turn around. Bors followed her and slowly came toward her. He looked at her and then she caught his unspoken intention. He would kiss her.

Her skin prickled with pleasure at the thought. The thudding of her heart drowned out the noise from the band and the guests. Her experience maybe limited, but she could see the invincible web of attraction between them building.

When Bors reached her, he cupped her face with both hands, leaned down and took her mouth with savage intensity. His kiss was hard and demanded a response. She replied, meeting his tongue with hers. The action elicited a low moan from Bors. She wrapped her arms inside his jacket and around his back, feeling the muscles beneath her palms. They continued to kiss. It was wet, erotic and dreamily intimate.

Bors wrapped one arm around her waist and brought her to him. Their bodies fused, his hard cock pressed against her pubic mound, her unrestrained instinct had her squirming and seeking more pressure from him. Masculine heat oozed even through his clothes. Bors felt hot! Her skin sizzled deliciously. She wanted more of his warmth, of his hard body. Most of all, she wanted the ache deep in between her legs answered.

Bors tightened his hold, but it wasn't enough. She longed to feel his skin, his mouth on her breasts. Burning with desire, she returned Bors's kisses with an

equal passion. He groaned in her mouth.

They kissed hungrily. Bors lifted his mouth a fraction from hers, and breathed, “You’re beautiful and played beautifully. I thought an angel came down from heaven to play for us.”

“I agree. I think everyone dancing fell in love with each other.”

Taylor let out her signature squeak and buried her face on his shirt.

“Dammit, Gawain. Do you have to be here, too?” Bors snarled.

“Hey, knuckle-butt. I’m here first saying goodbye to my toes.”

“Why are you saying goodbye to your toes?”

“Because they’re dead and will have to be amputated. Teta stepped on them a gazillion times. Did you see her clogs? Taylor came in just as I was saying farewell to my little piggy. Sorry, Taylor. Didn’t mean to witness the smooch.”

“It’s all right, Gawain.”

Bors eased his hold on Taylor’s waist but didn’t let go. They were still locked in an intimate embrace. Taylor could feel his heart thumping wildly against his chest.

“Can you leave now?”

Gawain ignored Bors totally. “You know I was here before, eating my chicken when Julie and Tristan started making out. That was before they became an item. Now look, Lovely Julie is huge with my nephew. Guess I’m just always at

the right place at the right time. Except for the time when I caught Mom and Dad in a passionate embrace. That was awkward.”

Taylor laughed. She could almost imagine Gawain’s reaction stumbling on his parents locked lips. “How do you know that you’re having a nephew?” Taylor smiled at Gawain, who winked at her in return.

“I don’t, but we all want one. Except for Kirsten. She wants a niece to add more girls in the family. Anyway, go ahead, guys. Don’t mind me.”

“How about you leave before I rearrange your face, bro?”

Gawain snorted. “You never learn, do you, Bors? Last time it was you who screamed like a baby pig when I relocated your bones. Want to squeal again?”

“Ungrateful ass. I broke your fall and saved your empty head from breaking when you landed on my shoulders.”

“That’s your version of the story when Mom found us.”

However amusing listening to the brother’s bantering, Taylor thought she had better go back to the party. “I’ll leave you two alone to size up your egos.”

“Stay,” Bors commanded.

“Okay, I guess I’m the one leaving. I want to hear you play again, Taylor. Don’t know about ugly face here.”

“Just leave, Gawain.”

“Yeah, yeah. I don’t want to be in here anyway. There’s something about this

kitchen that bonds people together and make them do things like kissing and groaning. I'm beginning to think there's some magic bouncing around in here. Better go. Teta might come. I don't want the magic to bounce while she's here." Gawain shivered with exaggeration, rubbing his arms up and down. "Do you know, Taylor, that she carries a gun in her purse?"

"No, I didn't know that."

"Yup. That's why I couldn't complain when she stepped on my toes."

"Bro, I thought you're leaving?" Bors said.

"Yeah, yeah. Hey, Taylor! Thanks."

"For what?"

Gawain raised one shoulder in a shrug. "Ugly face is here because of you. I guess we'll be seeing him more often now. Mom and Dad couldn't be happier." He turned around and walked out of the kitchen, leaving her alone with Bors.

"What was that about?"

"I don't know."



At two forty-five in the morning, Bors finally pulled into his driveway. If he had not put a stop on Taylor and Kirsten's gabbing, he would still be sitting in his parents' living room, sipping his second glass of wine and most likely would have been driven home by one of his brothers. Waiting for Taylor had been fine and



dandy when he and Simms were exchanging information about Jean and what he had gotten so far from Taylor, which was basically nothing new except for the reason why Taylor ran away.

When Simms shifted the conversation to computer hassles and went into a debate with Percival, he had decided to look for Taylor and found her and Kirsten in his mom's sunroom. Both had been lying on their stomachs on the carpeted floor, browsing through Kirsten's clothing designs. He had watched them for a minute, his attention focused on Taylor's long smooth legs bent at the knees, ankles crossed, and swinging idly back and forth. Julie and Kirsten used to stay up late, too. That had been before Tristan stole Julie from Kirsten. Judging the way the women had laughed, he knew Kirsten found a new friend.

He would have had been contented just to stand and watch the two women, but the party was over, the caterer they hired had cleaned and left the backyard as it was before, and he wanted Taylor back in his house.

Turning off his engine, he shifted in his seat to watch Taylor, who still looked out the window. With the soft glow the moon provided, he could see the outline of her delicately carved cheekbones, her full lips, and long lashes. She had been quiet since they left his parents house. He wondered what she was thinking right now.

"Babe? We're here. You awake?"

Taylor looked at him then smiled. "I've never been this awake in all my life. It's as if I just woke up from a long dream and started living."

"What do you mean?"

"Your family."

"They're a handful, I know."

"I adore them."

Bors met Taylor's eyes, bright with joy. "Glad to hear that." He leaned forward, pushing the wayward hair off her face then cupped her chin, turning her face toward him. Taylor placed her hand on his forearm. The warmth of her skin in his hand traveled from his fingers to his heart and then continued down to his cock. God, he had to kiss her.

He did. It was slow, thoughtful. The perfect kiss for a moonlit night. But Taylor's eagerness made it difficult for him to reign in his control. Her open wet mouth tasted so sweet and her tongue danced with his, raising temperature to a fever pitch.

Quickly, his calm shattered. He traced the soft fullness of her mouth with his tongue before exploring the warmth deep inside. His hand traced the column of Taylor's neck, shoulder, and then cupped her full breast. God, it was perfect. He wanted to suck her, feel her. Make love with her. Bors throbbed. His hard cock begging to be freed. Tearing his mouth from Taylor's, he kissed her chin, ear then

continued down to suckle her nipple through the material of her dress.

Taylor whimpered. The sound made him even harder, if that was even possible. He switched between biting and suckling until he couldn't take it anymore. He sat up straight with one hand gripping the steering wheel and the other on Taylor's shoulder. He needed to control himself, his breathing or he might just have a heart attack in the car.

Jesus! Looking at Taylor, she was in no better shape. Her cheeks were flushed and chest heaving. "You, daughter of Eve, are a danger to my insanity." He pulled the key from the ignition then got out of the car. He walked toward the passenger side and opened Taylor's door.

"You, son of Adam, are what mother's warned their daughter's about." Taylor turned and walked away from him.

With his lust-induced brain, it took him a few seconds before he understood what she meant. Bors laughed. He walked ahead of Taylor then leaned against the front door facing the woman who'd wiggled her way deep inside his skin and close to his heart in a very short time.

"Are you saying that I am a bad influence? Like the heroes in Julie's romance books? The rakes, scoundrels."

"Yes."

"Which kind am I?"

“A tease.”

He didn’t know how he managed to insert the key into the keyhole to unlock the door without looking, but he did. Turning the knob, he pushed it open.

“Did I tease you, Taylor, with my kisses?”

“Now you are being a scoundrel.”

At past two in the morning, he shouldn’t flirt with her. But the time was too sweet to end. Taking her hand, he pulled her inside and shut the door. “Hard not to be one when I’m around you.”

“I arouse wickedness. Should I be flattered with that comment?”

“Baby, you should. Right now, I am too fucking aroused to go to bed.”

“Oh.”

He shocked her with his choice of words. Taylor’s eyes grew bigger and her jaw slackened. Bors took advantage. He showered kisses around her mouth and along her jaw. Without stopping, he continued to kiss the expanse of her shoulder, lowering her strap as he went farther down. Taylor shivered when he exposed her breast, blew on her nipple before trapping it between his lips. The pink nipple hardened. *He* turned rock hard.

As if he had all the time in the world, he sucked her gently. Damn, she tasted so good. Slowly pulling her dress down, he mentally hoped Taylor wouldn’t object. He needed her. He must have her or he’d shoot himself to end his agony.

Bors left one hard nipple to possess the delectable softness of her mouth once again. He filled it with his tongue, claimed it just as he intended to possess her body—completely.

Taylor's dress dropped on the floor without so much a noise. Finally, he had her where he needed her—in his arms, naked and trembling. She still had her black thong on, but it, too, would come off. But first, he'd ready her body. He wanted her helplessly, wickedly, willingly, and wantonly naked, begging for his kisses, touch, and to take her. Oh yeah. Before the sun rose, he'd make her want him as much as he wanted her.

He'd wanted this since he laid eyes on her. Wanted her with his mouth on her silky smooth skin, her breasts swollen with nipples hard and wet from his kisses. Her eyes clouded with passion and hair spread on his pillow. Her legs spread apart with her pussy glistening and weeping for him. Last time he tasted her, they were in the kitchen. This time, when she climaxed, she'd be in his bed writhing and panting; whispering his name.

Bors tore his mouth from Taylor's to kiss her neck. He was so hard thinking about what he would do to her, that he sucked the soft skin below her jaw hard. He was sure she'd be sporting a hickey for a week. He cupped Taylor's breasts while he quickly looked at his mark. The mark of possession.

Just like the hickey, he would make Taylor remember this time when he

penetrated her tight pussy, claimed her virginity, and possessed her body for the first time.

Plans laid out in his mind, he used his one hand to caress her breast while his mouth feasted on another. He licked around her areola before trapping the hardened nipples between his lips. He switched between licking, sucking and flickering his tongue. God, he loved women's breasts. There was something about them that could make him so hard and feel languid at the same time. So fucking hard to explain.

Taylor's body arched. She gripped his hair while pressing her breast deeper into his mouth. Her body's temperature rose in a matter of minutes. He traced her undersides, stomach, hips, and round ass. He purposely avoided touching her clit. Not yet. He needed her desire for him unmatched.

"Bors..."

"Yes, love."

"I can't wait anymore."

"No?"

"Give me more now or I'll go mad."

He would have hooted with triumph but his throat was too tight from holding his control. With Taylor begging him, he swept her up in his arms then strode toward his bedroom. Laying her down in the center of the bed, her head

resting on the long downy pillow, he pulled the covers from underneath her. It was easy since his bed wasn't made.

Bors stood beside the bed while he removed his clothes. His fingers shook as he unbuttoned his pants, his chest heavy from harsh breathing and his dick hard. He couldn't believe a beautiful woman lay on his bed waiting—seductively. With just a thong covering her body, she looked more delectable. Like peeling a wrapper off a box, he wanted to see what it covered with eagerness he never felt in his life before.

He knew she lacked experience in bed. But looking at her with arms above her head, watching him with heavy lidded eyes, one would think she knew already what was bound to happen. After shucking off his pants, he left his Calvin Klein's Men Gripper Trunk underwear on. He grinned as Taylor licked her lips while her gaze focused on his erect cock.

Stretching beside her, he lowered his head and licked one hard nipple. His tongue circled her areola then suckled her hard. He palmed Taylor's breasts, pressing hard, kneading her hungrily while torturing her with his kisses.

"Breast man, you're killing me."

"With pleasure, I hope." He flicked his tongue like butterfly wings, tickling her.

"Bors," she sobbed, and gripped his arms.

“Yeah, babe.”

“Please touch me.”

Bors chuckled. “I’m touching you already.”

“Not enough.”

She reached down to touch his erection, but he stopped her. If she so much as made contact with his skin, he’d spill his seed on the sheet. “Demanding wench.” He continued to worship her breasts until she was moaning erotically, gripping his hair tight as she arched her back and held him to her. He took pity on her and slid down the bed, kissing her damp skin, caressing her hot body, and the top of her mound but avoiding touching her pussy.

“Bors, please...”

Settling between her legs, he cupped her knees and spread her legs. For a second, he looked at her pussy glistening like a fresh grass on the meadow wet with dewdrops in the early morning. “Beautiful.” Like a moth to a flame, he lowered his head and lightly laved her juices while her fingers traced her folds.

Taylor gasped the moment his tongue touched her clit. While his fingers played with her opening and labia, she opened her legs wider and panted.

“God, stop this torture!”

Unable to say anything, Bors answered her plea, inserting his middle finger first then his index finger. She was tight, wet and slippery. He pushed deeper until



he felt her barrier, reminding him that she was still new to this.

Taylor's body was on fire. Each lick, touch, and movement of his fingers buried inside her fueled her heat. While moaning and panting, Taylor lifted her head and looked down at Bors. His eyes gleamed with unsatisfied desire. His jaw muscles twitched and his nostrils flared like that of a raging bull. Good god, he looked magnificent.

"Bors, please. Stop teasing me."

He replied by slowly pulling his fingers out of her tight pussy. It felt so wonderful that Taylor's head thrashed from side to side in desperation. But before she could protest, his fingers were back inside her again. This time, two with the third knuckle poised right at her ass.

"Good, lord."

"Shhh...just feel me work inside you, baby."

Taylor shuddered at the feel of his fingers filling her. Breathing was as difficult as absorbing what was happening with her body. Bors's intimate caress, bold possession, heavy thrust of his fingers into her welcoming body, his tongue and hot mouth on her skin were too much. But it never was enough.

She was naked, open, wet, and ready. He was equally naked with his hot skin branding her. But to Taylor, it wasn't enough. She wanted more. Her body

screamed for more. To fill the emptiness that Bors opened with his mere kisses.

Each time their skin made contact, flames deep inside her ignited, burning her greedily. Turning her body into a blazing inferno. She was melting, feverish, and thirsty for more.

*Good god. What is happening with me? I am on fire. I am lusty. I want to...*

“Make love with me. Now.”

Somewhere in the distant part of her mind, a good sense rang reminding her of what she was about to do—make love with a man she hardly knew. She may still be inexperienced, but she already knew what it was he was about to do—he would penetrate her with his cock to break her hymen until he buried himself deep inside her. He would pull out and then would thrust again. Bors would repeat it again and again, and she could hardly wait.

She desperately wanted this. Anticipated him moving on top of her with his cock throbbing inside her weeping pussy, whispering love words, biting lightly on her skin, kissing her, sucking her skin. And for chrimanysakes, how wet she would get before he claimed her?

So this was what drove virgins, decent, married, young and old females to lunacy. This strong craving to be fucked, to be in the arms of a man like Bors, and reach heaven or blinding orgasms. God almighty, even a virgin like her wanted to shout fuck just because it felt good.

Taylor tried to reach for Bors's cock once more. "Bors," she half pleaded and half moaned.

With his fingers still buried deep inside her pussy, he rose up. "I want this night memorable for you, Taylor. Each and every night, you will think of me, of this, of us." His body sliding over hers, he used his elbow to brace himself, positioned his hips between her widespread thighs.

Taylor gasped from anticipation. Pulling his wet fingers out of her, he used them to rub his engorged head against the slick folds of her pussy. "Feels good?"

"Yes. Oh yes."

"Right here, baby? Right around your clit?"

Taylor could only nod. His head was poised right on her entry. She lifted her hips to take him in, but he only shook his head.

"Do you want me inside you?" His voice was hoarse, forceful, and the worse came out through his teeth. "Say it."

Taylor grabbed his arms and tried to pull him down. "Yes. I want you!"

"You know what this means, baby. Your virginity will be mine."

"I'm yours."

Bors's facial expression didn't change, but something about his eyes showed satisfaction. Like a fighter who guaranteed his win. To Taylor's own satisfaction, he moved his hips lower until his cock was pressed hard against her pussy. Like a

hotdog in between a hotdog bun. And then he began thrusting, creating delicious friction that made her whimper lustily.

Taylor's body began to sing. Oh, the feel of his muscles, his heat, his hardness against her own soft body. There was nothing like it. And then he kissed her again. It wasn't gentle, but a consuming kind. She couldn't think about anything but his kiss and the way his tongue searched every crevice of her mouth.

Then Bors shifted a bit. She felt the pressure of his engorged cock forcing its way inside her in a slow, calculated movement.

"Baby, I don't want to hurt you."

"Bors, if anything, I only feel—"

Their locked lips muffled her gasp. She moaned or she must have groaned. She couldn't tell. All she knew was the tiny pain disappeared in a hurry, replaced by pleasure so good not even a hot fudge sundae could beat it.

Taylor waited for Bors to move, but all he did was stare down at her. His deep blue eyes seeking, silently asking questions she already knew how to answer.

"It didn't hurt."

Visible relief showed in his shoulders as he nuzzled the crook of her neck. "Good girl."

Bors began to move. "Baby, I have to do this." He pulled out then thrust heavily, powerfully into her. "Oh, fu...dge, babe!" The bed creaked, her body sank

deeper into the semi-firm mattress and she loved it. Bors filled her completely with one swift thrust.

The foreign sensation of having him inside her was a bit shocking. That she actually gave up her virginity and that a big and solid man was atop her finally dawned on her. Taylor waited for that feeling of loss, of not being a virgin anymore. None came. *So this is it. She did it and by god, it feels wonderful. I don't want this to end.*

Once he started the age-old ritual of making love, erotic friction began to spark. Taylor hung on to Bors's arm and spread her thighs wider to accommodate him. She loved the feel of his sac slapping her ass, the sound of his cock as the base met her wet lips.

"More, Bors. More, please."

"I'll give you, more, baby. Tonight is ours."

Bors grounded his hips. He pulled out slowly until the tip was barely out of her pussy then drove hard into her waiting pussy again. Taylor screamed. Bors covered her mouth to drink the sound.

"Oh god!"

He reached down between their bodies to touch her clitoris. "Come for me, baby. Now."

Over and over, he rotated her clit, concentrating on the spot that took her

higher until she felt herself shattered. As soon as her climax began, Bors thrust faster, harder, and deeper. Taylor was swept away in the spiral of pleasure she'd never felt in her entire life. Her pussy throbbed, but her soul sang in delight. But Bors wasn't done. When her climax began to ebb, he pulled out of her, scooted down, and sucked her clit until another wave of intense pleasure built up. The sharp ecstasy gripped her until finally it left her boneless.

"Now, baby. My turn." Bors licked her lips then thrust his tongue deep into her mouth as he drove his cock into her pussy—forcefully. He changed position so he could lift Taylor's legs higher, leaving her ass high up and pussy wide open. He made her hold the back of her legs up as he thrust even more deeply while his thumb pressed her clit.

Taylor watched Bors' taut body ripple with muscle movements. He was looking at their joined bodies and groaning as he pumped his hips. He'd already broke a sweat.

"Baby, so good. So fucking good," he said and then he thrust faster and harder.

She felt Bors press his thumb on her clit. Taylor screamed from the intense pleasure and gripped the sheet. "Bors!"

"Hang on, babe. I'm coming. Fuck!" He stopped thrusting. Instead he grounded his hips.

All tension released, Taylor met Bors' gaze. A wicked smile pasted on his face as he slowly lowered his body to give her another wet hot kiss. Slowly, Taylor came back down to earth. And with her was a handsome hunk with a last name Knight.

## Chapter Eleven

Bors woke up to the sound of Taylor playing her violin with vibrato that had him enthralled. He recognized the piece. Edelweiss. Kirsten had watched the movie *Sound of Music* maybe a hundred times when she was sixteen and played the soundtrack over and over until Gawain threatened to break the disk in half.

He stretched on the bed, locked his hands behind his head, and listened. Rays of sunshine penetrated the white blinds. Bors looked at the clock. What? *Eleven forty-five? Damn, it's late.* When was the last time he stayed in bed this late? During his high school days, maybe. But he and Taylor had stayed up until almost six in the morning making love. She had been a virgin, but a hellcat in bed. He'd never had a woman with such uninhibited exuberance, happy and eager to return the pleasure.

He'd made love to the daughter of the man he hated the most and lost himself in her. How in the world did that happen? Since he had lost his virginity at the age of fourteen, he couldn't count how many times he had a woman. But he couldn't remember waking up simmering from the passion of last night and still half aroused. The satiation he had with her the first time he reached his orgasm



surpassed that of the number of times he reached his peak with other women. But with Taylor, his release seemed to go on forever and he wanted more. God, he fucked her last night as if he was a teenager taking a bite of Eve's apple for the first time. His orgasm reached his soul.

Thinking about the hot and wild sex quickly made his body grow warm. His dick swelled. Bors raised his head to look down at the sheet that covered half of his body. It looked like a mini tent. He wished Taylor had stayed in bed. He'd love to have her fingers wrapped around him right now instead of the neck of her violin.

Something changed. The moment he saw her sitting across from him, his well-laid path had changed, altered. He just hoped his relationship with Taylor would not cause a problem when he clamped his handcuffs on Jean's wrists.

In one swift move, Bors got off the bed, taking the sheet with him. He wrapped it around his waist and walked out the room. Barefoot, he didn't make a sound as he walked in the living room. How many times had he walked out here since he finished building this house? Many times. But this time, finding a woman, a beautiful sensual and uninhibited creature sitting in the room, made this particular morning different. He bet that even if the room were unfinished, without furniture, and bare, the room would still look complete. Why was that?

Bors rubbed his eyes. God, he needed a strong cup of coffee.

Taylor sat in front of the glass window facing the water. He couldn't see her face, but if he would make a guess, her eyes were closed. He waited until she hit the last note then took another step toward her line of vision.

Taylor raised one brow, smiling. "Good morning. Nice outfit."

"Morning. Awesome playing."

"Did I wake you? I'm sorry. I always play in the morning."

"Don't be. This is the best morning I've ever had. Although," he walked behind Taylor, leaned down and wrapped his arms around her shoulders. "I'd rather have you beside me. Right now."

"Playing while lying down is kind of hard."

Bors nuzzled Taylor's neck. "Baby, the kind of playing I have in mind wouldn't be hard, but fun."

"Silly. You know what I mean."

"Let's go back to bed."

"Why? It's already morning."

"Because that's where I want you to be. Where you should be. Where you...should be resting."

Taylor sighed her body slumping in her seat. She looked defeated. "Last night, last night was...I don't know what happened with me. I just—I attacked you, didn't I? Like a deranged woman who never had sex in her life and finally

found the opportunity.”

“Baby, you never had sex before last night. But yeah, you were a hellcat. I think I have scratches on my back to prove it.”

Taylor covered her face with her hand. Still, he could see her ears turning bright red. “God, I’m so embarrassed.”

“Don’t be.”

“We didn’t use protection the first time.”

“You worried?”

“No.”

“Me, either.” It was the truth. “How are you feeling? Physically, I mean.”

“I’m fine. How about you? I didn’t hurt your arm, did I?”

“No.”

“Nice of your brother to stitch you up.”

“Yeah.” He looked at his arm and tried to pry the bandage open. “I sure am glad he’s a doctor. Otherwise, I would have to go to a hospital, and I hate hospitals.”

“Because the nurses go nuts when they see you?”

Bors grinned. “That, too. But primarily, what it represents to me. When I go to a hospital it’s because something bad came down.”

“What do you mean?”

Bors realized where the conversation was heading and quickly remedied it. “I’m just talking about what happened in the past with my sibs. Kirsten nearly died because she ate something she’s allergic to. Luckily Julie, my sister in-law was smart enough to use the epipen on her. That was how their friendship started. But Kirsten was taken to the hospital anyway. Tristan ended up in the hospital, too, when he landed on a sharp part of a broken tree. The thing was like a sword; it pierced his side. He survived and woke up in the hospital. See? Hospitals mean something bad happened.”

“Were you even taken to a hospital?”

“Yeah, but for minor stuff. Broken ankle, wrist, cuts.”

“Poor baby. You must have been a rascal growing up.”

“Made me tougher. So Miss Jean, we could go shopping for what you need and then maybe go for a walk down to the beach. The sun’s shining. I’d hate to waste a beautiful day.”

“I don’t know about shopping, but I’m good on walking. Maybe the view would help me think about what to tell Judge Knight about my dad.”

“That’s what I’m thinking.”

“I need to figure out my problem. When I left Jean’s home, I thought my plan was as tight as *Ocean’s Eleven*. Talk to your dad and Jean would be out of the hole he dug for himself and then I could start living without having to worry that

someone is out there waiting for a chance to trap dad or hurt him. How stupid I am to think that a simple talk with a judge would fix my problem right away.”

“You’re not stupid. Just not George Clooney.”

“Or Julia Roberts.”

“You’re prettier than her though.” *Fuck*. For the first time since he started working on Jean’s case, he hated the topic about the man. Bors squatted in front of Taylor, pushed the wayward lock of hair out of her face and placed his fingers beneath her chin. “Baby, don’t you think Jean should at least pay for what he’s done or still doing right now? He is selling girls.”

“I know that, Bors. That’s why I need your dad’s help. I don’t want him to go to jail. He’ll die there. God, I don’t know. Maybe a house arrest or something, but not jail time. Bors, Jean is a good dad. I want the world to know that. I want them to see him as that.”

*Too fucking late and impossible to happen.* Wrapping his arms around Taylor’s waist, he rested his cheek on her lap. How could he tell her Jean didn’t need help, he needed to be punished. And he, of all the people, was first in line to see it from happening. “Baby, Dad is just. What he can give you is a sound advice. But I am telling you now, Jean’s fate is out of his hands. You need to prepare yourself for this—good or bad, he will serve his time.”

“If that’s the case, I’m willing to go back to living with him. If keeping him

out of jail means rotting in his home, living my mundane life, I'll do it. I love my father that much. I'll do what I can to make him stop. Maybe pester him every day, make him crazy."

"And what about your conscience? Can you live your life knowing your father is stealing daughters away from their homes, their parents?"

"I'm sorry that Dad's business is hurting other people, but blood is thicker than water. I wouldn't let my father go to jail. Bors, I already lost a mother, I won't lose a father, too."

"Be reasonable. If Jean's in jail then that means you know where he is. So technically, you didn't lose him."

"But he'll be in my conscience, too. And if he dies in there? What then? I don't know if the public knows this, but when he went to Thailand, he had triple bypass surgery there."

"No, I never heard about that." It was true. Jean must have spent tons of money to keep the surgery under the rug. Shit, the man was as good as Bin Laden when it came to hiding information.

Bors looked up. He stared at Taylor's eyes. The pain he saw in there hit him in the gut. He didn't like it. He wanted to erase the pain. Worse, the words to promise to give what she wanted balanced at the tip of his mouth.

*Fucking hell.*

“What’s wrong? You know, you don’t have to get involved in this.”

*Oh god.* He was very much involved in this as she was. “Nothing’s wrong, babe.”

“Bors, if watching me, which you keep on insisting, will affect your job, then maybe you should—”

“Don’t worry about my job. I took a leave of absence.”

“Really? Why?”

“Isn’t it obvious?”

“Bors...”

“Taylor...” he mimicked her tone making her laugh. “So, how come you’re not excited about shopping? Women love to shop, I thought.”

“Do your mom, sister, and sister in-law love to shop?”

“I don’t think so. Julie likes to stay home and write, Kirsten is addicted to designing, and my mom hardly goes out.”

“So your idea that women love to shop came from...”

“Teta.”

“Ha! I talked to her last night. She told me she plays bingo, likes to visit pawnshops for guns, and the shooting range.”

“Okay, fine. Forget that I said women love to shop. Tell me why you don’t like the idea. Last night you were wishing that you had another pair of jeans with

you.”

“Not that I don’t want to go shopping. It’s just that I don’t have money to spend. I’m poor.”

“Very. You’re homeless, unemployed, penniless, shoeless, chauffeur less...tsk, tsk. Poor, poor, Taylor.”

“Stop it. I’m being serious here.”

“Me, too.”

Taylor pinched his arm.

“Yeoww!” He bit her arm.

“Ouch! Troll, I’ll get a bruise.”

“Sorry.” He kissed the spot that he bit. It was already red. “You were saying?”

“I know how difficult it is to be poor, but knowing is far different than experiencing it. To think about where to get my next meal...is really hard.”

“Babe, as long as I’m here, you won’t go hungry. I’ll get anything that you want as long as I could afford it.”

“That’s very nice of you, but I can’t depend on your charity.”

“Who says I’m giving you food, transportation, shopping spree for free. You have to earn them.”

“How?”



“Since you are poor and unemployed, you could work as my housemaid. Keep this house clean.”

“And warm up your bed.”

“You want to add that to your job description?”

Taylor chewed her bottom lip and crinkled her brows. “I don’t know. Maybe I should post that at Craig’s List. I might get a better—” Taylor screamed when Bors grabbed her sides and tickled her.

“The hell you will.”

“Stop! Okay, be serious.”

“I’m serious.”

“About the job description?”

“Everything.”

“Why are you so nice to me?”

“You already know the answer to that. I like you. So, I think we should get ready. Unless, you want to go back to bed and forgo the walk through the woods to see the alcove down the beach.”

“As much as I love your heavenly bed, I’d like to feel the sun on my skin and get a nice tan. I don’t want Paige from Tweed’s to see me looking as pale as a bag of flour. She likes my tan, you know.”

“Tan? You’re kidding, right. This is your natural skin color.”

“It is. But I told Paige...oh never mind. It’s a woman thing.”

“She assumed you are a fan of tanning salons. Good hearted as you are, you decided to go along.”

“Kind of like that.”

“Hmm...I know this light brown caramel colored skin is real.” He began inching his hands inside her shirt until he reached her breasts. What he found hardened his dick instantly. “Not a big fan of bras?”

“Confining. Mine aren’t like papayas that need support anyway.”

“Oh baby, yours are perfect.” To prove his words, he cupped her breasts, gently squeezing the mounds he wanted so badly to lave. “Firm enough to fill my hands and with beautiful nipples.” He lifted her shirt and licked one hard pink nipple.

“Bors...ohhh...”

He sucked her hard enjoying the feel of her nipple rolling in between his tongue and the roof of his mouth. “Hmm...like that, beautiful?”

“Yes.”

It was what he wanted. Bors looked up to gaze at Taylor’s flush face. Her eyes were already glazed from banked heat. He stood and took her violin and bow and placed it on the nearby table. Before Taylor could protest, he was back kneeling in front of her. “We’ll make it to the beach before the sun goes down.”



Dressed in Bors' plaid long sleeved shirt and sweatpants with rolled up hems, Taylor kept her hold on Bors' hand as they walk side by side along the grass-covered path. The smell of pine needles, wet grass, Puget Sound, and dirt mingled in the air, and she loved it. Critters skittered from one tree to the next. Bird mating calls came from different directions. They all sound wonderful.

Taylor plucked a leaf from a rhododendron so tall and bushy it looked like a tree and not a bush. She let go of Bors' hand and stopped to admire the white bells blooming beneath a wild bush. "I could almost imagine fairies living here."

"Hmm. Kirsten said that, too, when she was little and found a patch of those white bells. Girls think alike, huh?" Bors adjusted the sling pack he carried.

"I suppose in some areas. This is like untouched paradise."

"Right on paradise. Untouched? Not really. Developers have been coming here, checking out the land to build condos. But the Orca's community refuses to budge. We like to control the growth of population in this area."

"Don't you think you're being selfish? For not sharing this place to the outsiders."

"If developers take over then this place would be available only for private residents. Nature, animals, Fawn, they all have the right to live like us. Do you think it would fair for them if the developers started cutting down hundred year

old trees for the sake of investments? The town council is formed to protect what you see here. So people from all over the world can come and enjoy this. I don't think we're being selfish."

"Bors Knight, are you a tree hugger?"

"A tree climber, too. My brothers and I used to climb all kinds of trees. We liked to think of ourselves as Robin Hood."

A blue jay flew by making weird noises. Another one perched too close to where they stood. "What do you suppose is happening? Maybe trouble in the nest?"

Bors walked closer to the blue jay. The two birds joined together. They looked agitated, flapped their wings and let out what seemed to be a distress call.

"There's the problem."

"What?" Taylor made a move to follow but Bors motioned for her to stop.

"A baby jay is on the ground. Here, take my pack."

Taylor took the pack and slung it across her shoulder. "I don't see it."

"Hang on. Baby jays start as grayish or ashen colored chicks. When the feathers are longer, you could mistake them for baby crows. I have a bandanna in the pack, will you please get it for me?"

Taylor found the red bandanna right away and handed it to Bors. She watched him rub it on the grass before he gingerly covered the bird.

One of the birds screeched then flew real close to Bors' head.

"Watch out. I think they're the parents. Mad parents."

"Yup. They're trying to protect their baby. Come closer. Look at this thing. Have you ever seen such an ugly bird in your life?"

"Oh my god. Are you sure that's a baby bird and not some aliens' spawn? Are those the would-be feathers? They look like porcupine quills."

Bors laughed. "Good observation. Ugly, huh? But those parents love this baby so we have to put this ugly thing back into the nest."

"Do you see a nest?"

"Yup. See up there where the two branches formed a V?"

"Oh, I see it. It's pretty high. Amazing how little Porky survived."

"Porky?"

"Better than ugly."

Bors grinned then leaned over for a quick kiss. "Alright, Porky is going back to the nest." He tied the two ends of the bandanna around his neck.

"Um, is that necessary?" Taylor look at the little lump move.

"Any ideas?"

"No. Please be careful."

"Hmm...are you beginning to like me, Miss Jean?"

"No. I just don't want you to hurt yourself and not be able to put Porky back

in the nest because I definitely wouldn't be—”

Bors kissed her square in the mouth. “I’ll be careful.”

Heart in her throat, Taylor watched Bors grab one branch then another until he came close to the nest. When his foot slipped, she screamed, scaring the momma and papa jays.

“I told you to be careful, you troll!”

Bors looked down and let go of his hold on a branch. He swayed back and forth. “Ahh!”

“Bors!”

“Just kidding, babe. I’m okay.”

“Troll! I hate you. If you fall and crack your neck, I’m not calling nine-one-one.”

“You lie. Okay, Porky is back in the crib. I’m coming down. Wanna catch me?”

“And flatten me like a pancake? You’re handsome, but no way I’m gonna break your fall, honey.”

Bors managed to climb down as easily as he climbed up. “What did you call me?”

“Troll.”

“Yeah, that too. But I’m talking about when you said I’m handsome. You

called me...”

“Honey.”

“Say it again.” Bors wrapped his arm around her waist.

“Honey.”

“God, you made that word sound so sweet and good.”

“It’s just a word, honey. So, do you think Porky’s going to be okay? Hello?”

“Oh, I hope so. The parents aren’t flying around to attack me anymore. I didn’t touch the baby or the nest. They don’t like human scent. So, I think they’re not going to abandon the babies.”

“There are more little porkies in the nest?”

“Yeah. Ready to say goodbye to Porky?” He took the pack from her and stared at Taylor.

“What?”

“I just realized you look like a hobo in your outfit. Poor, Taylor. No money, no fancy clothes.”

“But I have you.” The words were out before she thought better of it. She shrugged to cover her embarrassment then tried to walk around Bors. He stopped her.

Pulling her against him, he pressed his mouth against her temple and whispered, “Yes. You’ve got me.”



The end of the beaten path opened to a spectacular westerly view of the afternoon sun, islands, and prime sandy-pebbled beach. A huge rock shaped like a shell provided shelter from wind or hot sun. Anybody could relax here, spend the afternoon combing the beach, collect beach glass, read books, or simply daydream.

Taylor closed her eyes, heightening her senses. She could hear the nature talk, but no sound of manmade noise that intruded the serenity of this place. Paradise.

From behind her, Bors wrapped his arms around her. “This is an inlet. No ferries could come here, but you could see them through that opening. Once, I spotted a couple of kayakers enjoying this area. But only once. We’re too far for small boats to wander here.”

“This is your private getaway.”

“Very private. Come on.”

Taylor kicked off her slippers and started running. “Oh, I love it here! Look how smooth this rock is. Shaped like Mickey Mouse’s ear.”

“No, it looks like butt cheeks.”

“God, you’re so dirty-minded. Can you put this in your pack?”

“Sure.”



Half an hour later, Bors' pack felt ten pounds heavier. He spread the blanket on the flat slab of rock, sat on it, and leaned against the boulder Taylor named Clam. He watched Taylor along the wet sand searching for more rocks. The sweats he loaned her were rolled all the way up her thighs to keep them dry. Once in while she would look at him and wave. And each time, Bors' heart would soar. With the sun's reflection on her hair, her long legs red from the cold water, she looked ethereal. Like a child, she would laugh when the waves sneaked up on her.

He loved watching her—everything about her. Why? He just met her. They were only together because she needed his father's help and he needed her to pin her father and send his ass to jail. What he felt for her was pure lust. Period. Because love would be impossible to grow in such a short time. Impossible.

"Hey, lazy butt. I have more rocks. And you've got to see this." Taylor dropped the geoduck she was dragging and then opened her hand to show a flattened disk like sea urchins that lived on sandy bottoms. They used to be prevalent in the Island, but they were getting less and less now.

"Sand dollar. It's a dead one so you can keep it. Place it under the sun to dry."

"It's beautiful."

Taylor wiped her hand on her sweats, placed the sand dollar under the sun, and lay down on the blanket. Her face was red from the lowering sun. "Can we

just stay here forever?”

“As soon as the sun disappears from the horizon, you’ll freeze.”

“But I have a troll to warm me up.”

Bors pushed off from where he sat and laid down beside Taylor. He partly covered her warm body. “And this troll is more than willing to give you warmth.”

Slowly, he inched his hand inside Taylor’s plaid shirt. She shivered from his touch but didn’t complain. Her skin felt so warm, so alive. He kissed her lightly on the lips, nose, jaw and ear. He quickly grew used to being around Taylor, as if they’d been a couple for more than a month. “You’re beautiful.”

“You, too.”

Bors covered her mouth with his. The kiss was slow challenging her to dominate until she drew his face to hers with her tongue thrusting, searching. Bors smiled and returned her kisses. He eased his hand inside her sweatpants to touch her heat and found she was already wet. He loved it. Her body’s quick response to his touch heightened his own. “Oh, baby. You’re wet.”

Taylor writhed beneath him and replied with a moan.

He plunged his tongue inside her mouth the same time he eased two fingers inside her. She moaned while rocking her hips, urging him to go deeper.

“I want to see your breasts.” He adjusted his position to give her room as he suckled her lower lip then her chin.

Taylor lifted her shirt and moved her lacy cups aside. “Bors...”

“Yeah?” His head bent to lap on her nipples. He tantalized the buds with his tongue, which had hardened instantly. Like a starving man, he sucked her hard.

“Oh, god.” Taylor’s juice pooled and wet his fingers.

“Hmm...love your breasts. And this...” His mouth left her breast so he could kneel in front of her. He shucked her sweats and thong off. “...I can’t get enough of. I want your taste. Look at me, babe.”

Taylor met his gaze as he anchored her leg over his shoulder and spread her folds. Without breaking eye contact, he teased her with his fingers. “You’re beautiful,” he said and then he began to feast.

The little nub he knew would give her pleasure felt good trapped in between his lips. He pulled it with his mouth while his fingers slowly eased inside her. Bors began pumping. Slowly at first and then he increased his tempo.

Taylor’s hips began to move. “Don’t stop,” she whispered.

Bors didn’t stop until she screamed his name.

Slowly, he eased his body back up, leaving kisses on her belly, breasts and neck. With his arms supporting his weight, he stared at her passion induced eyes. “You look like a cat that just had her bowl of milk.”

“You mean satisfied.”

“Uh-huh.”

“Yes, but we’re not done yet.”

“I’d love nothing more than to make love to you right now, but the slab is too hard. We’ll continue when we get home.”

“Nonsense.” Taylor pushed on his shoulder, urging him to lie on his back.

Bors smiled and flattened his back on the blanket.

Taylor straddled his thighs then began unbuttoning his fly. He swallowed. Anticipation on what she was about to do increased his burgeoning urge to bury himself deep inside her. He raised his hips a fraction and helped her ease his jeans down. “Ride me, Taylor.”

Taylor replied with a smile. She moved her ass lower instead of higher to where his waiting hard cock bobbed. Bors hissed from the pleasure when Taylor wrapped her slender fingers around his shaft.

“My turn to taste you,” she said with a smile. And she did.

Bors’ toes curled from sheer pleasure of her timid licking. If he let this go on another second, he’d ejaculate while her mouth was wrapped around his hard shaft. Unable to bear it anymore, he grabbed her arms and pulled her up. “Enough teasing. Spread your legs. Take me in. Yes, that’s—fuck!”

Taylor wrapped her fingers around his cock then rubbed the tip on her clit. “Like it?”

“Babe...”

Biting her lower lip, Taylor slowly lowered herself on his engorged cock, feeling his whole length inside her body. “Hmm...so nice.” She began to ride him.

Bors reached down to touch her clit. “Yeah, baby. Fuck it. Come on. I want to feel you come again.”

Taylor looked down at their joined bodies, licking her lips. Ah, she would probably enjoy looking at herself in the mirror while they made love, he thought. Next time. For now, he’d give her what he could. He surged his hips upward to meet her. Without missing a beat, he helped her come.

“Bors. Oh my god!” She lifted her shirt over her head and tossed it aside. Her breasts giggled from their hard pumping. Cupping her breasts, she said, “I want your mouth on my breasts, Bors.”

“Sure, baby.” He placed his hands just below her armpits and pulled her closer so he could suckle her.

Taylor moaned and rocked her hips faster.

As soon as she screamed his name, he lay back down and lifted her ass. He kept her steady while he surged up deep and hard into her pussy. His release shook him to the core. Exhausted, he pulled Taylor close for a tight embrace.

“That was...yummy.” Taylor said, her breath warm against his chest.

“Yes. Delicious.”

“So, are we doing it again when we get home?”

Bors laughed. “Insatiable wench. Of course.” And he hugged her tight.

## Chapter Twelve

For the next six days, Taylor and Bors visited Porky and his family on their way to the Clam. Bors thought if Taylor continued bringing rocks home, he would have to build another room just for her collections. She wanted to go back to the cove this morning but Simms called asking him to come to his office and to give him updates in person. When he left the house, Taylor was sitting on her favorite spot in the living room, facing the mountains, tuning in her violin. He wanted to listen but she shooed him out and then laughed. That laugh had him going back to her side for another long kiss that promised something more. If Gawain didn't call to remind him that they would be flying to Seattle soon, he would have had her back in the bedroom.

He was inspecting Butt, the rock Taylor found in the cove when Astrid tapped him on the back.

"Sheez, what had got you so entranced that you didn't even hear me call your name?"

"You were calling me?"

"Oh god. Who stole your mind from work?"

Bors held up the rock that Taylor wanted to name Mickey but he insisted on calling it Butt. He didn't relent until she agreed.

"A rock. I'm able to sneak up on a top agent in this office because of a rock?"

"Not just *a* rock. Tell me what you see when you look at it."

Astrid stared at the rock for a minute frowning. "It does remind me of something. Wait, aha! Testicles. Uh-huh, it looks like it."

"A what?"

"You heard me. That rock looks like testicles when in a relax state."

"Astrid, you've been a widower for such a long time I think you forgot what testicles look like. This doesn't look—"

"Knight, are you saying that I'm as dry as the Sahara desert?"

"No, no. All I'm saying is that this doesn't look like testicles at all."

"Maybe you haven't seen yours in a long time, that's why you couldn't see the resemblance."

"Nice come back, Astrid."

"I know. Now, why are you looking at that?"

"Someone gave it to me."

"Normally, when someone gives you something, it is to remind you of him or her. Since you have a rock testicle...Oh my god," Astrid covered her mouth.

"Wait, wait. Let me explain."



“You told me you couldn’t find the right woman. Now I know why. Because you’re looking for a—”

“Oh, fuck no! A woman gave this to me and this is Butt. I mean, a rock shaped like a butt and I called it...” Astrid’s laughter told Bors his case was lost. “It’s Mickey’s ears.”

Astrid wiped her eyes, careful not to smudge her eyeliner. “Don’t worry, Knight. Your secret is safe with me.”

“There is no secret.”

“Whatever. Simms wants to see you. Oh, if I were you, I’d keep your testicle rock in your pocket. Toodles.”

Bors pocketed his rock and gave Astrid a warning look, which only made the older woman laugh harder. He wasn’t worried though. Astrid was anything but a gossip. Another trait that Simms loved about her.

As usual, his boss hunkered in front of his computer when he opened the door. Simms stub out his cigar then waved him in.

“Shut the door, Knight.”

Since the night of his mother’s birthday party, he hadn’t filled Simms in on more info about Taylor. All Simms knew was that Taylor was staying at his house. The only people who knew about Taylor’s true background were his family. They gave him a hard time, especially when they learned about Taylor’s aversion to men

in uniform.

His family didn't approve of his idea about not telling Taylor what he meant when he said he caught vermin for a living, but they understood. He just wished that Taylor would too when the time to reveal the truth came.

"So? Are we close to locking Jean's ass in jail?"

"Far from it, sir. Our unfounded suspicions about the reason why Taylor ran away from Jean point to a contrary conclusion."

"You sound like a freaking lawyer. Knight, spill it. I'm too old for surprises."

"Taylor left to find my dad and ask him for help."

"Help with what?"

"To save Jean's soul. To keep Jean from ending up rotting in jail."

"Why? What's their connection?"

"Jean is Taylor's father."

"Son of a bitch."

Bors went on to explain why Taylor had to escape, her plan of bluffing Jean that she'll expose him if he didn't stop his girl trafficking. He also added Taylor's financial situation, hence the reason why Taylor ended up living with him.

After two hours, Bors left Simms office with nothing but his boss's warning to keep his head with the brain working, not the one that drools through its eye.

Simms wanted results within two weeks or he'd replace him. They both

knew that when an agent got emotionally involved with his case, it was time to step back and let another agent take over. Emotions, when ruled over mental and physical strengths, often brought negative results.

He waved goodbye to Astrid then called Branyan to give him a ride to the ferry terminal. The ride would be perfect to fill in his partner about Taylor.



“Can’t believe Bruno Jean’s daughter is living under your roof. All this time we’re trying to find someone with balls to come forward and expose Jean. Now...Damn, you really told her you’re a rat catcher? A rat catcher? ”

Bors glanced at Branyan. “She hates anyone in uniform.”

“Even the UPS guys?”

“Okay, anyone that carries a gun.”

“Including Teta?”

“Why are you being a knuckle dick?”

Branyan laughed. “You know, here’s what I think. Wait, knuckle dick? What the fuck is that?”

“Just look at your knuckle. See that? That’s your dick.”

“Fuck you. I wouldn’t be expecting a baby if I have a dick as short as my thumb.”

Bors laughed with Branyan. He’d had different partners in the past, but

Branyan was the first that he actually enjoyed working with. He talked like him and his brothers, and his wife could beat the mean chef on television when it came to making pastries.

Branyan took the exit to State Route 20 westbound from the I-5. From Seattle, it was about a two-hour drive to Anacortes where he would catch the ferry back to Orcas Island. With Branyan in the car, two hours felt like twenty minutes. He could gab through his eardrums.

“You like her,” Branyan said.

“What?”

“Come on, Knight. You’re not deaf. Just admit it.”

“Admit what?”

“You like Jean’s daughter, that’s why you hid your true form—a kickass FBI agent. And you offered your house because you, Bors Knight, are interested.”

“In digging out information about Bruno Jean from Taylor.”

“Bors, let’s forget that we’re work partners for a minute. I’ll talk to you like a friend.”

“Egad. You sound like Kirsten and Julie. Whenever they want to talk like a friend, bro, you run.”

“Well, you can’t run so you might as well listen.”

“Do I have to?”

“Just fucking sit there and listen. You saw the moment your brother, Tristan, fell for Julie. It was you who told me that I was a goner when I met my wife. You saw the signs because you’re the observer. Now, reverse the situation. I’m the observer and I’m telling you—”

“You’re wrong. I’m not in love with Taylor. She’s broke and needs a place to stay. She’s what we need. And keeping her at arm’s length is the best. As for why I told her I catch vermin, I’m not going to repeat myself.”

“Deny it all you want. But you know you’re a goner.”

“You don’t know that.”

“I’ve seen you look at her. Like...”

“Like what?”

“A man in love.”

Bors’ shook his head in utter disbelief. “You’re nuts.”

Grinning, Branyan nodded his head without looking at him. “No. I’m a good observer.”

Branyan drove through the town of Anacortes. They headed west on 12<sup>th</sup> Street toward Oakes Avenue. This was a nice ride to unwind and enjoy the scenery before hopping aboard the ferryboat. “I always liked this drive,” Branyan said, then took a slight right at the Ferry Terminal Road.

“Me, too. Always reminds me that I’m almost home.” The scenery varied

from thick green forest to beautiful views of Puget Sound to the Olympics on the west and the snow and ice-capped Cascade Range to the east. Bors wondered if Taylor was looking at the same scenery. She loved looking at the mountains and frolic in the cold water of the Pacific Northwest.

The ferryboat loomed ahead of him when Anacortes Ferry Terminal turned into Spur Street. Normally, when he thought of home, he imagined his parents' home. This time, he couldn't wait to see the home he recently finished. And he knew why. Taylor. He smiled at the thought of that woman who could make any man lose his head because of her kookiness when it came to food, and her uninhibited behavior in bed.

This afternoon, they were supposed to have an early dinner at his parents' house and Taylor would discuss Jean with his dad. Perhaps they could squeeze a short walk in the woods and visit Porky and his family.

"Looks like we made it on time. Ferry's loading." Branyan flashed his badge and was waved in towards the private parking area.

"Thanks for the ride." Bors got out of the car and hitched his pack on his shoulder. He leaned down to look at Branyan. "Kiss Susan for me." He was about to walk away when Branyan called him. "Yeah?"

"What are you gonna do when this whole business about Jean is over and Taylor decides to leave your home?"

The question held Bors speechless. The thought about Taylor leaving never crossed his mind. Now that Branyan brought up the question, he didn't know how to respond to it. All he knew was that it caused a painful prick inside his chest.

Branyan laughed. "Thought so. Good luck, bro."

Bors remained rooted even when Branyan's car disappeared around the corner. He'd gotten used to having Taylor around. He couldn't imagine days without her. Who would make a big mess in his kitchen, hog the blanket, walk with him in the woods, and share the cove with him. Well, he suppose he would go back to living like a normal guy—chase criminals, walk in dirty alleys at night, go home to an empty bed, no making out with Taylor.

*No Taylor. Damn, that hurts.*



He spotted Gawain's car parked at the unloading dock. He expected his brother and Taylor to be there so they could go straight to his parents' home. But what he didn't expect was the green-eyed monster currently gnawing at his chest. As soon as he saw them laughing, with his brother's arm wrapped around the back of Taylor's seat, jealousy like he'd never felt before assaulted him. He shouldn't feel jealous. Gawain would never sneak behind his back and steal something important to him.

Bors steps faltered when reality hit him square in the chest. Taylor was

important to him. Important enough to find a way to deal with Bruno Jean's case without hurting his daughter's feelings. While on the ferry, he'd wracked his brain about all possible angles to nab Jean and still have Taylor's trust. Only, he came up short and still ended up empty handed.

*Damn it. Why did you have to be Jean's daughter, babe?*

Gawain saw him and must have said something to Taylor because she turned her head to look in his direction. Her smile was eager and alive with affection and delight. She had no idea how captivating her smile was. God, she was one beautiful creature.

He returned her smile with a larger smile of his own. Right at that moment, all he wanted was to get to her and kiss her. Maybe he'd do just that. So what if Gawain was in the car. He'd seen them kissed before.

"Hey there. How was your meeting? I hope vermins haven't invaded Seattle since you took your leave."

Bors caught Gawain's disapproving look. "No. Branyan is doing a great job keeping the population to a minimum." He hunched over, his forearm resting on the car door. He stared at Taylor, fighting the urge to kiss her in front of his brother. *Ah, the heck with Gawain.* Before he lost his courage, he held her chin between his fingers, lowered his head then kissed her. He only meant to give her a hello kiss, but the moment their lips touched, Taylor returned his kiss with reckless



abandon, sending a shock wave through his entire body.

Gawain started singing *Crazy Love* by Michael Buble while tapping the steering wheel loud enough to penetrate his kiss induced brain.

Oh yeah, Bors could hear her heartbeat even when he was in Seattle and when he lay beside her at night. And each time, it felt like the heavens opened up so the angels could look down on him.

Kirsten was a big fan of Buble and sang his song all the time. He didn't know Gawain's another fan, too. Rubbing his finger on Taylor's lower lip, he winked at her then he straightened to walk to the back door. Once seated and buckled, he flicked the back of Gawain's head. "Okay, Michael Buble. Let's go see Mom and Dad."

"You sure, Romeo? Want Taylor to sit in the back so you two can continue making out as if I'm not here?"

"Shut the fuck up."

"Can I sit in the back?" Taylor asked grinning, her cheeks rosy.

"No. What am I? Your chauffeur?"

"You're a poophead."

"Oh my god! You're another Kirsten."

Bors laughed. "You have no idea."



\_An hour and a half later, they pulled up in the Knight's driveway. Cars lined up the cemented family drive, which told Taylor that everyone was already here. She'd met the whole Knight family, but coming back here to have a lunner with just the family felt like meeting her future in-laws. Crazy, but she was nervous.

"Looks like everyone's here. Are we late for the lunner?"

"A lunner?" Bors and Gawain echoed simultaneously.

"Lunch and dinner. So are we late?"

"No. Except for you and Bors, everyone is staying here for a visit. They don't have to drive to come to lunner."

"Babe, even if we're late, it doesn't matter. This is my family." He got out of the car and opened Taylor's door. "Come on. I smell barbecue hotdogs."

Lord, how did it come to this? All she wanted was to meet Judge Knight. She got what she wanted plus more. She'd been sleeping with his son, and it all happened in such a short time.

Taylor took Bors offered hand. "Are we supposed to bring something? A bottle of wine or a bundt cake?"

"No. Mom said to bring our empty stomachs."

"Oh Bors, that's just a social statement of politeness. We should have

grabbed something.”

“Don’t worry Taylor. We’ll just put it on your tab.” Gawain wriggled his brows then walked ahead of them.

Bors held her hand as they walked to the front steps. “Please forget about the social statement of politeness crap and relax. We’re fine.” To Gawain, he asked, “What, bro? Unlock the door.”

“Don’t have a key, ugly face. Gave it to Teta. She’s getting a duplicate.” He reached above the porch light and started patting the flat area. “Here we go.” He held a key up. “Spare key.”

Gawain unlocked the door, and replaced the key back into its hiding place. As soon as he opened the door, a golden retriever met them.

Bors sat on his haunches and rubbed the dog’s ears. “Hey, Cinnamon.” *Sneeze.* “Meeting us, huh?”

“Uh-oh, doggie’s here. You know what that means.”

“Afraid of Teta, Gawain?” Taylor teased.

“Who isn’t?”

Taylor laughed at Gawain’s exaggerated show of fear.

“I’m hungry. Come on, guys. Follow the smell of grease and you’ll find food.” Gawain left them in a hurry.

Bors sneezed again. “Cinnamon, this is Taylor. Don’t hump her leg. She’s off

limits. Achoo! ‘Kay, off you go.’

Cinnamon barked twice then bounded off and disappeared in the corner.

“So, a dog can’t hump my leg but you, you...”

“What,” Bors asked, grinning.

“Nothing.”

“What?”

“Never mind.”

“What? Say it.”

“I said never mind.”

“You’re blushing.”

“I’d be blushing too if I’m inches away from getting poked with your Mister Johnson.”

Teta, Julie’s friend and now a special member of the Knight family, walked in on them. Her curly deep purple hair, bright pink top, blue pants and orange clog clashed together. The only thing missing was a red nose and she could be a circus clown.

“Mister Johnson?” Taylor and Bors asked simultaneously.

Teta replied by raising her brows and lowering her gaze to Bors front.

Bors looked down and let out a curse that Taylor never heard in her life.

“Uh-huh. Your dick that is presently pointing toward Taylor is Mister

Johnson.”

“Did you say what I thought you said, Teta?”

“You heard me, boy. I know more than one name for that...uh-oh. What happened? Got shrinkage now eh?”

Taylor wanted to laugh at Bors reaction. She couldn’t believe he was capable of blushing. He looked like a little boy the way he shuffled his feet with his hands in his pockets. And when he met her gaze, his color turned deeper red.

Bors didn’t say anything. The way his jaw muscles were clenching, he was trying to keep his opinion to himself.

From what she observed, the Knight boys were actually tame around Teta. Maybe because they knew she meant business. And her *business* involved her gun.

“Go on, you two. Foods ready. Oh, you might want to help your brothers, boy.”

“With what?”

“Putting a crib together.” Teta looked at Taylor and said, “You’ve seen all the Knight boys together. All are eye-candy *with* degrees under their belts, but you should see them right now. One wonders if they used their good looks to earn their diplomas. Tata, you two.” Teta tucked her handbag under her arm and then called the dog. “Come Cinnamon. You have an appointment at Scrub A Pup.”

“Why are you leaving? Aren’t you going to eat with us?” Bors asked then

sneezed as Cinnamon walked passed him.

“Going to Costco. Gotta make a duplicate of this house key and buy Julie hard rock plums. Don’t know why. They look like old man’s testicles and probably tasted sour, too. I’m off.”

Taylor and Bors watched Teta drive away with Cinnamon’s head sticking out the window.

“What’s up with you women comparing fruits to human body parts? Breasts like bananas and plums like old man’s testicles? God.” He squeezed his watery eyes shut then sniffed.

“Bors, you’re allergic to Cinnamon. To animals?”

“Yup.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Taylor’s voice raised a pitch. “That night when we took Fawn in, you were sneezing like crazy. I would have put Fawn in the back of the truck if you said something.” She reached to cup his face then rubbed her thumb on his cheeks.

“It was nothing. Besides, I enjoyed watching Fawn.”

Taylor smiled. She remembered how insistent he was about tying the fawn on the flatbed of the truck. “No, you didn’t.” She tiptoed and pressed her open lips to his. “But you let Fawn stay inside because of me.”

“I’ll stay in the dog kennel for you. You should know that,” he said in

between kisses.

“Why?”

“Because...” His lips recaptured hers, more demanding this time.

Taylor drew his face to hers, kissing him deeper, savoring every moment.

“Because what?”

Laughter reached her ears and remembered where they were.

Bors sighed in her mouth. “I’m not sure. I hate to say this, but we have to stop before I snatch you back into my bedroom.”

“Sounds wonderful. May I see it?”

“Don’t tempt me, wench.” Gathering her into her arms, he held her snugly.

Taylor laughed. “Alright. Let’s go see your brothers. They probably need your hand more than I do right now.”



Sitting on a green camping chair sandwiched between Kirsten’s and Julie’s, Taylor admired the men. Teta was right on. The Knights were all pleasing to look at but Taylor doubt they lack depth or intellect. Just look at the way they were staring at the pieces of wood laying on the picnic table. One would think they were all scientists trying to figure out how to put together a rocket ship. Bors’ hands were on his hips. Percival hadn’t stopped rubbing his chin the way she’d seen chess players did during a tournament. Tristan kept nodding while

inspecting a long piece of wood and Gawain tossed the screws back and forth between his hands.

Kirsten said, when she turned three, her dad disassembled the crib so he could store it in their cramped attic. All of the Knight kids used it and now it would be the new baby's turn to enjoy the heirloom.

"Julie, why don't you just buy a new one? Check Amazon," Gawain said.

"No. I want this one. You all used it. Now it's my baby's turn to sleep in it."

"See, that's the point. We all peed, pooped and puked in this crib. I remember sleeping in this and smelling Bors' drool."

Bors picked up the long piece of wood and poked Gawain in the ribs. "You're such an asshole. You're the one who slept in this thing because you weren't potty trained until you went to kindergarten."

"Fuck you, ugly face. That was Tristan."

"No. Tristan's the chewer. He chewed the bars and licked the varnish and suffered from bad case of diarrhea here, Mom said." Percival pointed at the yellow stain on the crib's mattress propped up against the picnic table.

"Very funny, Percival. You're the mongoose that ate the corner of that mattress until you couldn't stop throwing up."

Taylor giggled. "Julie, are you sure you want your baby to sleep in that crib?"

"I'm actually having second thoughts."



“Hey, Kirsten. What kind of mark did you leave on that crib?”

“Me? By the time I used that thing the smell was so noxious, I would pass out whenever Mom put me in there.”

Julie and Taylor roared their laughter.

“Oh my god. Stop. I might deliver this baby here.”

“How long do you think they’re going to stand there?”

“Hopefully before the baby comes out,” replied Julie while rubbing her stomach. Her swollen feet propped up on the stool cushioned with a small throw pillow.

Kirsten looked up from her laptop. “Your baby will have a mustache by the time those Einsteins figure out how to put a simple crib together.”

Julie looked at Kirsten. “I thought you believe we’re having a girl?”

“Oh right. Well, your baby will have boobs before she can use the crib.”

“And menstrual period,” added Taylor, placing her hotdog sandwich on a plate on her lap.

“Imagine yourself changing her diaper.”

“Eewww!” Julie covered her face with the manuscript she was editing. “Tristan can change her diaper.”

Kirsten and Taylor laughed so loud they attracted the men’s attention.

“What’s so funny?” Bors asked, his eyes focused on Taylor.

“Um...” She looked at Kirsten and then to Julie.

“You guys. You’ve been standing there for hours and the crib is still not a crib,” answered Julie.

“Honey, want to take a crack at it,” Tristan said smiling at his wife.

“No. Have to keep my feet elevated and I have editing to do.”

“What about you, snot nose?”

“Can’t you see I’m busy surfing the net?”

“Taylor, since you laughed the loudest, do you think you can help put this together?” Bors leaned against the table and crossed his arms against his chest. The position emphasized the muscles on his thighs and arms. Arms that held her tight hours ago while she convulsed from her orgasm.

The thought brought heat to her face. When Bors winked, an insane idea that he read her mind only made her feel hotter.

Clearing her throat, she answered, “Um, no.”

Bors shifted his position and crossed his ankles together, taking Taylor’s gaze from his face to his thighs and to the bulge in his pants.

She swallowed at the memory of what that bulge looked like when exposed.

“Why can’t you? You’re not doing anything.”

“Um, because I have a hotdog on my lap.”

The men looked at each other then burst out laughing.

*Great thinking, Taylor. Sike!*

“Wow. Can’t believe they’re my brothers. They have dirty minds, don’t they?”

“And mouths. They curse worse than the drunken trollops in my books.”

Taylor met Bors’ gaze. “But would you have your husband any other way?” she said, almost in a whispered voice. But Julie heard her.

“No.”

She broke eye contact with Bors to look at Julie. Taylor didn’t miss the sparkle in Julie’s eyes as she looked at Tristan. You could feel the love between the two of them. When she returned her gaze to Bors who was laughing with his brothers, she heard herself say, “Me, too.”

A half hour later, Katherine joined them waving a piece of paper in the air. “Darlings, I found the instructions on how to put the old crib together.”

Behind her, Arthur followed carrying six different size pieces of wood, smiling slyly. “Boys, my apologies. I was wrong when I said you have everything you need. I found these important parts of the crib. Apparently they got separated from the rest.”

“Dang! I knew we weren’t this stupid not to figure out how to put together a crib.” Percival sighed.

“You’re just too stupid to know something was missing,” Kirsten laughed.

“Laugh brat. If your website crashes, don’t come crying to me.”

“Oh Percival. You’re such an angel...cake. Too easy to crumble.”

“Crumble my ass.”

Taylor brought her hand up to stifle her giggles. Boy, she surely didn’t want the Knights’ attention directed to her. They all have such wicked sense of humors and wicked in name-calling.

It didn’t take long before the crib was put together. Made out of reddish brown mahogany wood, the polish still shone from the afternoon sun. Taylor had never seen a crib with a canopy before. It was old-fashioned, with intricate designs on the posts, the kind that kings and princesses would use, and it was beautiful. Unlike any other cribs, this one could be converted as a corner crib and daybed. Not an easy crib to put together.

While Kirsten joined her parents under the shade of the cedar tree reminiscing, Julie inspected the crib with Tristan. The two were hand and hand whispering, kissing.

She tried to imagine Bors as a baby sleeping in the fancy girlish crib and smiled. Someday his baby would sleep there, too. A beautiful boy or girl with deep blue eyes. And like Julie and Tristan, he and his future wife would probably use the crib, too.

The thought pricked her heart.

She looked at Bors and found him staring at her. Her heart skipped a beat. He must have been watching her the whole time.

It had only been a week since the first day they'd met. And yet, many things had happened between them that weren't part of her plan for coming here. All she wanted was to talk to Judge Knight. Now, she found herself dreaming of having a baby...with Bors.

She suppose her irrational emotions were the result of being cooped up in Jean's house for so many years because it was impossible, yes, impossible for someone to fall in love—Oh my god. She started hyperventilating.

Bors must have noticed her distress. He made it where she sat in a hurry. With his hands on the chair's arm, he leveled his gaze with her. "You okay, babe?"

Taylor swallowed. "Yes. I'm just kind of feeling hot right now."

"Wanna go inside?"

"No. I'm good here."

"You sure?"

"Yeah."

"Bors, are you game?" yelled Gawain.

Bors looked at his brother. "Sure. Just a sec." He looked back at her then combed the wayward hair off her face with his fingers then smiled. "You look beautiful sitting here. But, would you like to go for a walk before we talk to Dad

about your plan?”

“We can walk to the cove later. We’re here to visit. Just play with your brothers.”

“You love the cove, don’t you?”

“Very much.”

Bors grinned. “What do you like about it?”

Before she could give her reply, someone barged in on them. A man waving a gun.



“Nobody fucking move.”

No one expected it. A man, pinched face, about Taylor’s height, with gray wild eyes and crew cut hair, pointed his gun at Bors. The man held his gun sideways—Hollywood style. He wore army pants and a baggy unbuttoned black shirt making his silver dog tag visible and poorly designed tattoos. Bors wanted to choke him with his necklace, which most likely wasn’t military issued, but the kind that he could get at vending machines.

*Fucking punk!* He faced the man with Taylor at his back. If the son of a bitch pulled the trigger, he would get hit and not her.

Bors made a quick assessment. All members of his family were around. Tristan had Julie behind him, his dad had his mom, and Kirsten stood by the tree,

Gawain and Percival to his left. And all weren't moving. As if someone pressed the mute button, his family had gone silent.

Behind him, Bors heard movements. *Dad.*

"Son, lower your gun. Whatever it is you need, we can talk about it without—"

"Shut up, old man."

"Hey, dickhead. Watch your tongue or I'll stick this screwdriver in between your eyes." Gawain's voice was harsh and raw with anger enough to make the man blink.

Rattled, the man darted his gaze between Bors and his brothers. "Move and I'll shoot, Agent Knight."

"Gawain, bro. Stay where you are." He'd been in a sticky situation like this, but not when his family was around. This was tough. "Let my family leave. We can talk."

"No! He's got a gun."

*Shit!* Taylor grabbed his arm and tried to stand in front of him. He shoved her back but the dratted woman dug her fingernails in his skin and refused to budge. He grabbed her waist and pushed her behind him again—with force. He wondered if she understood when the man called him agent. If she did, this wasn't the time for an explanation. "Taylor, it's okay, babe." To the man, he said, "If it's me

you want, let my family go,” he repeated.

“Like you, I don’t want blood and trouble, but don’t do anything stupid. Or I’ll blow your brains and anyone else here. Toss your gun on the ground, Agent.”

“Why are you calling Bors an agent, you bonehead?” Taylor asked trying her might to stand in front of Bors again.

“Because that’s what he is. An FBI agent. Isn’t that right, *Agent* Bors Knight. Your gun on the ground and kick it toward me.”

“You stupid ignoramus. He carries a gun because of Judge Knight. To protect him from a watermelon brain like you and because he catches vermin. That’s his job.”

Bors heard his sister groan. But he didn’t dare look. In his mind, he set aside everything else except for the man in front of him. “Taylor—”

“Your fucking gun!” The man made a poking motion with his gun.

Bors reached behind him for the gun. He could draw his gun and shoot before the punk could say fuck, but he wouldn’t take a chance. No lunatic would come here to get him or his father. He had a good idea why this man was here. Taylor.

Raising one hand up in the air, Bors slowly crouched low and placed the gun on the ground.

“Easy, Agent. I wouldn’t hesitate to put holes in your chest.”



“How dare you! Hurt him and your family will have to search for your head. If you have a family.”

“The only vermin Agent Knight here catches are people like your father, Miss Taylor. He’s been after Congressman Jean. So why are you defending him?”

“But, but, he’s not. He’s a...a vermin catcher. Tell him Bors.”

Bors knew Taylor was looking at him. Most likely waiting for an answer from him, but she would have to wait. “You know me, Taylor, and probably the rest of my family. Why don’t you introduce yourself and have some hotdogs.”

“Fuck you. I have instructions to get rid of you, Agent. But I’ll save my bullet and your fancy shirt if you give Miss Taylor to me without any fuss.”

“Bors is not an agent. That’s not true,” Taylor said, her voice firm, final.

“Tis the truth, Miss Taylor. He knows Congressman Jean.”

“Jean sent you here?”

“Yes. Come with me and no one will get hurt.”

“No.” Bors heard his own voice harden ruthlessly. “Wanna shoot me, huh?” Bors spread his arms wide. “Then pull the fucking trigger. Shoot! You son of a bitch. But get this, you’re not getting out of here alive.”

He could feel his adrenalin surging. His anger became a scalding fury. The beast inside him wanted to charge the punk, head butt him and pulverize his face. But years of training taught him to do the opposite. He could get out of this, he

thought. He'd recognize a street punk and a hired killer anywhere. And this one, he could tell was at the lowest rung of the wanna be killer's ladder. Right now, he must keep the man's attention to him, away from his family.

Obvious fear glittered in the man's eyes. Bors took the opportunity. "You didn't consider the fact that you could end up bloody before you came here, did you."

"Son, my name is Judge Arthur Knight. Put the gun down and I'll do everything to help you." Arthur's voice sounded calm, but Bors knew his father well enough to know that he, like him, was beyond furious. One thing his dad couldn't tolerate—anyone who threatened his family.

"I know how powerful you are, Judge, but I don't need your help. If I need help, Congressman Jean can give it to me. Now, Agent Knight, don't do anything stupid, or I'll fire. I don't care who I hit."

"Damn you, asshole."

"Do it. Aim it here! Make sure you kill me right away, you son of a bitch!"

"Cabbage head, shoot my brother and I'll tie your uncircumcised dick to my bike and drag you around until nothing is left but your foreskin!"

"If you hurt anyone here, I'll turn you into ground beef!"

Bors' family talked at once. But that last remark came from his mother. Her trembling voice pierced his heart.

Bors kept his eyes on the man who seemed to have suddenly noticed his sister. Maybe because she insulted him or because his sister's charm worked again like it normally would to any man who happened to glance at her.

"Hey, look at me." Taylor yelled at the man.

The man blinked like an owl that just woke up. He frowned at Taylor.

"You have no right to come here and threaten this family. They are not Jean's enemy."

"Tsk. Miss Taylor, don't tell me you've been sleeping with your father's enemy and didn't know about it."

Once again, the Knights turned quiet. Bors could hear the birds chirping, the muted sound of cars driving by and the loud thudding of his heart. He knew Taylor would eventually find out about his job, but not like this. He thought to take her out to the cove and reveal the truth, but it wouldn't happen now because this son of a bitch came.

Taylor released her hold on his arm and stepped forward. "I'll go talk to my father. Just don't hurt anybody."

"Taylor, babe—" Bors saw movement coming from the kitchen doorway, but he didn't show a sign that he did. A chubby arm pressed against the doorjamb, shot straight out and pointed at the man.

Before their very eyes, the man's face became contorted from unspeakable

pain, collapsed in a heap on the ground and started twitching. Bors picked up his gun off the ground the same time Teta came out of her hiding. Her Small Fry pointed at the man.

“Die you, pig! This will teach you a lesson not to threaten my family. Your nuts will be fried when I’m done with you. Die. Die,” Teta screamed, her face bright red.

Everything happened in a blur. Taylor remembered watching Bors run toward the man twitching on the ground and kicked the gun away from him. Tristan went over to Teta and wrestled the stun gun from the woman who kept screaming threats about sending the man to hell herself. Gawain managed to plant his fist on the man’s face a couple times before Kirsten pulled him away, and Percival, the ever-passive brother, stepped on the man’s hand crushing his bones, probably imagining it was the man’s head he was stepping on.

But with all the ruckus, her gaze riveted on Bors and the gun he held. *So it’s true. But he said...*

Someone placed a hand on her shoulder. She looked up. It was Judge Knight. His expression was tight with strain. Most likely from anger he bottled up the entire time his family faced the horrible nightmare.

“We should go inside.”

Taylor didn't get a chance to say no. Arthur maneuvered her into the kitchen. "Did someone call the cops?"

"No."

"Why? This imbecile should go to jail. He should be punished. I don't care if Dad sent him here. He threatened your family. He pointed his gun at Bors. What if he accidentally pulled the trigger? What if he got shot? He'd be bleeding right now and he doesn't like hospitals. He told me so. What if...what if he died? I can't let him die. I love your son, you see." Tears blinded her eyes.

God, she was so afraid. Taylor began to shake as the fearful images of what could have happened built in her mind. When she saw the barrel pointing at Bors, her heart lodged in her throat. She imagined a bullet hitting Bors, piercing his shirt, his flesh. But she couldn't cry then. Now...now she couldn't stop shaking. Just thinking of him hurt and in pain shattered her. God, she loved him.

"You can tell him that you love him yourself. But right now, Taylor, we can't call the cops until Bors gives it a go. He's an undercover agent and it would jeopardize him if someone outside this family learned about it. That's why we have to keep this man here until the *right* help comes. You understand, right?"

Taylor nodded. Of all the people, she should know that the cops here could be working for her dad, too. She looked at Bors talking to someone on his cell. He didn't look like the same man she shared glorious moments in bed with. Right

now, he looked thunderous and menacing. His stance, legs wide apart and hand fisted at his side, proved how furious he was.

She glanced briefly at the man on the ground with his hands handcuffed on his back. Bors's handcuffs. How did she miss seeing his badge and whatever an agent carried?

"Taylor?"

"Okay."

They moved to the living room where Katherine, composed with her chin up, was already waiting. Except for Bors, the Knights, including Teta gathered in one big circle and hugged each other. They could have lost someone today—because of her.

She shouldn't have come here. Never should have contacted Arthur. If one of them had gotten hurt, she wouldn't be able to forgive herself. Taylor was about to leave the room when Katherine called her name. She turned around to face the Knight family whom she learned to love and adore in such a short time.

"We have room." Katherine motioned at a spot beside her.

Taylor's tears fell like rain. After all that had happened, after the trouble that she brought with her, Katherine still wanted her in her home? Taylor shook her head. She'd never met such a wonderful family in her life. Their love for each other was immeasurable despite the squabble, the teasing, and the name-callings. She

couldn't imagine what would happen if they lost Bors today. Devastated would be an understatement. It could happen if she remained here. Her father would send another stupid butthead to get her.

"It's my fault one of you guys nearly got killed. My dad will not stop until he gets me. He'd only send another one."

"Then he, too, would suffer."

"Thank you, Teta. But I think it's time for me to leave."

"No."

Taylor turned to see Bors staring at her. His handsome face contorted from a dark, angry expression. "I am. And you can't stop me."

"Why? Because I lied to you?"

Taylor met him stare for stare. All those times when they cuddled together in the dark, sharing childhood experiences, he was most likely transferring information to his supervisor. She should hate him for his deception, for squeezing information out of her so he could find out more about her dad. For lying. But she couldn't.

"Answer me, damn it," Bors said, his voice grated harshly.

"You're mad? You have the right to be mad at that man you handcuffed outside, but you can't be mad at me. You lied to me. You used me. But I'm leaving because this is not the right place for me."

“Yes, it is. Dad’s right there. The best judge there is. You’ve been wanting to talk to him, to ask for his help. Stay and talk.”

“Bors, have you forgotten? The reason why I wanted to talk to Judge Knight was to help me figure out how to make Dad stop his unsavory business. To find a way to keep my dad out of jail. The opposite of what you want. Like you said, I am only putting your dad in a bad situation. From the very beginning, without my knowledge, you’ve been playing a charade with me, Bors. It’s time to stop.” She looked at Arthur. “I’m sorry.”

“Stay.”

“Why? Tell me.”

“I need you.”

“Didn’t you get enough information about Congressman Bruno Jean? Did your supervisor tell you to dig for more so you can put my dad in jail?”

“No. Damn it! You got it all wrong.”

“What? Everything’s been laid out on the table. You work for the bureau, hunting my dad. I want to save him. Simple. And you tell me I got it all wrong? Do you honestly think that I’m that gullible? Just because I was a virgin when you had me doesn’t mean that I don’t have a brain.”

“Teej was a virgin?” Gawain said in a loud whisper.

“Shut up, bro.” Percival said.



“Julie was, too. Where can I find one?”

“Gawain, learn to shut up, will you?”

“Boy, better listen or I’ll stun you.”

“I love you, Teta.”

“Shut up. This is a *Hallmark* moment and I want to listen.”

Taylor heard the comments followed by shuffling and grunts, but she ignored them. Although her body felt warm from embarrassment, she stayed put.

“I didn’t take advantage of you, if that’s what you mean. What happened...what happened between us, has nothing to do with my case.”

“I think otherwise. I have to go Bors.”

“What, to tell your father to run?”

She wiped the tears that blinded her and choked her voice. “More than that. I know you’d do anything for your family. You love them that much. I love my dad and I’ll do anything to keep him from harm. Obviously, we are on both ends of a spectrum. So please, just let me go.”

“What about your freedom?”

Crestfallen, she forced a smile, betraying nothing of what she truly wanted—to stay. “For the past seven days, I’ve tasted freedom to last me a lifetime.”



The cold Pacific Northwest wind whipped penetrating his jacket. The waves smashed against the sandy shore where he stood. His boots began to sink into the wet sand, but he didn't give a shit about it. For the past two days, the weather had been as crappy as his mood. Clouds refused to lift and expose the mountain the same way the heaviness in his chest resisted going away.

He missed Taylor so much. Damn, it hurt. When she left, she took the sunshine with her, heat in his house and the beauty of his surroundings. In a very short time, she crawled deep inside his heart and claimed a big spot. Now that spot was empty. Because he was the very person she hated the most—a man in uniform.

When she asked him why he wanted her to stay, he didn't know how to reply to that. Unsure about what he was about to say. It had been ages since he uttered the three letter words to someone other than his family. He wanted to say it, but was afraid Taylor wouldn't believe him. After all, he had already lied to her.

He started walking along the shore. The closer he got to the cove, the deeper he sank in his despair. "Babe, I miss you. I didn't want us to end."

The hem of his jeans was soaked when he finally decided to go home. He walked past the birds' nest in a hurry. Ignored the blooming white and blue bells Taylor loved to admire. Didn't stop to watch the scurrying squirrels. He walked briskly, then jogged, trotted and finally, he ran full speed. The air filling his lungs

felt good. He focused on his breathing and not the pain gnawing deep inside his chest. He didn't stop running until he reached his home.

Teta's car was parked at his driveway. Bors racked his brain trying to remember why Teta would be here. Did he let another important date slip again? At least, she got a key to get inside the house. Opening the front door, he found the old woman in the middle of the living room, arms akimbo, and with a scowl on her face.

"Hey Teta. I didn't know you were coming today."

"Me, either. I should be at the shooting range right now, but I miss seeing your ugly face. So here I am."

"I miss you too, Teta."

"Cut the crap. What are you doing here hiding like a hermit? Look at you. Look at this house. Looks like you forgot to shave and shower since Taylor left. And I smell old pizza. You looked even better when you were working undercover. What have you been doing these past two days? Staring at these rocks?"

"I'm just busy."

"Doing what? Moping and thinking about that girl? Don't know why when you could just go and see her."

"Teta, it's not that easy. She left because—"

"She's hurt. You lied. You're after her father. But you love her and she loves

you. Now think about how you two are going to solve your problem. Moping isn't gonna help."

"Wait. Stop. Did you say she loves me?"

"Only a stupid person wouldn't see that she's in love with you. And I heard her tell your dad that while you were busy with the bastard that I stunned."

"Dad knew?"

"Oh, the whole family knows about it."

Could she be? "Okay, say she loves me."

"She loves you, dolt."

"Fine. She loves me. But she loves her father more, Teta."

"Knock, knock. Any brain in there? Wake up, Knight. Think. So she loves her father. She wants him safe. You love her and I guess you'll do everything for her. What are you going to do about the situation?"

"Borrow your gun and stun myself."

*Whack!* "Imbecile."

"Damn it, Teta. That hurts." Bors rubbed his elbow where Teta's bag hit him.

"You know, Knight, many men came into my life. Men with thick hair. Handsome mustaches, bulging muscles, some size eight. Beautiful men, like your brothers."

“What about me?”

“Yes. You, too. They were all great. They taught me pleasures in bed that I would never forget.”

“Um, Teta. Do I have to hear this?” *Size eight? Where is lightning when you need it?*

“Yes, you do. But you know, none of them taught me the meaning of love, sacrifices, loyalty. Except for one. My husband. He wasn’t perfect. He was horrible at mowing the lawn and I had to show him how to nuzzle—”

“Teta!” Bors took a deep breath and pointed his stare at the rocks lined along the windowsill. “I didn’t know you were married.”

“I was. I was a hot babe in my younger years.” Teta huffed. “Anyway, I loved my husband so much that I tried conceiving his baby even though the doctor told me it would be dangerous. But you see, I wanted to give him what he wanted the most.”

“Oh, Teta.”

Teta’s chubby chin quivered. “I lost the baby. Five months later, my husband died of a heart attack. But you know what? He died happy. He couldn’t believe I’d put my life at risk to make him happy. But you know what? I’d do it over again if he were still here. How about you, Knight? Do you love Taylor enough to sacrifice what you value most?”

## Chapter Fourteen

Rain hadn't let up yet. The sky was gray and thick with clouds. What horrible weather. Just like his situation. After his illuminating conversation with Teta, he thought about calling Taylor on her cell. But what would he say? Sorry? What could he accomplish by doing that? No, a sorry wouldn't be enough to prove how much she meant to him and it wouldn't be a sacrifice. A sacrifice was what Teta had done for her husband.

Teta pegged him—he would do anything for Taylor. But what he had in mind, he wasn't sure if it would work. After all, he would be bargaining with the devil himself.

Unmindful of the rain, he got out of his truck and walked toward the gated mansion. He stared at the most attractive and imposing lakefront property in Lake Washington. He wondered if Taylor was looking out waiting for him or if Jean locked her up in a windowless room and threw away the key. He knew they were both here. Ray, Taylor's bodyguard, told him so through a text. The man followed the instructions he gave him before he took Taylor away. Jean must have decided to stay here to figure out what to do with his daughter.

Bors scanned the windows, hoping to get a glimpse of the woman who

rocked his world with her beauty and charm, quirkiness and kind heart. Nothing. No shadows, no movements. What if he was too late? What if Jean had taken her somewhere? What if she was on the plane to Italy? Damn it. He wanted to call Ray but he specifically said not to return his message. Jean probably beat the shit out of him when he let Taylor escape. As much as he would like to text or call him, he wouldn't do it. Jean could be monitoring his cell phone. He owed Ray big time. If it weren't for him, he wouldn't have met Taylor.

He stood in front of the intercom. After two deep breaths, he pressed the button. Someone answered right away.

“What do you want?”

“I'm Agent Bors Knight. I need to talk to Congressman Jean.”

“Agent Knight. The agent that zapped Rocco and kidnapped Miss Taylor? You fucking nuts?”

*No. I'm in love.* “Tell Jean I'm here.”

Bors heard the man talk to someone and they all laughed. *Fucking pigs.* He was about to press the button again when the gate slowly swung open.



A black man three times his size and a Shaquille O'Neil look-a-like, stood behind the gate, obviously waiting for him. He held a golf club that he swung back and forth pretending to hit a golf ball. Bors bet this guy could take his head off in

one shot. He quickly assessed the perimeter, but other than Shaq here, no one was around. But he knew better. Jean's kind felt safe when surrounded by goons and guns. Somewhere, he knew, guns were aimed at him. He'd bet his house on it.

"Gun." The man said pointing the head of his club on his chest. "On the ground."

Bors removed his gun he tucked from his waistband. Without taking his eyes off the man, he did what he was told.

"Follow me." Without picking up the gun off the ground, the man walked ahead of him, whistling.

Nerves on high alert, Bors followed the man inside the house. He could be walking to his death right now. A fat chance that he wouldn't come out alive hovered in his head. He thought about his parents and siblings. Before coming here, he left them a message. A short one. *Love you all*. Now that he thought about it, he shouldn't have done it. They were probably worried sick right now. If Jean let him come out of here in one piece, he'd explain to his family why he had to do this. They would understand. He hoped. Bors sighed. Teta's right. He was an imbecile at times.

If the mansion was an eye catcher on the outside, inside it looked simple and yet elegant. Every corner of the room boasted good taste and wealth. Just like Taylor when he had first met her. She looked so refined, beautiful and simple.



They passed the living room and walked in a long and wide hallway that opened to another big room—billiards room.

“This is Miss Taylor’s home. So don’t touch anything.”

“Where is she?”

“You’re not here to see my daughter.” Jean, who stood by the bar, spat the words with enough venom and contempt. “How dare you defile my daughter? How dare you touch her with your fucking hands!”

Bors just stared at him. If Jean thought he’d cower, that he would tuck his tail in and whimper from his shouts, he was wrong. Jean could turn blue from screaming, but he would never back down. He knew why Jean was be mad, but fuckin’ eh, he should blame himself for what happened. “What’s wrong with my hands, Jean? I would think mine are cleaner than yours.”

The black man he had yet to learn the name raised his club. Bors reacted quickly and took a step back. The club hit the table and left a hole in the middle.

“Big, stay out of this.”

*Big. So apt.* “Yeah, Big. Stay out of this if you want to stay big.”

“Shut your fucking mouth, agent. You’re arrogant, aren’t you? Why, you think your father’s power could match mine? I can kill you right now and he won’t be able to do a damn thing.”

“That’s what you think, Jean.”

“Ah, you spent a week with my daughter and now you think you know everything about me.”

“I know enough.”

“What you know—”

“Is hurting your daughter, you son of a bitch. Do you have any idea how much your fucking dirty business is killing her?”

“Killing her? My business gave her this house, expensive clothes. She lives in a luxury reserved only for the rich.”

“Do you honestly think that money and all of the material things you offered at her feet made her happy? Yes, you gave her everything, but you took away her freedom. Treated her like some criminal, guarded and under twenty-four seven watch.”

“It’s for her own good. This...” Jean spanned his arms wide. “...is all for Taylor. Everything that’s under my name is for Taylor. I did what I had to do to keep her away from bastards like you.”

“I think you got it backwards, Congressman. You live in a world of filth. You think everyone else is the same like you. You’re afraid Taylor will meet a man as dirty as you, fuck ass. That’s why you built Taylor her own prison.”

“Because I love her. I should have sent her on an island because this prison is not good enough.” Jean said, breathless with rage.

“And she loves you, too. She ran away to see my dad so she could ask for his advice.”

“What advice?”

“On how to help you to save your soul. That’s love. Your daughter loves you so much she’s willing to leave this fucking wealth you wrapped her in. She doesn’t need it. She needs you. She believes somewhere deep in your black heart, kindness lurks. She didn’t run away to stab you in the back. Why do you think she came back to you without a fight? Because she learned who I am—the man who is after your fucking ass. She would rather remain your prisoner so long as she can keep an eye on you and make sure you don’t sit your ass in jail. Right now, she’s probably looking for another way to help you before it’s too late.”

“You fucking liar.”

“I didn’t come here just to lie to you.”

“Tell me why you came here again?”

Bors stared at Jean. He came here for one reason—Taylor. “To help Taylor get her wish. If you really love her, you will cut a deal with me.”

“You. An FBI agent whose been after my blood—wants to cut a deal?”

Bors ignored Jean’s supercilious comment. “Give Taylor the right to live without your bodyguards, end your business for her sake. Give me everything about the girls, their whereabouts, and other people involved and you won’t sit

your ass behind bars. You will be under protective custody.”

“I have powerful connections, agent. Protection is not my problem.”

“What about Taylor’s. Have you thought about her?”

“Taylor has nothing to do with my business. My daughter is innocent.”

Jean’s voice shook from anger. His eyes turned into slits.

“Then agree with me. Prove that you love her.”

“What about you? Agent Knight, you wouldn’t come here to cut a deal with me if my daughter didn’t mean anything to you. You came in my pit, alone. Why?”

“What I feel toward Taylor has nothing to do with my deal.”

“Bullshit. You’re not stupid so don’t act like it. I’m a man, Knight. My daughter is beautiful like her late mother. If living with her for a week didn’t have an effect on you, then there must be something wrong with you. So, I’ll ask you again. How important is my daughter to you?”

Bors didn’t hesitate. He took out his badge from his pocket and tossed it on the table. He dug in his pocket, took out the rock he carried all the time and gently placed it on the table. “Deal with me.”

Jean’s brows rose. “A badge for a deal. Can you believe this, Big?”

“Yeah, boss,” Big sneered.

Bors was about to repeat himself when a man carrying a high-powered machine gun barged in the room.

“Sir, there’s an Agent Branyan outside the gate, three angry looking guys, and a mad woman with purple hair. They want this agent.”

*Fuck! What the heck are they doing here?*

“Your reinforcements, Knight?”

“Your worst nightmare.”



Bags in the trunk of his car, Bors sat in the driver’s seat and stared at his parents’ house. When he came out of Jean’s house in one piece, he received his brothers’ wrath while Branyan watched. They called him all kinds of names before each one hugged him roughly. But it was Teta’s screams that had him kicking himself in the ass. He made them worried to their stomach.

For the first time, he let his work get to him on a personal level. A bad thing, a big no-no. Thus the reason why his bags were packed. Simms accepted his resignation from the bureau and offered him a ride to desk at the citizenship and immigration office in San Diego. It was a less than desirable job, but it would do. With his sterling resume, USCIS San Diego was more than happy to take him.

It would be the farthest he’d ever lived from home.

He and his brothers, including Kirsten, promised their parents that they wouldn’t wander too far, that they’d stick close enough to the home base. When he called his parents and siblings, he could tell they didn’t like the idea of him

moving, but they supported him nevertheless. Besides, he'd be back here during the holidays. The weekend visits...well, he'd call instead.

He picked up the box from the passenger's seat and got out of the car. Darn Kirsten. Why did she have to throw a goodbye party? It would only make the leaving harder on his parents, especially his mom.

Well, time to face the family and say their goodbyes. He walked up to the front door. He didn't have to unlock it. Percival, who must have seen him arrive, opened the door. His brother clapped him on the shoulder. "Good to see you, bro. You really want to do this?"

"Yeah. I hear music. Did Kirsten invite the whole town?"

"Go see for yourself."

"Man." Bors walked toward the back of the house and all the way to the backyard. The house was big enough to fit in two more families, but like a vortex, they would always converge in the backyard. He'd miss the scrimmage with his raucous brothers, the brat, and his parents. His chest constricted. *Damn, it isn't like I'm going to a different continent for good.* This assignment would keep him away for at least two years, but he'd be back.

He could hear Gawain arguing with Kirsten about eating the whole bag of chips. Bors grinned. He'd miss the bickering, too.

With a hand shoved in his pocket, he walked out into the open space of

their backyard.

His family, Branyan and his wife, Simms, and even Trish all stood by the picnic table, huddled together, and turned to look at him.

“Hey guys.”

“Hey handsome.” Julie walked to him and gave him a hug.

“There’s my favorite brother.” Kirsten grinned then she, too, hugged Bors.

“You’re a turn coat, brat.”

“You’re such a jealous prick, Gawain.”

“Hey, bro. Miss seeing your ugly face.”

“I just saw you a week ago.” Bors clapped hands with his brother. And then like Kirsten, Gawain stood on the side facing Kirsten. *Are they going to form a line?*

“What’s up, guys?”

“Hello, darling.” Katherine hugged Bors.

“Son.” Arthur offered his hand.

Done with the greetings, his parents stood on the line. Odd, he thought. Next one to approach him was Simms.

Simms held up the resignation letter he submitted the same day he talked to Jean and started ripping it. “I don’t need this. San Diego will have to find a top-notch staff. I’m keeping mine. You’re staying. We have work to do. Jean gave us enough info to last us a lifetime in exchange of what you promised him.”

“Jean agreed?”

“Yes.”

Before Bors could say more, Simms stood beside his father smiling. When Branyan and his wife moved away from the table, it was then that he realized why they were huddled together.

Bors stood rooted on the spot. His eyes directed to the woman he loved so much but thought he would never see again. But what was she doing here? To say goodbye? Bors shook his head. If this was one of Kirsten’s jokes, there was nothing funny about it.

Branyan cleared his throat. “I think this is yours.” He handed Bors his badge and gun. “Welcome back, partner. Four days without you are hell.”

“Thanks, man.”

“Now I can breathe. It’s wonderful to know my husband is partnered with the best of the best.” Lucy kissed Bors on the cheek.

“Thanks, Lucy.”

Bors already anticipated her next move. Sure enough, Lucy stood beside Branyan. His family and friends formed a path that led to Taylor.

“Hey.” Taylor greeted.

“Hey.” He replied.

“How are you?”



“Fine, I guess.”

A loud snort came from Teta, sitting on the lawn chair. *Wow. How did I miss seeing her there? Moron, because you only have eyes for Taylor.*

“I heard you’re selling your house.”

“Yes. I still have the condo.”

“Why? I thought you love everything about the San Juan’s. What about the woods, the birds, the cove?”

“The whole place looks different now, Taylor. It isn’t the same anymore.”

“Why?”

Bors swallowed. He was told that Taylor loved him, but would her love be enough to accept what he was about to say?

“Why?” Taylor repeated.

Gawain whacked him on the shoulder none too gently, then nodded his head toward Taylor.

He closed their distance to an arm length. God, he wanted to touch her, hug her so badly. With the sunlight reflecting on her silky hair, she looked so beautiful. “Because...because you weren’t there anymore.” With tenderness, he moved the soft wisp of hair from her temple, then traced the familiar soft skin of her cheek. She felt smooth and warm. “When you left, you took the colors, sound and the sunshine with you. Without you, life is dull, void. Lifeless.”

“What if I come back?”

“I want nothing else. But why would you do that?”

“It’s the only way I could get my freedom.”

“I don’t understand, love. Simms said your dad already agreed with my deal. And part of it is that you’ll live free.”

“True. But you see, I can roam around the world without a bodyguard, but I will still never be free.”

“Why?”

“Because you have something that belongs to me. Without it, I would never truly be free.”

“What is it?”

“My heart.”

“Babe.” Still holding the box, he pulled Taylor toward him for a rough embrace. “Oh god. I love you so much.” He closed his eyes and inhaled her scent.

“I love you, too.”

“How can you love me? I’m everything you hate in a man.”

“Don’t say that. I love everything about you.” Taylor cupped Bors’ face. “I don’t care whether you’re a vermin catcher or an FBI agent. I will love you no matter what you do for a living. You gave up your badge for me. I’m more than willing to give up my idea that all men in uniform are the same. You are unique. A

gem in the bureau.”

“I can say the same thing about you. Do you really want to come back to the house?”

“Positive.”

“For good?”

“What are you saying?”

Bors grinned then kissed Taylor’s smiling lips. What better opportunity to propose than today. His family and friends would bear witness when he pledged his love and loyalty. This was what he’d imagine his proposal would be like. Too bad he didn’t have a ring.

Holding Taylor’s hand, he kissed her again then went down on his knee. He put the box on the ground. He brought the box here to ask Kirsten to wrap it nicely for him. Now there was no need for it.

“Finally. I thought I’d have to stun him to find the courage,” Teta said to no one in particular, earning a round of laughter from everyone.

“He told me he hadn’t found the right woman who deserved the three magical words. Looks like he found the perfect one. She had him on his knees already. Keep him down there, Taylor. That’s the best place for a Knight,” Trish said.

Bors leaned his forehead in Taylor’s hand, laughing. Taking a deep breath, he

looked up at Taylor. “You heard Trish. I’ve never said the three magical words to any woman. But with you...I’ll do anything. Taylor, I don’t have a ring right now, but I hope this will do.” He opened the box and took out a shoe that Taylor left in the parking lot. He had them fixed before he went to see Jean.

“Oh my god. You kept my shoes? They look so new.”

“Yes.” Cupping Taylor’s ankle he removed her sandals. “Taylor, the way you described how you felt about my house the first time you’d seen it is exactly the same way I feel right now—you are my last stop, my destination. I love you and will love you more everyday forever. Through tough times, with you and me together, we’ll survive. Taylor, will you marry me?” He slipped the shoe on her foot.

“Oh my god. This isn’t really happening.”

“I know I should give you a ring—”

“No, no. This is better. It’s just I didn’t expect this. Bors, how can I say no? You’re such an irresistible Knight. Yes, honey. I will marry you.”

Bors stood, scooped Taylor up and hugged her tight. The sound of birds chirping was loud in his ears. The ferryboat tooted its horn. He could hear the water as it crashed into the shoreline. The trees were green and majestic again. And it was all because of the woman in his arms. “I love you. Please don’t leave me again.”

“Not going to happen. I love you more than enough to stay beside you

forever.”

“Wow. He is really a cheapskate. Shoes instead of a ring,” Trish commented.

“I know. So Taylor will carry the shoe in her purse so she could show it to her friends? What is she gonna say, ‘hey this is my engagement shoes.’ Wow. Only a Knight would do this kind of thing,” Teta shook her head.

“Well, maybe Taylor will wear the shoes until they get married,” Gawain said.

“I think it’s really romantic,” Kirsten said in a teary voice.

“Man, I hope this isn’t gonna be a new Knight tradition.”

“Oh, such a wonderful idea, Percival. Now, you’ll have to bring your girlfriend here to propose,” Kirsten grinned.

“What girlfriend?”

“Find one and we’ll help with the preparation.” Julie beamed.

“Lord have mercy.”

“I’m hungry. Let’s bring out the food, folks,” Gawain announced.

“How could you be hungry again? You just ate.”

“Percival, unlike you, I have a man stomach.”

“You mean a cow’s stomach. You’re such a dick.”

“Technically, cow’s don’t have more than one stomach, but rather four digestive compartments.”

“Technically, you can shut up, doctor. Can we eat?”

“Gawain, you’re gonna have to marry a chef someday.”

“Haven’t you heard, Julie? I’m engaged to *Sarah Lee*.”

Exchange of words flew around Bors and Taylor.

“Welcome to the family, love. I hope you won’t change your mind.”

“I love your family, Bors.”

“And they love you, too. Wanna visit the cove?”

“We can’t leave yet. Everyone helped prepare the food. We have to partake.”

“Let’s eat quickly then.”

Taylor laughed and hugged Bors tightly. “I love you.”

“I love you more.” Bors cupped Taylor’s face and gave her a long drugging kiss that held a promise for more.

*The End*

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## Author Bio

Tierney O'Malley graduated from PATTS College of Aeronautics and worked for an airline company. She also worked for a non-governmental organization dedicated to the conservation of natural resources. Her debut novella, *To Trust a Wicked Man*, is published by Cobblestone Press. She resides in the Pacific Northwest with her husband, their two daughters and a golden retriever.

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Wicked Knight: Knight Brothers Series

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